



A GLIMPSE INTO THE AFTERLIFE

Part 3: The Near Death Experience

by Rav DovBer Pinson
IYYUN Center for Jewish Spirituality

*The following are excerpts from the book by Rav Pinson;
Jewish Wisdom on the Afterlife: The Mysteries, the Myths, the Meanings.*

Ten Stages of the Near Death Experience:

1. At first the individual may experience a sense of not being any longer amongst the living...overhear other people pronouncing them dead.
2. Tranquility, peace and the absence of any pain or anguish.
3. Hear an uncomfortable noise, buzzing or hissing.
4. An awareness of separation, into a kind of phantom body...an energy field...cloud, a form of light
5. Passing through a dark passageway, a tunnel or burrow of sort.
6. Encounters ethereal lightweight 'entities'...quite familiar to him...family members or previously deceased friends. ...Angelic figures
7. Being of Light, which he understands to be "God." This light is one that emanates powerful and unconditional loving vibes.
8. A total life review and a sense of self-evaluation.
9. An absence of time, a sense of timelessness and even spacelessness.
10. Comes upon a type of barrier, a door, a bridge and the like, which apparently separates life on this world from life in the next.

• The soul hears everything said in front of her lifeless body—until the grave is sealed or the body decomposes. (*Shabbas, 152b*)

• The Jerusalem Talmud says that until three days after burial the soul hovers over its body. (*Moed Katan, Chap 3, Halacha 5.*)

Still, there is a level of soul that remains connected for all time with the grave. (*R. Aharan Berechyah of Modena:*

Ma'avar Yavak, Maamor 2:7, p. 206.)

• The Talmud speaks of the soul of the righteous leaving the body, as drawing a hair out of milk. (*Berachos. 8a.*) Or similar to trying to pull a tangled rope. (*Midrash Tehilim, 11:6.*)

• The refined body is called *guf dak*, whereas the coarse body is called *guf gus*. (*R. Meir Ben Gabbai: Avodas Hakodesh, Part 2:26, pp. 144–147. R. Menasha ben Israel: Nishmas Chayim, Maamor 1:13.*)

Others call it a *malbush*. (*R. Ovadyah Seforno: Kavanas HaTorah. See also 11 Zohar, p. 141b; p. 150a.*) Others maintain that it is called a *tzelem*. (*Nishmas Chayim, 1:13.*)

Others, such as R. Dan Yitzchak Abarbanel, call it *ruach*. See *ibid*. In the *Zohar* it is often referred to as a *chaluka d'rabanen*—"garment of the sages." (*Zohar, Part 1, p. 66a.*) Some sources view the *chaluka d'rabanen* as a "borrowed" *levush*—garment. (*Siach Yitzchak. Sheivet HaMusal, 35, p. 499.*)

The first (published) reference in Jewish philosophy to this idea of two bodies is found in a text attributed to R. Bachya Ibn Pakudah. (*Toras HaNefesh, Chapter 4, p. 25.*)

• The *tzelem* exists at the moment of conception, and when a soul enters the world it expands with the *tzelem*. (*111 Zohar, p. 13b. R. Moshe Cordovero: Shiur Komah Hashgacha (5), p. 119.*) Conversely, "... by the way of the *tzelem* the body increases and grows." (*R. Shem Tov Ben Shem Tov (?–1430): Sefer Ha'emunos. Shar 6:4, pp. 61b–62a.*)

Other sources speak of the *tzelem* as the intermediate medium between the coarse body and refined soul. (*R. Menachem Azaryah De Fano: Asarah Maamoro, Maamor Chikur Din, Part 4, Chapter 14, p. 278.*) Since there are many levels of soul thus there are many levels of *tzelems*.

(R. Chaim Vital: *Eitz Chayim, Part 2, Shar 26; Shar Ha'Tzelem, Chapter 1, p. 48. Reshis Chachmah, Shar HaYirah, 12, p. 32.*)

According to the Zohar, even before entering a human form, a soul stands above in the very same form in which it will later embody itself. (111 Zohar, p. 61b.)

The malbush is shaped like the mitzvot. (R. Moshe Me-trani: *Beis Elokim, Shar Hayesodos, 53, p. 489.*)

- Souls see their relatives and friends, and they accompany them to their place of eternal rest. (Zohar, Part 1, p. 218b. Note Midrash Rabbah Shemos, Parsha 52. Baba Basra, 75a.)

The awareness, the sensing souls from other dimensions of reality, can occur even prior to actual death. (*Nishmas Chayim, Maamor 2;21.*)

- When R. Yochanan Ben Zakkai was about to pass on he said, “prepare a seat for Chezkia the king of Judah who has come to welcome me.” (*Berachos 28b.*) There are many other sources that speak of souls meeting up with illustrious personalities of history, particularly meeting souls that they are connected with. (11 Zohar, p. 250b. Baba Kamah, 111b. Ramban: *Baba Basrah, 43a (to the Rif). Recanti: Parshas Vayera, p. 24a. Safer Chassidim, 559. Magid Mesbarim, Vayakhel. Ma'avar Yavak, Hakdamah, p. 21. See also Kesuvos, 104a.*)

Teacher and student forge an everlasting relationship, in this world and in the next. (*Shar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah 10.*)

- Angels are identified with light, for the lack of any other physical term. (R. Dan Yitzchak Abarbanel: *Bereishis, 1:1. Mifalos Elokim, Maamor 3;3.*)

Most opinions view angels as divested of all chomer, material form. (Rambam: *Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, Chapter 2, Halacha 3.*)

Some opinions write that angels as well are comprised of a chomer albeit a more refined one than mortal man. This is foremost the opinion of R. Shlomo Eben Gabriel. (*Abarbanel. Kings 3:12, where he is quoted. See also R. Yoseph Gikatila Safer HaNikud. 3:3.*)

Some speak of angels existing as refined fire. (*Pirush on the Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah, Chapter 8. See also Meiras Einayim, Parshas Re'eh, p. 297. Pardes Rimonim, Shar 2;7.*)

Some speak of angels existing in a refined version of fire and wind. (Ramban: *Torah's Ha'adam, Shar Hagmul, Rabbi Eliezer of Worms. Sodei Razya. Hilchos Malachim, p. 163.*)

Others speak of angels existing in any one of the four basic elements, a refined version of earth, fire, wind, or water. (R. Mattisyohu Delectra (Poland, 16th century): *Shaarei Orach. pp. 100–101. See also Pardes Rimonim, Shar 24, Chapter 11. R. Shlomo Ephraim Lunshitz. Kli Yakar, Bereishis, 6:16.*)

- The angels and the soul (some add the limbs) bear witness to one's life. (*Taanis, 11A, Pesikta Rabti, 44:8; Tanna Divei Eliyahu Zuta, Chap 1.*)

The Mishnah says that God is both the judge and the witness. *Avos, 4: 22.*

The person himself is the witness. (*Reshis Chachmah, Shar HaYirah, 12, p. 35. Migdal Oz, Chibut Hakever, 1, p. 276.*)

Regarding the angels bearing witness. (*Hakdamah LeZohar, p. 12b.*)

R. Eliezer of Worms writes of the five witnesses that testify: a person's possessions, his accompanying angels, his limbs, his soul, and the Creator. (*Sodei Razya, Chachmas Hanefesh, p. 1328–329.*)

Negative actions become ingrained in ones bones, as it says “their iniquities having come upon their bones.” *Yechezkel Chap 32: 27.* While a persons good deeds become inscribed upon his right hand. (*Midrash. Beis Hamidrash. Perek Gehenom. Part 1. p. 92.*)

R. Menachem Azaryah De Fano writes that the universal book recording all human actions is the sapphire (colored) ether that surrounds the human being. (*Asarah Maamoras, Maamor Chikur Din, Part 2:12, p. 112. See also, by the same author Maamor HaNefesh. Part 2;10, p. 23.*)

This ethereal material was called by pre-modern physicians the “surrounding ether.” (*Yad Yehudah To Asarah Maamoras*) “Nothing is ever lost in this universe.” (*Zohar, Parshas Mishpatim, p. 100b.*) The laws of the conservation of energy.