

## ***“A Closer Look at the Soul”***

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אלה' נשמה שנתת ב' טהורה ה'א

“My G-D, the soul You placed within me is pure...You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me, You safeguard it within me, and eventually You will take it from me, and restore it to me in time to come. As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You, Hashem my G-D and the G-D of my forbearers, Master of all works, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.” (The Complete Artscroll Siddur Sefard; page 21.)

I believe that this short prayer should be said every morning, immediately after we thank Hashem for waking us up. However, what I want to address in this paper is the question of the “Soul”. What is the soul? Where is the soul located? How can Hashem restore souls to dead bodies? Is there a place that the soul goes when we die? How can Hashem restore the soul of a dead body?

I want to begin answering these questions by first examining the five levels of the soul, as seen through the eyes of the Kabbalah. The word Kabbalah means: “to receive”, coming from the root word Kabal. The term implies that it is a certain kind of wisdom that is received. The idea of Kabbalah, then, is to become completely infused with Torah and to connect with it on every possible level. The levels of the soul are as follows:

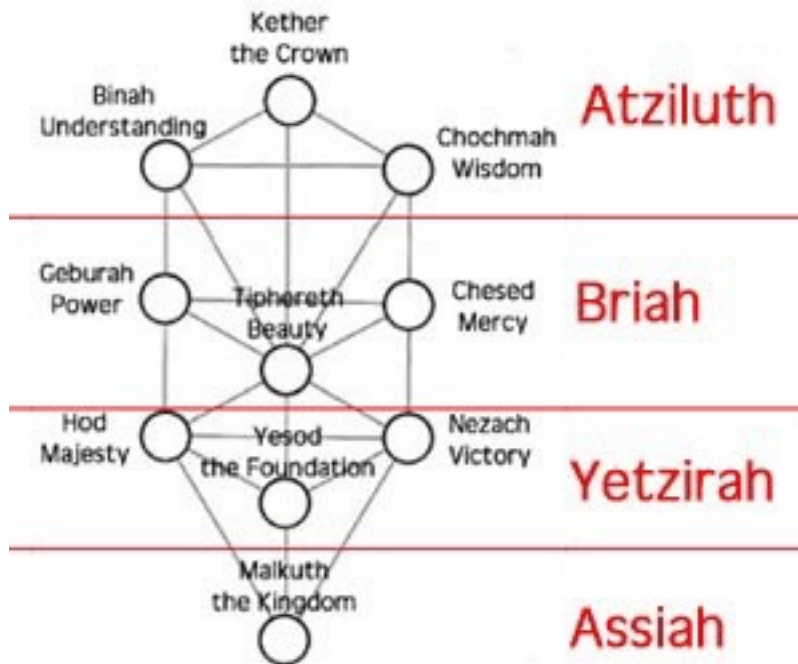
**Nefesh** – Soul; Asiyah – Completion; the final Hey; this is the lowest level of a human being formed in the image of Hashem.

**Ruach** – Spirit; Yetzirah – Formation; the letter Vav; this is the second level of the soul, that we call breath, or the breath of life.

**Neshamah** – Breath – Beriyah – Creation; this level is represented by the letter Hey.

**Chayah** – Living Essence – Atzilut – Nearness; this is the fourth level represented by the letter Yod.

**Yechidah** – Unique Essence – Adam Kadman – Primeval Man/Woman; this is the Apex of Yod.



Looking at the etymology of these terms, we see that the word Yechidah, comes from Echad and Yichud, meaning “oneness” and “unity”. The word Chayah derives from Chai which means “life”, and Chayut, which means “life force.” The word Neshamah stems from Neshimah meaning “breath.” The word Ruach is often translated as “spirit” but it is also found with the connotations of wind, air, or direction. The word Nefesh comes from the root Nafash meaning to rest, as in the verse, “And on the seventh day, He ceased work and rested (Nafash)” (Exodus 31:17).

The Kabbalists teach that the five levels of man’s soul, which originates in the highest realms, parallel to the inner dimension of each universe. The universe represents the external space or dimension of G-D’s relationship to the world. The soul, on the other hand, represents the inner space of that relationship.

The five levels of the soul thus form a chain linking man/woman to the supernal universes and to G-D. Since the soul constitutes the inner dimension of the universes and the reason for which G-D originally concealed His light, man’s primary connection is directly with G-D. Thus, the Torah says, “And G-D blew into his nostrils a soul of life” (Genesis 2:7). Commenting on the inner meaning of this verse, the Zohar notes that when G-D “exhales”, He does so from His innermost Being. Furthermore, even after having placed His breath into man’s body, this breath is still not severed from Him. This indicates that man’s soul is an extension of G-D’s breath and directly connected to Him.

## The Glassblower Analogy

This relationship can be illustrated with an analogy. Imagine a glassblower who decides to make a beautiful vessel. This “decision” emanating from the innermost will, is the level of Yechidah-Uniqueness. It corresponds to the universe of Adam Kadmon and the apex of the Yod.

Next we see the glassblower himself before he begins to blowout. This is the level of Chayah-Living Essence, corresponding to the universe Atzilut where the life-force is still within the realm of the Divine. This level parallels the Yod of the Tetragrammaton.

Next, the breath (Neshimah) emanates from the mouth of the glassblower and flows as a pressurized wind (Ruach) through the glassblowing pipe, expanding in all directions and forming a crude vessel. The wind finally comes to rest (Nafash) in the completed vessel.

This analogy is extremely useful in a meditative sense. For one thing, it provides us with a model for comparing various states of consciousness with the different levels of the soul. For another, it allows us to visualize our own direct connection with the Divine.

The highest levels of the soul, for instance, are not yet separated from their Divine source. Thus, in the analogy, they are both still within the mind and lungs of the glassblower. From Hashem’s point of view, they are “internal” aspects of man’s soul, while the lower levels of the soul are “externalizations.” This is an extremely important distinction, for from the human standpoint, the exact opposite is the case.

Of the five parts of the soul, the *Neshamah*, *Ruach*, and *Nefesh* are called *Penimi'im* – Internalizations because we have the ability to draw these levels down into our earthly existence. The levels of Yechidah and Chayah, however, will only be internalized in the World to Come. It is for this reason that they are now called *Makifim*-Envelopments or *Atarot* – Crowns, because they actually transcend our individual personalities.

Now that we have explained the five levels of the soul, I want to begin answering the questions set forth at the beginning of this paper: What is the soul? Genesis 2:7; “And the Lord G-D formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” In this verse of scripture we see three elements or levels of the soul at work using our glassblower analogy. The Nefesh, the body of man, the Neshamah, the creative breath and the Ruach, which here symbolizes the tube through which the glassblower uses to blow into the body of man.

The Ruach “wind” that is breathed into man, settles in the inner being of the Nefesh, “body” and forms what we define as the soul, the Neshamah. The Rabbi’s taught: “Three partners have a share in man: The Holy One, praised is He; his father and his mother. His father supplies the white substance out of which are formed the bones, arteries, nails, brain, and the white of the eye. His mother supplies the red substance out of which are formed the skin, flesh, hair, and the black of the eye. The Holy One, praised be He, provides him with spirit and soul, beauty of features, power of sight, power of hearing, power of speech, faculty of walking, intelligence and wisdom. When man’s time comes to depart this world, the Holy One, praised be He, takes His share and leaves his father’s and mother’s share before them”

(Niddah 31a). The portion of man that the Eternal One takes back is the Neshamah. Therefore, Ecclesiastes 12:7; "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit, Neshamah – Soul shall return unto G-D who gave it."

Where is the soul located? The soul (Neshamah) is that part of our being that is *Breath – Beriyah – Creation*; it resides in the inner-most part of our being. Rav Kook, a great teacher of Yisrael, who lived in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, called this part of us the "Yesh", meaning "there is". In other words there is that part of our being that the hand of man can never touch.

How can Hashem restore souls to dead bodies? The book of Job, I believe holds the answer to this question. Job 19:23-27; *"Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever. For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see G-D: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."*

I firmly believe with a perfect faith, that when we examine the words of Job, with insight from "Kabbalah"-the ability to receive, that Job is stating the following. Let my words be written in a book that they might live forever and bear witness to my testimony and my faith. Let my words be written with an iron pen and lead in the rock. The "Rock" is the Eternal One of Yisrael. So let it be known that I testify that my rock is an everlasting Being, Who was, Who is and Who shall forever be. In Him alone do I trust! That after I depart this part of my being on earth and my skin has been consumed, from my bones and I no longer have shape or form, yet, shall I see my Redeemer, with mine own eyes, even though my reins, my understanding of my former self has been removed from my brain. Yet in my flesh shall I see G-D, within the new body that Hashem will grant me, with mine own eyes.

We are spiritual beings, before we become physical beings. Every breath we take as we live is directly connected to the Giver of Life, Hashem, the Eternal One of Yisrael, Blessed be He. When the breath of life leaves our bodies, it and our soul return to the One who gave them unto each and every being that breathes.