

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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COVENANT WITNESS RESPONSE

Regarding:

“The Anatomy of the Soul” — A Kabbalistic Lecture by Rabbi Efraim Palvanov found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRxPnpyMx8A&t=29s>

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I. OPENING STATEMENT OF COVENANT AUTHORITY

The following response is issued under the authority of the Tanakh alone — **Torah (Instruction), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings)** — as the sole, final, and self-interpreting standard for all questions concerning the human soul. No post-biblical commentary, however ancient, revered, or widely accepted, holds co-equal authority with the written word of **Yahweh** (יהוה). This response does not condemn the sincere intent of the lecture under review. Rather, it applies the standard of **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:2**: **“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it.”**

The lecture in question narrated by Rabbi Efraim Palvanov draws extensively from Kabbalistic sources — the Zohar, the teachings of Isaac Luria (the “Arizal”) as recorded by Chayyim Vital, post-biblical Midrash Rabbah, and Talmudic Aggadah — and presents these as authoritative interpretations of the soul’s anatomy. Three religions encounter this content differently: Judaism’s devout may accept these Kabbalistic traditions uncritically. Christianity largely ignores or dismisses them. Islam has no framework for evaluating them. The covenant standard demands that all three be measured by the same plumb line: **what does the Tanakh itself actually say?**

II. WHAT THE TANAKH AFFIRMS: THE GENUINE HEBREW TESTIMONY

The lecture opens with three genuine Hebrew terms found in the Tanakh. This foundation is correct and should be affirmed. **Yahweh** has indeed used these precise words in the written covenant record.

A. Nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ) — H5315 — The Animated Living Being

Nephesh appears over 750 times in the Tanakh. In its foundational usage it describes the totality of an animated being — not a separable “soul” abstracted from the body. Its direct connection to blood is not Kabbalistic speculation; it is explicit Tanakh law:

Vayikra (Leviticus) 17:11 *“For the nephesh of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your nephesh; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the nephesh.”*

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 12:23 *“Only be firm not to eat the blood, for the blood is the nephesh; you shall not eat the nephesh with the flesh.”*

Bereishit (Genesis) 9:4 *“But flesh with its nephesh — its blood — you shall not eat.”*

Rabbi Efraim Palvanov’s identification of nephesh with blood is therefore firmly rooted in Tanakh. The Hebrew construction **ki nephesh ha-basar ba-dam hi** — “for the nephesh of the flesh is in the blood” — uses the preposition bet (ב, “in”), making the relationship inseparable, not merely symbolic. This is Tanakh’s own anatomy of the soul at its most basic level, and it stands as written.

B. Neshamah (נִשְׁמָה) — H5397 — The Breath of יהוה

Neshamah appears 29 times across 24 verses in the Tanakh. Its foundational use is in the creation of the human:

Bereishit (Genesis) 2:7 *“Then Yahweh Elohim formed the human from the dust of the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (nishmat chayyim), and the human became a living nephesh.”*

Two critical observations emerge from this verse: First, neshamah is the **breath of Yahweh directly imparted** — a divine act that distinguishes humanity from all other creation. Second, the result of this breath is not that Adam “received a soul” in a Greek

dualistic sense; rather, Adam **became** a living nephesh. The Tanakh presents the human as a unified being, not a soul trapped in a body. The neshamah is the animating connection to **Yahweh**, not a separable spiritual organ.

Neshamah also appears in Bereishit 7:22 paired with ruach: “all in whose nostrils was the nishmat ruach (breath of the spirit) of life” — establishing that even animals carry both. This is a fact the lecturer acknowledges but which has significant implications for the hierarchical five-soul framework, as addressed below.

C. Ruach (רוּחַ) — H7307 — Wind, Breath, Spirit

The word ruach appears approximately 389 times in the Tanakh and carries the widest range of meaning of the three terms: physical wind, the breath of living creatures, the spirit of **Yahweh**, and the animating spirit of the human. The key Tanakh testimony on the ruach at death is given by **Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)**, attributed to **Shlomo (Solomon)**:

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:7 *“And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the ruach returns to Elohim who gave it.”*

Note what the Tanakh states: the ruach returns to **Elohim** who gave it. This is consistent with **Bereishit 2:7**, where **Yahweh** breathed life into the human. At death, that breath returns to its Source. The Tanakh does not elaborate on what happens to the ruach after this return — and that silence must be respected. What post-biblical Kabbalistic tradition builds upon this foundation is a separate question requiring separate evaluation.

III. WHERE THE TANAKH ENDS AND KABBALAH BEGINS

The lecture transitions from these Tanakh foundations into a Kabbalistic structural framework that must be carefully evaluated. The key question is not whether these traditions are ancient or widely received, but whether they derive their authority from the Tanakh itself or from post-biblical sources elevated **to** or **above** the Tanakh. The covenant standard requires honest disclosure of this boundary.

A. The Five-Soul Framework: Chayah and Yechidah

The Rabbi himself acknowledges a critical fact: the fifth level of soul, yechidah, does not appear in the Chamisha Chumshei Torah (the five books of the Torah of Moshe). He

further acknowledges that chayah is also absent from the Torah text in its five-soul sense. He correctly traces the five-soul acronym NRNHY (nephesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah) to the Midrash Rabbah, the Zohar, and the Arizal — all post-biblical sources compiled between the 2nd and 16th centuries CE.

Midrash Rabbah was compiled approximately in the 5th–6th century CE. The Zohar, attributed to **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai**, was first published in 13th-century Spain through Moshe de Leon (c. 1280–1286 CE), with substantial scholarly debate about its actual authorship and antiquity. The Arizal (Isaac Luria, 1534–1572 CE) taught in Safed; his teachings were recorded by his student Chayyim Vital in works including Sha’ar HaGilgulim (The Gate of Reincarnations). None of these constitute Tanakh authority, and none may be treated as co-equal with or superior to the written word of **Yahweh**.

What the Tanakh actually gives us is a rich use of nephesh, ruach, and neshamah as descriptions of the human being’s animating life principle. The Tanakh does **not** present these as five hierarchical spiritual organs that are progressively unlocked through moral attainment. That is a Kabbalistic interpretive overlay, not a Tanakh teaching.

B. Gilgul — Reincarnation Has No Tanakh Foundation

The Rabbi presents the candle metaphor of reincarnation as though it flows naturally from the Tanakh. The candle metaphor does appear in the Midrash, grounded in **Mishlei (Proverbs) 20:27**: “**The candle of Yahweh is the neshamah of man.**” This verse is genuine Tanakh. However, the Kabbalistic doctrine of gilgul neshamot (transmigration of souls), which the lecturer uses to interpret the candle metaphor, is a different matter entirely.

Gilgul is absent from the Tanakh. It is absent from the Talmud. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica: “There is no definite proof of the existence of the doctrine of gilgul in Judaism during the Second Temple period. In the Talmud there is no reference to it.” Its first explicit articulation appears in Sefer HaBahir, a mystical text that began circulating among Kabbalists in 13th-century Europe, and it gained wide currency through the Zohar, also 13th-century. Medieval rationalists including Maimonides (Rambam), Hasdai Crescas, and Rabbi Yosef Albo either ignored or explicitly rejected it.

Scholarly sources further note that the origins of gilgul show influence from external traditions including Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and possibly Indian philosophy, which entered Jewish mystical thought in the medieval period. This does not make gilgul automatically false, but it does mean that it cannot be presented as Tanakh teaching. The Tanakh’s testimony at death is clear: the ruach returns to **Elohim** who gave it (**Kohelet**

12:7). The dust returns to the earth. The Tanakh says nothing about the ruach being assigned to another body.

The Tanakh's primary responses to suffering, injustice, and the problem of the righteous suffering — addressed at length in **Iyov (Job)**, **Tehillim (Psalms)**, and **Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah)** — do not invoke reincarnation as the explanation. **Iyov** is answered by **Yahweh** from the whirlwind (**Iyov 38–41**) with a call to trust the sovereign wisdom of the Creator, not with a doctrine of multiple incarnations.

C. The Zohar and Arizal as Co-Equal or Superior Authority

The most significant covenant concern in this lecture is structural: the speaker positions the Zohar and the Arizal as explanatory authorities for the Tanakh, treating their interpretations as definitive and reliable. Phrases like “the Zohar says...” and “the Arizal explains...” are used to fill in what the Tanakh “really means.”

This is the same structural error found across all three religions: Judaism elevating rabbinic tradition above the Tanakh; Christianity elevating Church councils above the Tanakh; Islam elevating hadith collections above the Tanakh. In each case, post-revelation commentary is given the power to determine the meaning of the original text rather than simply respond to it. The Tanakh standard is given by **Moshe (Moses)** himself:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:2 ***“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your Elohim that I command you.”***

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 18:20–22 ***“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”***

Commentaries, Midrash, Zohar, and Arizal teachings may be consulted as historical witnesses to how communities have read the Tanakh — but they hold no law-making authority. Where they affirm what the Tanakh plainly states, they are helpful. Where they add to it, they must be evaluated by the standard of **Devarim 19:15**: two or three independent Tanakh witnesses. **By that standard, the five-soul framework, gilgul, the sefirot-organ mapping, and the Kabbalistic cosmology of five worlds cannot be established as Tanakh doctrine.**

D. The Sefirot-Organ Mapping

The lecture presents a detailed mapping of human organs to the Kabbalistic sefirot: the liver to chesed, the spleen to gevurah, the heart to tiferet, the kidneys to netzach and hod, and so forth. This is an elaborate and internally consistent system — but it is Kabbalistic, not Tanakh! The sefirot themselves do not appear in the Tanakh as a theosophical framework; they emerge in medieval Jewish mysticism, particularly through the Sefer Yetzirah (c. 3rd–6th century CE) and reach their full expression in the Zohar and Luria’s thought.

The Tanakh does speak meaningfully of specific organs in covenant life. The kelayot (kidneys) appear as the seat of innermost counsel and testing (**Tehillim 7:10, 16:7; Yirmeyahu 17:10, 20:12**). The heart (lev) is the seat of will, understanding, and moral commitment throughout the Tanakh. The kaved (liver) appears in prophetic and priestly contexts. But connecting these to a ten-sefirot emanationist framework is a post-biblical theological construction, not direct Tanakh teaching. The biological insights in the lecture — about oxygen, iron, hemoglobin, cellular respiration — are genuinely illuminating and stand on their own scientific merits without requiring the Kabbalistic framework to validate them.

E. “Son of God” — A Covenant Correction and Affirmation

The lecturer makes a critically important Tanakh affirmation when he states that the Torah declares every member of Israel to be a son or daughter of **Yahweh**, and that early Gentile Christianity misapplied this concept through the lens of Greco-Roman hero mythology (Hercules, demigods). This observation is correct and covenant-grounded:

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 14:1 *“You are sons to Yahweh your Elohim; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the dead.”*

Shemot (Exodus) 4:22–23 *“Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says Yahweh: Israel is My son, My firstborn son.’”*

The Tanakh’s sonship language is covenantal and collective, not metaphysical in the Greek deity-begetting sense. This is an essential correction the covenant must consistently bring to all three religions: to Judaism, where the language is sometimes spiritualized into Kabbalistic theurgic categories; to Christianity, where it was hijacked into Trinitarian theology through Greek philosophical frameworks; and to Islam, where Surah Al-Ikhlās (112) rightly rejects the Greek pagan concept of divine begetting, but sometimes overcorrects by dismissing the covenant family language of the Tanakh entirely.

IV. THREE-RELIGION COVENANT AUDIT

The following audit evaluates where each tradition aligns with Tanakh teaching on the soul and where each departs from it.

PRINCIPLE	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
Nephesh (animated being) connected to blood	AFFIRMS — based in Vayikra 17:11 and multiple Torah texts	AFFIRMS partially — but often spiritualizes away from the Hebrew bodily unity	AFFIRMS partially — Quran uses nafs (cognate of nephesh) 298 times; Islamic anthropology affirms the soul-blood connection functionally
Neshamah as the divine breath from Yahweh	AFFIRMS — Bereishit 2:7 is foundational in all streams of Judaism	AFFIRMS — but conflates with Greek pneuma and Trinitarian Spirit language, departing from Hebrew specificity	AFFIRMS structurally — ruh (spirit) in Islamic theology parallels neshamah; but Quran 17:85 states the ruh is a divine matter known only to Allah
Ruach returns to Elohim at death (Kohelet 12:7)	AFFIRMS — universally accepted Tanakh text; debated in terms of implications	Partially DEPARTS — NT reinterprets this through resurrection theology imported from Greek immortal-soul concepts	AFFIRMS — Islamic theology holds that the ruh returns to Allah at death, consistent with Kohelet 12:7
Gilgul — reincarnation of souls	DEPARTS — gilgul has no Tanakh basis; is a medieval Kabbalistic importation absent from Torah, Prophets, and Writings	REJECTS outright — but often for wrong reasons (importing Hellenistic immortal-soul and resurrection in bodily Greek form instead)	REJECTS — Islam firmly rejects reincarnation; the soul returns to Allah and awaits judgment
Five-soul framework (NRNHY) as authoritative anatomy	DEPARTS — chayah and yechidah are post-biblical	Has no framework for evaluation — but Western Christianity's	Has no framework for evaluation — but Islamic anthropology's

PRINCIPLE	JUDAISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM
	Kabbalistic additions; the framework itself is a medieval construction	body/soul dualism also departs from Hebrew nephesh wholeness	simpler nafs/ruh distinction is arguably closer to the Tanakh's actual usage
Sonship language — Israel as children of Yahweh	AFFIRMS — Devarim 14:1, Shemot 4:22 are foundational covenant texts	DEPARTS — Christianity restricts singular divine sonship to Yeshua, reading Greek deity-begetting categories into a Hebrew covenant relationship	AFFIRMS the uniqueness of Allah while rejecting the Greek concept of divine sons; but sometimes incorrectly dismisses the Tanakh covenant family language entirely

V. COVENANT VERDICT AND AFFIRMATIONS

What This Lecture Gets Right

The scientific parallels drawn in this lecture are genuinely illuminating. The chemical equation for combustion being identical to cellular respiration ($C_6H_{12}O_6 + 6O_2 \rightarrow 6CO_2 + 6H_2O$) is accurate and does align remarkably with the Tanakh's flame-soul metaphor drawn from **Mishlei 20:27**. Iron as element 26, corresponding numerically to the gematria of the Tetragrammaton (Yud-He-Vav-He = 10+5+6+5 = 26), and iron as the oxygen-carrying element in hemoglobin — this is a striking convergence that reflects genuine covenant insight. The fundamental connection between breath and life (**Bereishit 2:7**), and the necessity of sleep and dreams as Tanakh-affirmed realities (**Bereishit 28:10–22; 37:5–7; 40:5–19; Bemidbar 12:6**), are grounded in the written text.

The identification of nephesh's connection to blood, neshamah's connection to breath, and the ruach's connection to the animating force of life — these three terms **are** genuinely in the Tanakh, and drawing attention to them is a service to all three audiences (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) who have often lost the Hebrew precision of these terms in translation.

What Requires Covenant Correction

Four corrections must be issued from the covenant standard:

1. The authority of the Zohar and Arizal must be explicitly subordinated to the Tanakh, not presented as its authoritative interpreters. They are post-biblical commentators. **The Tanakh interprets the Tanakh!** Where the Zohar and Arizal illuminate what the Tanakh plainly says, they are useful historical witnesses. Where they add to it, they must be identified as additions, not revelations.

2. Gilgul must be plainly identified as a post-biblical doctrine with no Tanakh warrant. Presenting it as a natural reading of the candle metaphor in **Mishlei 20:27** is eisegesis — reading into the text. The verse states only that the neshamah of man is the candle of **Yahweh**. It says nothing about the candle's wax being transferred to new wicks across multiple lifetimes.

3. The five-soul framework must be presented as Kabbalistic tradition, not Tanakh anatomy. The Tanakh uses nephesh, ruach, and neshamah richly and profoundly. The additions of chayah and yechidah, the sefirot-organ mapping, the five worlds cosmology, and the progressive “unlocking” of soul levels through moral attainment are medieval Jewish mystical theology — fascinating, sometimes insightful, but not Tanakh. Presenting them as Tanakh teachings misleads all three audiences.

4. Bodily health and covenant faithfulness must not be conflated into a merit system. The Tanakh does affirm that honoring **Yahweh's** covenant brings life and health (**Devarim 28:1–14**). But the lecture's Kabbalistic framework implies that failure to access higher soul levels is due to insufficient spiritual “rectification.” The Tanakh holds no such framework. The testing of the righteous (**Iyov**), the suffering of the innocent (**Yirmeyahu 15:18**), and the acknowledgment that death comes to all (**Kohelet 9:2–3**) resist any framework that reduces spiritual state to progressive moral achievement within a five-tier soul system.

Covenant Affirmation of Common Ground

This response issues the following covenant affirmation to all three audiences — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — on the basis of Tanakh alone:

To Judaism: You hold the Tanakh as your foundational text. Return to its actual language about the soul — nephesh, ruach, neshamah — and let these texts speak without Kabbalistic overlay. The three terms in the Tanakh are sufficient, rich, and authoritative. Post-biblical mysticism may be studied as historical tradition, but it must not govern the meaning of Yahweh's own words.

To Christianity: You have largely lost the Hebrew foundation of soul-language by reading it through Greek philosophy (psyche/pneuma, Platonic dualism, Aristotelian categories).

The Tanakh's nephesh is a unified animated being, not a "soul" imprisoned in a "body." Return to **Bereishit 2:7** and read it in its Hebrew context: the human being became a living nephesh when **Yahweh** breathed into him. Redemption in the Tanakh is not about escaping the body; it is about the renewal of the covenant relationship between **Yahweh** and His people in this world.

To Islam: The Quran's use of nafs (a cognate of nephesh) and ruh carries genuine resonance with the Tanakh's soul language. **Surah 17:85** ("They ask you about the ruh. Say: The ruh is of the command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been given only a little") reflects appropriate covenant humility before the mystery of the neshamah. The Tanakh's refusal to speculate beyond "the ruach returns to Elohim who gave it" is the same posture. Guard this humility against those who would fill in what the text leaves open.

VI. CLOSING WITNESS

The soul that **Yahweh** breathed into the first human in **Bereishit 2:7** is not a mystery requiring 1,600 years of Kabbalistic elaboration to understand. The Tanakh states what it states. The nephesh is the animated being whose life is in the blood. The neshamah is the divine breath that makes the human more than mere matter. The ruach is the animating spirit that returns to **Elohim** at death. These three realities, taken together and read in their Tanakh context, are sufficient for covenant life, covenant obedience, and covenant death.

What lies beyond this — the five worlds, the sefirot, the gilgul, the progressive unlocking of soul levels — these are the traditions of men. They may illuminate; they do not obligate. **The standard of Devarim 4:2 stands: do not add to what Yahweh has commanded!** Every soul in the three great religious streams that have received the Tanakh will stand before **Yahweh** not on the basis of how well they navigated Kabbalistic cosmology, but on the basis of their covenant faithfulness to His written word.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:14–16 *"But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil... love Yahweh your Elohim, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments... that you may live and multiply, and Yahweh your Elohim will bless you."*

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