

# SOULQUEST

*Journey Through Life, Death, and Beyond*

## COURSE RATIONALE

At the pinnacle of his career, having achieved fame and fortune, Leo Tolstoy considered his life meaningless and a failure, for he realized that ultimately he would die, and “all my affairs, no matter what they might be, would sooner or later be forgotten, and I myself should not exist.”

The confrontation with the harsh reality of mortality, whether through aging, a health crisis, or an encounter with death, makes us wonder whether our life has any meaning.

It is during these existential crises that our tradition reaches out to us with solace and comfort, asserting emphatically that while our bodies may die, our soul is eternal, and this world is but one step in its journey.

For death is not an end. Nor is it a mere passageway to the next stage of existence. Our knowledge of death can become a means of inspiring life, and ensuring that our moments here are lived to the fullest.

This course is not a philosophical one, but an experiential one. It does not attempt to prove the existence of a soul, nor of the afterlife, nor of heaven and hell and reincarnation. Instead, it shares the intuitive truths that have inspired generations of Jews to live more fully and to face death fearlessly. It explains how those who left this world are not lost to us, nor us to them. It allows us the opportunity to resolve what death has left unresolved, and thereby to find peace and closure.

We invite you to discover the odyssey of your soul. Find out where it came from, where it is going, and what it is doing right now. Explore the limits of mortality, and how we can better appreciate the true life of those who are living, as well as those who have passed on.

Know yourself, discover your purpose, and acquire the tools to navigate life's challenges.

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## COURSE OVERVIEW

### **Lesson One: Meet the Pilot**

To talk about death, we first have to talk about life, and the soul that is the source of life. In this lesson, we examine the classic sources to develop the idea of the soul and its properties, and examine the purpose of the soul in this world.

### **Lesson Two: Before You Were Born**

We establish the soul as the “real self,” eternal in its existence. We look at the origin of the soul and the manner in which it prepares for its descent into the world, as well as Jewish customs of pregnancy and birth designed to aid the soul in its transition.

### **Lesson Three: Death and Beyond**

In this lesson, we examine death from the perspective of the soul. We look at the Jewish customs of death that aid the soul in its transition out of the physical world. We talk about *Gan Eden*, the pleasure the soul receives as a result of its positive actions in this world, as well as the process of *Gehinom* that is meant to cleanse the soul so that it can reunite with its source. The lesson also addresses the ultimate state of the soul when it returns to this world during the era of the Resurrection of the Dead.

### **Lesson Four: Reincarnation**

The soul usually requires many lifetimes to complete its mission. Each lifetime adds to the experience of the soul so that currently we are able to draw upon the lessons of previous lifetimes. This knowledge allows us navigate our life and mission with greater hope and confidence. We will also consider the lives of famous Jewish personalities, and see how the mystics have explained the events of their lives through the lens of their past lives.

### **Lesson Five: Eternal Bond**

Once a soul has left this world, despite its exalted spiritual place, it can no longer perform mitzvot, and we become the hands and feet of the departed. Our actions here cause great delight for the souls above. This lesson discusses the customs of Kaddish, Yahrzeit, Yizkor, and visiting the grave. It also discusses the ways that departed souls may communicate with us, and pray or intercede on our behalf.

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## **Lesson Six: Toward a More Meaningful Life**

By understanding the different stages of the soul's journey, we can live our own lives more fully. Each day is, in fact, a microcosm of the soul's journey, and the current moment is pivotal in launching us towards a fuller future. If you had one day left to live, how would you spend it? And why aren't you living as if today were your last day? We end our course with a morning meditation to inspire you to make the most of each day.

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute is to inspire Jewish learning worldwide and to transform Jewish life and the greater community through Torah study. Our goal is to create a global network of informed students connected by bonds of shared Jewish experience.

JLI aspires to be the pre-eminent provider of adult Jewish education, and to continue to set new standards in the field. We are a learning organization, listening and responding to our affiliates and students so we can continue to grow in new ways.

Our holistic approach to Jewish study considers the impact of Jewish values on personal and interpersonal growth. Drawing on research-based instructional design and cutting-edge approaches to adult learning, JLI's innovative presentation of traditional Judaism is designed to be both intellectually rigorous and highly accessible.

JLI is associated with Merkos L'Inyanei Chinuch, the educational arm of Chabad-Lubavitch.