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# REINCARNATION

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One of the common misconceptions that people have about Judaism is that “reincarnation is totally alien to Jewish thought” (Simon Glustrom, *The Myth and Reality of Judaism*, 1989). Many people are surprised to learn that Judaism actually affirms belief in reincarnation, whereby the soul returns to the world to live a new life, a doctrine usually associated with Eastern religions. In reality, though, it should not seem so surprising. The basic concepts underlying reincarnation are fundamental to Jewish outlook, such as the eternity of the soul, Divine reward and punishment, and the future resurrection of the dead.

Whereas the latter concepts are fundamental to the classical understanding of Judaism, reincarnation has not enjoyed a prominent place in the Jewish tradition. The idea of reincarnation in Judaism has been fully developed in the tradition of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah. Even there, it has remained a much-guarded secret of the spiritual world. The Ramban (Nachmanides), who often delves into the mystical, only hints to the concept of reincarnation. As such, reincarnation is a concept less familiar than others, but certainly no less Jewish.

In this class we will dispel the myth that Judaism does not believe in reincarnation and seek to answer the following questions:

- ❧ What are the central Biblical sources for reincarnation, as understood by the Kabbalists?
- ❧ What is the purpose of reincarnation?
- ❧ How does reincarnation work?
- ❧ How many times can a person be reincarnated?
- ❧ Can a human be reincarnated as an animal?
- ❧ What are the philosophical implications of belief in reincarnation?
- ❧ Are there findings in modern science that confirm the belief in reincarnation?

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## SECTION I: OVERVIEW OF REINCARNATION

From a Torah perspective there is no doubt as to the presence of a spiritual soul which transcends the material body and which continues to exist even after the body, the earthly vessel of the soul “returns to the earth.” Reincarnation is simply an extension of the continued existence of the soul whereby a soul reenters the physical world and occupies a different body than it did in its previous earthly life.

While some Torah laws and verses are suggestive of the process of reincarnation, the concept is only made explicit by Kabbalistic authorities such as the Zohar, Sefer HaBahir (attributed to the first century Sage, Rabbi Nechuniah ben Hakanah), Ramban, and the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria).

### PART A. BACKGROUND: THE BODY/SOUL DUALITY

#### 1. Genesis (Bereishit) 2:7 – The human soul.

The Lord, God, formed the Man, earth from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the living soul; and the Man became a living being.

וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה.

#### 2. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:7 – The soul returns to God.

And the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return unto God Who gave it.

וישוב העפר אל הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלקים אשר נתנה.

#### 3. Midrash HaGadol, Bereishit 2:7– The soul and body return to their source.

“He blew within his nostrils the soul of life” – He created his body from the land, and his spirit from the heavens. And at the time of his death, the part which comes from the land returns to the land, and the part which comes from the heavens returns to the heavens.

“ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים” – ברא גופו מן הארץ ונפשו מן השמים. ובשעת מיתתו חלק הארץ חוזר לארץ וחלק השמים חוזר לשמים.

### PART B. SOURCES IN THE TORAH AND PROPHETS

#### 1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 33:6; Targum Onkelos ibid. – Moshe (Moses) blesses Reuven (who had long since died) that he should not die “a second death.”

Let Reuven live, and not die.

Let Reuven live an eternal life, and let him not die a second death. [Meaning: let Reuven not require the rectification of reincarnation, which would cause him to die a second death.]

יחי ראובן ואל ימות.

יחי ראובן לחיי עלמא ומותא תנינא לא ימות.

2. **Ibid. 25:5-6 – According to Kabbalistic sources, the law of yibum (levirate marriage) is based on reincarnation.**

When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and has no child, the widow shall not remarry to one not of his kin; her brother-in-law shall come to her and take her to himself as a wife and perform the levirate marriage. And it shall be that the first-born son that she bears shall succeed in the name of his dead brother, that his name not be blotted out from Israel.

כי ישבו אחים יחדו ומת אחד מהם ובן אין לו לא תהיה אשת המת החוצה לאיש זר יבמה יבא עליה ולקחה לו לאשה ויבמה: והיה הבכור אשר תלד יקום על שם אחיו המת ולא ימחה שמו מישראל.

3. **Zohar, Vol. III, p. 215b – Yibum enacts the secret of reincarnation.**

This is the secret of reincarnation.

[The son born to the husband's brother from his deceased brother's wife is a reincarnation of the deceased brother.]

והאי איהו רזא דגלגול.

4. **Ramban, Bereishit 38:8 – Yibum is founded on reincarnation, the Kabbalistic secret of genealogy.**

Rather, the matter is a great secret, from the secrets of the Torah in the genealogy of mankind, which is known to the eyes of seers, to whom Hashem has given eyes to see and ears to hear ... and the one who is wise will understand. [The Ramban is referring to the secret of reincarnation.]

אבל הענין סוד גדול מסודות התורה בתולדת האדם, ונכר הוא לעיני רואים אשר נתן להם השם עינים לראות ואזנים לשמוע... והמשכיל יבין.

5. **Shemot (Exodus) 20:5; Zohar, Vol. II, p. 91b – A person may assume accountability for his transgressions in another incarnation.**

"I keep in mind the transgression of the fathers for [their] descendants, to the third and fourth [generation]."

There is one tree [soul], which is planted [in a body] once, twice, three times, and four times, and is punished for the transgressions of the first [incarnation]. The father, the son, the third, and the fourth generation, are all one [soul], which has not been rectified and has not even tried to rectify itself.

פקד עון אבות על בנים, על שלשים ועל רבעים, אילנא חדא דאינציב חדא ותרין זמנין ותלת זמנין וארבע זמנין, ואתפקד על חובוי קדמאי, אב ובן שלישי ורביעי חד הוא, כד לא אתתקן ולא חייש לאתתקנא.

6. **Iyov (Job) 33:30, with commentary of Recanati on Bereishit 23 – This verse is a reference to reincarnation.**

Behold, God does all these things with man, two or three times ...

הן כל אלה יפעל א-ל פעמים שלוש עם גבר:

To bring back his soul from the grave, to bask in the light of the living.

להשיב נפשו מני שחת לאור באור החיים:

See the Ramban in *Sha'ar HaGemul* (commenting on Iyov), who also understands the above verse in this way.

7. **Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah.org – According to the Vilna Gaon, the Book of Yonah (Jonah) can be seen as a metaphor for reincarnation.**

In addition to the factual, true account of Yonah's mission, the Vilna Gaon (throughout his commentary to Sefer Yonah) perceives an allegorical interpretation within the text. Yonah is the *neshamah* (soul), which is charged with a mission to fulfill in this world: perfecting itself. The neshamah boards a "vessel" to journey through this world: namely, the body. But the person tries to flee from God and avoid fulfilling His charge. Eventually, the individual is "swallowed up" and departs from this world, leaving his task unfinished. What happens after that? "And the Word of God came to Yonah a second time, saying: 'Arise! Go to Nineveh ...'" (Yonah 3:1-2). The soul is sent back to earth, to finally accomplish its intended mission.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ☞ Biblical sources clearly state that man is the composite of a physical body and a spiritual soul. When the body dies, the soul returns to God. When reincarnation occurs, that soul then enters a new body.
- ☞ The idea of reincarnation, which remained a Kabbalistic secret until late in Jewish history, is nevertheless alluded to in many places in the Bible. Kabbalah reveals the inner workings of the Torah founded on the reality of reincarnation.

## SECTION II: THE PURPOSE AND NATURE OF REINCARNATION

Each human being is created *b'tselem Elokim*, in the Image of God. According to the Kabbalists *tselem Elokim* applies to both Jews and non-Jews. The foundation of reincarnation is based on the principle that God created each person with the goal of reaching perfection by using his free will. If the soul did not achieve perfection in one lifetime, reincarnation affords additional opportunities to perfect the soul using free will (in contrast to those cases necessitating transmigration into animals, plants, or inanimate objects, which purifies the soul independently of free will).

### PART A. THE PURPOSE OF REINCARNATION

1. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Ner Le'Elef – Assisting an individual to reach perfection.**

The concept of reincarnation is very profound. As taught in Derech Hashem (see below), each human being was placed by God in this world to earn *perfection*. We need to appreciate how great each person can actually become. Perfection means the "fulfillment" of every atom that comprises a human being. God has faith in every individual to achieve this goal and does not give up on anyone.

Reincarnation can assist a person to reach perfection by perfecting different components of the soul that was not achieved in a previous lifetime; which explains why souls can be reincarnated as either human beings, animals, flowers or inanimate objects.

In order to appreciate what benefit reincarnation offers the soul, one must have a general understanding of the purpose of Creation in the first place.

2. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem 1:2:1-1:3:2, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation, Feldheim Publishers – Man must earn his perfection through the correct application of his free will, which can only happen in a physical world.**

God's purpose in Creation was to bestow of His good to another ... His wisdom therefore decreed that the nature of this true benefaction be His giving created things the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible for them.

God's wisdom, however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must be its master. That is, he must earn it for himself ... man must earn his perfection through his own free will and desire ... It was necessary, therefore, for man to be given free will, to be balanced between good and evil and not compelled toward either.

In order that God's goal best be achieved, the Highest Wisdom decreed that man should consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual.

The two are then in constant battle. If the soul prevails, it not only elevates itself but the body as well, and the individual thereby attains his destined perfection.

הנה התכלית בבריאה היה להטיב מטובו ית' לזולתו... על כן גזרה חכמתו שמציאות הטובה האמיתית הזאת יהיה במה שינתן מקום לברואים לשיתדבקו בו ית',

באותו השיעור שאפשר להם שיתדבקו... ואולם גזרה חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי שיהיה הנהנה בו בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו... ואולם צריך שיהיה זה בבחירתו ורצונו... על כן הוכרח שיונח הדבר לבחירתו, שתהיה נטיתו שקולה לשני הצדדין ולא מוכרחת לאחד מהם...

ואולם להיות הדבר הזה נשלם כראוי, גזרה החכמה העליונה שיהיה האדם מורכב משני הפכים, דהיינו מנשמה שכלית וזכה, וגוף ארצי ועכור, שכל אחד מהם יטה בטבע לצדו, דהיינו הגוף לחומריות והנשמה לשכליות,

ותמצא ביניהם מלחמה, באופן שאם תגבר הנשמה, תתעלה היא ותעלה הגוף עמה, ויהיה אותו האדם המשתלם בשלימות המעותד...

The physical world provides the battleground for man's free will, providing the soul with an opportunity to perfect itself. As the sources below demonstrate, reincarnation offers a second chance at earning perfection.

The Arizal, in his introductory chapters to *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, mentions several reasons for which a soul may be reincarnated. These include:

1. Repairing spiritual damage that was incurred through transgressions in a previous life
2. Achieving a level of perfection that was not achieved previously
3. One may be reincarnated for the purpose of helping others to reach spiritual perfection.

The common denominator of these reasons is that a person may return to this world in order to complete his essential calling, which he had not accomplished in his previous life or lives. Reincarnation may also be a form of punishment; nevertheless, it is for the ultimate benefit of the soul, which is able to reach its potential by returning to the physical world.

### 3. **Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas, Reishit Chochmah, Sha'ar HaYirah # 13 – Reincarnation can help where Gehinnom cannot.**

Why is reincarnation necessary for the soul since it gets purified in Gehinnom anyway? My teacher (Remak) explained that there are two reasons for reincarnation: (1) because a person may be lacking in the observance of certain commandments which are needed for perfection. Gehinnom can only purify, but not add that which is lacking; (2) Reincarnation can correct and purify things that Gehinnom cannot purify. This is because not all sins can be purified in Gehinnom; therefore a person must return to the world to fulfill his mission of perfection.

ובענין למה יצטרך גלגול לנשמה אחר שהיא ובענין נטהרת בגיהנם, תירץ מורי ע"ה כי הגלגול הוא לשתי סבות האחת לחסרון מצוה שלא השלים וצריך לחזור ולהשלים כראוי, ולזה מוכרח להתגלגל, כי אין גיהנם אלא טהרה לבד אבל לא להשלים חסרון. ועוד כי אפשר שיבא לתקן ולטהר מה שאי אפשר לגיהנם לטהר. והוא כי יש עונות שהגיהנם מטהר ויש שאין גיהנם מטהר ומוכרח הוא לבא להשלים.

### 4. **Zohar, Vol. I, p. 186b – Replanted to complete one's purpose.**

As long as a person is unsuccessful in fulfilling his purpose in this world, the Holy One, Blessed be He, uproots him and replants him over and over again.

וכל זמנא דבר נש לא יצליח בהאי עלמא, קב"ה עקר ליה ונטע ליה בכמה זמנין כמלקדמין.

For example, the Chofetz Chaim writes that a person who was wealthy and never assisted the disadvantaged may be reincarnated as a person who is poverty-stricken to understand the necessity of *tzedakah* (charity) and the plight of the poor.

### 5. **Sefer HaBahir (first century CE) 195 – Expiating the transgressions of previous lives.**

To explain why good things happen to one righteous person, while bad things happen to another is because the latter did evil in a previous [life], and is now experiencing the consequences ... This can be compared to a person who planted a vineyard and hoped to grow sweet grapes, but instead, sour grapes grew. He saw that his planting and harvest were not successful so he tore it out. He cleaned out the sour grape vines and planted again. When he saw that his planting was not successful, he tore it up and planted it again.

מפני מה צדיק וטוב לו צדיק ורע לו, מפני שהצדיק הזה כבר היה רשע לשעבר ועתה נענש ... משל למה"ד לאדם שנטע בגנו כרם ויקו לעשות ענבים ויעש באושים, ראה שלא הצליח נטעו גדרו ופרצו ונקה הגפנים מן הבאושים ונטעו עוד שנית ראה שלא הצליח גדרו נטעו אחר שנקה וראה שלא הצליח ועקרו ונטעו.

### 6. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 2:3:10, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation, Feldheim Publishers – Reincarnation is part of God's plan for the individual.**

There is another important principle regarding

עוד שורש אחר נמצא להנהגה בעניני העוה"ז, והוא

God's Providence. God arranged matters so that man's chances of achieving ultimate salvation should be maximized, as discussed earlier.

A single soul can be reincarnated a number of times in different bodies, and in this manner it can rectify the damage done in previous incarnations. Similarly, it can also achieve perfection that was not attained in its previous incarnations ...

There are many details in the concept of reincarnation, involving the manner in which an individual is judged according to one incarnation, and how this judgment depends on previous incarnations. The crucial point, however, is the fact that all is truly fair and just, as the Torah states, "The Creator's work is perfect, all His ways are justice" (Devarim 32:4).

No created thing can encompass God's thoughts or the profound depth of His plan. We only know that, like all other such concepts, the principle of reincarnation as one of man's experiences also follows the rule of fair judgment, as decreed by God to perfect mankind in general.

שהחכמה העליונה סידרה להרבות עוד ההצלה כמו"ש,

שנשמה אחת תבא לעוה"ז פעמים שונות בגופים שונים, ועל ידי זה הנה תוכל לתקן בפעם אחת את אשר קלקלה בפעם אחרת, או להשלים מה שלא השלימה...

והנה פרטי בחינות רבות ימצאו בענין זה של הגלגול, איך יהיה האדם נידון לפי מה שהוא בגלגולו, ולפי מה שקדם בגלגול אחר, לשיהיה הכל על פי המשפט האמיתי והישר, ועל כל זה נאמר, הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט וכו'.

ואין בברואים ידיעה שתוכל לכלול מחשבותיו ית"ש ועומק עצתו, רק הכלל הזה ידענו ככל שאר הכללים, שאחד ממקורות מקריהם של בני האדם בעוה"ז הוא הגלגול, על פי אותם החוקים והמשפטים הישרים שהוחקו לפניו ית' להשלמת זה הענין כלו:

## PART B. THE NATURE OF REINCARNATION

Reincarnation can assist a person to reach perfection by perfecting different components of the soul that was not achieved in a previous lifetime, which explains why souls can be reincarnated as either human beings, animals, flowers, or inanimate objects. These latter three forms of reincarnation are called transmigration, which is in essence a purification designed to spiritually cleanse the soul. Placed within a sub-human form of existence, the soul is no longer able to achieve rectification by means of free will; it may, however, achieve perfection and spiritual cleansing by means of passive events.

Some Kabbalists (based on Iyov 33:19-30, cited above) write that a person can be reincarnated as many as four times. The Zohar relates that as long as the soul is improving in perfection between incarnations, it will be given as many chances as it needs (Tikkunei Zohar 103a).

### 1. Sefer Chareidim, 7:57 – Is the soul aware of its reincarnated state?

The Kabbalists say that even though a soul reincarnated in a human body is unaware of its initial incarnation, nevertheless, when it is incarnated in the body of an animal or a bird, it is aware of its former incarnation, and it has anguish and regret over how it has descended from the human form to the form of a beast.

ודע שאמרו המקובלים, שאף על פי כשמתגלגל אדם בצורת אדם, אינו יודע בגלגולו ראשון, מכל מקום כשמתגלגל בצורת בהמה חיה או עוף, הוא יודע בגלגולו הראשון, ומיצר ומצטער איך ירד משמים מצורת אדם לצורת בהמה.

What determines the way one is reincarnated?



## 2. Arizal, Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 22 – The form of reincarnation fits the nature of the previous deeds.

After a person dies, he is punished for his transgressions in many ways, even before he enters Gehinnom. These ways are called *gilgul*. He may be reincarnated in an inanimate object, or in a plant, or in an animal, or in a human. Most people will not escape their being reincarnated in these ways ... The degree of transgression determines whether he will be reincarnated in a plant, an animal, etc.

אחר פטירת האדם, נפרעים ממנו על חטאתיו, קודם שיכניסוהו בגיהנם, בהרבה מציאויות של עונש, וכלם נקראים גלגולים. רוצה לומר, כי יתגלגל או בדומם, או בצמח, או בחי, או במדבר. וכמעט רוב בני האדם לא ימלטו מלהתגלגל בגלגולים אלה... ואמנם כפי ערך חטא האדם, כך בחי' אופני גלגולו, אם בצומח, אם בב"ח וכו'.

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ☞ The soul – a spark of the Divine – is charged with the mission of perfecting itself in the physical world. Clothed in a body, the soul will have the opportunity to earn its perfection through the correct use of its free will.
- ☞ Should the soul fail to accomplish its task in one lifetime, it may be reincarnated, either as an opportunity to complete its perfection or as purification for transgressions committed in a previous life.
- ☞ Reincarnation benefits the soul in ways that Gehinnom cannot, for it provides further opportunity for the soul to perfect itself through the mechanism of free will. In this way, reincarnation is a kindness from God that is for the ultimate good of the soul.
- ☞ The number of reincarnations that a soul can undergo varies. The Zohar relates that as long as the soul is perfecting itself during each incarnation, it will be given as many chances as it needs (Tikkunei Zohar 103a).
- ☞ Whereas the conventional process of reincarnation involves the return of a human soul into a human body, a human soul may also be reincarnated in an animal, plant, or even an inanimate object.

## SECTION III: THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BELIEF IN REINCARNATION

Incorporating the possibility of reincarnation into our worldview can change our perspective on a number of issues. The suffering of the innocent, the injustice in the world, and even the purpose of life all take on new meaning in light of reincarnation.

### PART A. PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PERFECTION OF ONE'S SOUL

Since the purpose of reincarnation is to provide a second (or third ...) chance to perfect one's soul, we can learn from this that the job of soul perfecting is entirely up to us.

1. **Mishnah Berurah, Sha'ar HaTziyun 622:6 – We have the responsibility to perfect our soul; if not in this lifetime, then the next.**

A person may repeatedly despair of correcting his faults and conclude that if God decrees that he dies because of his failure there is nothing he can do about it. However, this is a mistaken attitude ... The soul will be reincarnated over and over again in this world ... until the correction is achieved.

כי האדם חושב כמה פעמים לייאש את עצמו שאין יכול לתקן בשום אופן ועל כן יתנהג תמיד באופן א', ואם יגזור עליו הקב"ה למות ימות. אבל טעות הוא, שסוף דבר יהיה... ויבא עוד פעם ופעמים לעולם הזה ... לתקן,

2. **Arizal, Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 16 – It may be our task to be careful in mitzvot that were overlooked in a previous lifetime.**

You will therefore understand that which we find in the Talmud that a certain Sage was careful in a certain mitzvah to a greater degree than in other mitzvot, and another Sage was conscientious in a different mitzvah, as we find that one Amora asked his fellow, "What was your father careful in?" and he responded that he was conscientious in the mitzvah of tzitzit or tefillin, etc. ... The secret of the matter is that every Sage was particular in the mitzvah that he was lacking during a previous incarnation – either entirely, or in one of its details. This is also the secret discussed in the Talmud – that one person chose [to refine] particular character traits, whereas another chose [to refine] different traits ... for each one chose the traits according to his reincarnation.

ובזה יתבאר לך מה שמצינו בתלמוד, כי חכם פלוני היה זהיר במצוה פרטיית יותר משאר המצוות, וחכם א' היה זהיר במצוה אחרת. וכמו שמצינו שהיה שואל אמורא פלוני לחבירו אבך במאי הוה זהיר טפי, וחבירו השיבו שהיה זהיר בציצית או תפילין וכיוצא בזה... אבל סוד הענין הוא, כי כל חכם וחכם היה זהיר באותה המצוה שהיתה חסירה ממנו בגלגול הקודם, או כלה, או פרט מפרטיה. וגם ז"ס מה שמצינו בתלמוד כי פלוני היה בורר לו מדות אלו, ופלוני היה בורר לו מדות אחרות, כמ"ש שאלו לפלוני במה הארכת ימים. א"ל, מימי לא עברתי על מדותי וגו', כי כל א' בורר לו מדות, כפי בחי גלגולו:

3. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem, 2:3:10, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation, Feldheim Publishers – Previous lives may determine the challenges we face in this life.**

When an individual has a reincarnated soul, it is possible that he will be affected in a particular manner as a result of his deeds in a previous incarnation. The situation in which he is placed may follow from this, and this situation may bring with it the special responsibility given to him, as discussed earlier.

... והנה אפשר שיגיעו ענינים לאדם שנשמתו מגולגלת, כפי מה שיוגרם לה מצד מה שעשתה בגלגול קודם, וינתן לאדם ההוא בעולם מצב כפי זה, וכפי המצב שינתן לו יהיה המשא אשר יוטל עליו וכמש"ל.

## PART B. WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

Reincarnation can help explain why a righteous person might endure seemingly unjustified suffering.

1. **Vilna Gaon, Even Shleimah 3:5 – Understanding why the righteous suffer.**

Somebody who was a wicked person in his first

מי שהיה רשע בגלגול ראשון, מורידו הקב"ה בחסרונו

incarnation, God brings him down in the [time of the] waning of the moon, and he lives a life of poverty, even though he is now righteous. This is “A righteous person, for whom bad things happen,” and of this the Sages said, “Length of life, number of children, and the extent of one’s sustenance do not depend on one’s merit, but on one’s *mazal*” (Moed Katan 28a).

הלבנה, ואז הוא בחסרון כל ימיו, אע"פ שהוא עכשיו צדיק גמור, וזהו: "צדיק ורע לו", ועל זה אמרו "חיי בני ומזוני לא בזכותא תליא מילתא אלא במזלא תליא מילתא" [מ"ק כח.].

For further insights, please refer to the Morasha class on Suffering.

## PART C. HUMAN INJUSTICE

### 1. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudikov, Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Parshat Mishpatim – Reincarnation helps explain seeming injustice.

“These are the ordinances that you shall set before them” (Shemot 21:1). On this verse, the Zohar (II:94a) says: “These are the cycles of reincarnation ...” This is a surprising connection, seeing that the subsequent verses speak about monetary laws. However, I heard the following explanation: One person accuses another in court [that he owes him money]. Though the defendant knows he is innocent, the Torah nevertheless obligates him to pay. He should not be plagued by the question “Isn’t the Torah a Torah of truth, whose paths are pleasant?” because this is the truth of the Torah and its pleasantness. How can this be so?

Undoubtedly, he owed this money to the other man in a previous incarnation, and the Torah is now making him pay in order to free him from this debt. As for the person who took the money deceitfully, he will have to give his own accounting in the future. This is only one example of many possible cases.

This is what the holy Zohar alludes to in its reading of the verse: “These are the ordinances.” For while the law may at times seem unjust, really “these are the cycles of reincarnation.” The Creator of the world and of all souls knows what occurred between individuals in previous lives, and directs His world according to the Torah, with love and compassion, with righteousness and true justice.

ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם. איתא בזה"ק (משפטים צ"ד.) אילין סדורין דגלגולא עיין שם. והוא תמוה לכאורה הא בפסוק מפרש ואזיל דיני ממונות, אך שמעתי בענין הדין שאחד דן את חבירו לבית דין ויודע בעצמו שבודאי הוא זכאי בדין והתורה מחייבתו אל יקשה לו הלא תורת אמת היא ודרכיה דרכי נועם כי זהו אמיתות התורה ונועם דרכיה?

כי בודאי מסתמא היה חייב בגלגול העבר לאיש הדין עמו וכעת חייבתו התורה לשלמו כדי לצאת ידי חובתו וחבירו שלוקח עתה המעות במרמה הוא עתיד ליתן את הדין וכאלה רבים בעניני דינים,

וזה יש לומר שרימו הזוה"ק "ואלה המשפטים" שהם דיני ממונות אף על פי שמן הנראה הם נגד האמת לפעמים אך דהאמת הוא אילין סדורין דגלגולא והיינו הבורא הכל ובורא כל הנשמות הוא היודע איך היה בגלגולים הקודמים בין איש לחבירו ככה יסובב המסבב ומנהיג על פי התורה את עולמו בחסד וברחמים ובצדק ובמשפט.

## PART D. PREMATURE DEATH

The Chofetz Chaim writes that a child who dies young might have been the reincarnation of a great person (Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim 23:5).

## PART E. DISABILITIES

### 1. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Ohr Somayach's *Ask the Rabbi*, issue #245 – Reincarnation may explain why some people have only minimal interaction with this world.

I've heard that the famous "Chazon Ish," Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, stood up for people with Down syndrome and the like. If this is true, I understand it as follows:

Each person is given faculties. These faculties allow him to reach his potential. The greater gifts and faculties a person is given, the more he is obligated to achieve. A person is created far away from a goal but given the tools to get there. A person born with very limited faculties obviously has a much smaller goal to achieve. So, in essence, the person of limited capabilities is created closer to his state of personal perfection.

Such a person may even be a reincarnation of a great *tzadik* or *tzadeket* (righteous person) who achieved near perfection the first time around, but needs to come back to this world to be able to achieve perfection. Such a person is worthy of respect.

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ☞ The possibility of reincarnation changes one's perspective on life. If reincarnation awaits the soul that leaves this world unperfected, then the responsibility for perfecting one's soul cannot be shirked.
- ☞ Reincarnation can help answer philosophical questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do innocent people suffer and die? Why are some people naturally more gifted while others have such difficult challenges?
- ☞ Taking reincarnation into account also changes one's perspective on the seeming injustice in the world, whether human or Divine.

## SECTION IV: EVIDENCE OF PAST LIVES

Reincarnation is a central tenet of Hinduism. A Harris Poll in the US revealed that 24% of all Americans believe in reincarnation. Judaism does not seek non-Jewish or secular sources to authenticate its religious principles. In fact, the opposite is true – Judaism upholds its religious principles despite non-Jewish challenges such as in the alleged cruelty of kosher *shechitah* (slaughtering). Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to present a range of evidence for reincarnation reflecting widespread belief in what is not normally viewed as a Jewish phenomenon.

The challenge of documenting cases of reincarnation is that the vast majority of people recall nothing of previous lives. Furthermore, evidence for reincarnation is normally based on random individual accounts. This has begun to change with the establishment of the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of

Virginia School of Medicine that is systematically researching and analyzing cases of reincarnation. Extensive studies conducted by Dr. Ian Stevenson and Dr. Brian Weiss have collected a large body of evidence supportive of reincarnation from four areas:

1. Past-life regression: “remembering” details of past lives while under hypnosis
2. Past life memories: children remembering details of their past life
3. Unlearned abilities: the uncanny ability some people have to speak foreign languages that they were never exposed to, or to perform skilled tasks they were never trained in
4. Physical signs of past-life wounds: the matching-up of identity by means of physical signs of wounds sustained in the former life

In this section we will explore the emerging field of Perceptual Studies.

## PART A. SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

### 1. Stan Grof M.D., *Holotropic Mind – An area of serious study.*

So convincing is the evidence in favor of past life influences that one can only conclude that those who refuse to consider this to be an area worthy of serious study must be either uninformed or excessively narrow-minded.

### 2. Jane Bosveld, *Discover Magazine, June 2007, “Soul Search – Will Natural Science Pin Down Our Supernatural Essence?” – Evidence is building to support reincarnation.*

At the Division of Perceptual Studies (University of Virginia), there are file cabinets bulging with case studies of people who think they ... remember past lives: who they were, where they lived, what they looked like, what work they did, all sorts of details of a life.

Psychiatrist and physician Ian Stevenson, who founded DOPS, began gathering stories of past lives in 1960. He also made personal trips to verify and document the details, including reports of children with birthmarks corresponding to wounds the “previous personality” received and phobias related to the cause of death. Stevenson died early this year, but child psychiatrist Jim B. Tucker, author of *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children’s Memories of Previous Lives*, is continuing his work. Tucker has helped build a database of 1,400 cases of possible reincarnation. At his office at DOPS, Tucker explains that with the stronger cases “kids tend to start talking about these memories at an earlier age. They talk about them with more emotion. They give a lot of details, including specific names about the previous life.”

Investigating reincarnation is an even thornier research problem than studying NDEs (near death experiences). Although almost every culture has stories of people whose souls returned after death, the evidence for that return consists mostly of recollections and anecdotes. Tucker does his best to examine as many of the memories in each case as possible. Sometimes he locates family members and consults local historians to confirm information. Nevertheless, Tucker says, “We would never say that we have proved that reincarnation occurs. I think we can only say that we’ve produced evidence for it.”

## PART B. PARANORMAL BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN

The cases of paranormal behavior involving children are the most telling signs of reincarnation. Unlike adults, children lack the cunning to fabricate elaborate lies and they also lack the inhibitions that would hinder an adult. As such, cases of children relating information about past lives have been at the core of scientific research into reincarnation. We give here just a couple of examples, but there are many, many more.

1. **Carol Bownan's Past Life Forum, [www.childpastlives.org](http://www.childpastlives.org) – Reincarnation of a Twin Towers' fireman.**

I've been looking on the internet for someone talking about their child having past life memories from 9/11. My son has been talking about it for almost a year now ... he's almost four ... He started out insisting that he doesn't just want to be a firefighter, that he is one ... he would get up in the morning and put on his fire outfit (his big reward for being potty trained) and tell me he's going to work. He would take his play axe and pretend to chop down the walls etc. because there was fire behind them. That's how it started and the info just progressed ... we were reading a Curious George book about him in the big city and he said very matter-of-factly ... bad men knocked those buildings over, pointing at the Twin Towers picture (he has also never been exposed to 9/11 scenes ... I am also a stay at home mom). Then he said planes broke in them and he couldn't help ... he also told me there were people jumping because they wouldn't wait for him to get them ... He told me he was stuck and was trying to break through the wall to get the people out because they were calling for them ... He has also gone on extensively about the type of trucks he was in ... the color bucket on the truck and how it feels to come down from up high in the bucket ... very detailed about firefighting and has stated he's not a firefighter – he's fire rescue ... we have no firefighters in the family but the details I could go on with forever ... he also talks about his friend Mike who is also a firefighter ... It has opened my eyes to a whole new reality ... my husband still doesn't want to believe it, but the details are far too much for a three-year-old to make up ... it makes me feel better someone else is experiencing this too.

2. **Reincarnation International, Vol. I, #2 – Indian boy recalls details of past life.**

Titu Singh was two-and-a-half-years-old when he began to tell his family of his other life in Agra, a city in northern India. His memories were quite specific: he said that he had been the owner of a radio, TV and video shop, his name was Suresh Verma, he had a wife named Uma and two children. He also said that he had been shot, then cremated, and his ashes had been thrown in the river. His parents didn't take him seriously at first, but his behavior puzzled them – he often behaved as if he wasn't part of their family. "Titu is just an ordinary child, but sometimes he says and does things that only adults do," said his father. Repeatedly, Titu would tell his parents that he was homesick and wanted to go back to Agra. Once, he became so insistent about leaving, that he rolled his clothes into a bundle and threatened to leave home.

Titu's older brother decided to travel to Agra to check out his young brother's claims. He found a video shop called Suresh Radio, which was run by a widow named Uma whose husband had been shot, just as Titu had described. The brother approached Uma and explained how his little brother claimed to be her deceased husband. This information made Uma feel very odd. She decided to visit the Singh family the next day and see what truth there was in this young child's report. When the Verma family arrived unannounced, Titu was outside washing at the tap and spotted them first. He recognized them immediately and shouted to his parents that his "other family" had come. They invited the visitors to sit on the veranda, and Titu asked Uma to sit near him – an odd way for a five-year-old in India to relate to a grown woman. He asked about the children, and then stunned the widow by recounting the details of a family outing to a fair in a neighboring village where Suresh had bought her sweets, information that only she could have known. Titu later described burying gold in a hole in the house.

It was then arranged that Titu be taken to Agra. When he and his entourage arrived, it had been arranged for Suresh's two children to be playing among many other neighborhood children as a test for Titu. Titu recognized them immediately, singling them out from their playmates. Upon entering the video shop, Titu correctly identified changes made to the shop since Suresh's death ...

Titu told more details of the murder to an Agra court and was able to "convince the authorities that he was the reincarnation of the murder victim." The outcome of the case was not given in this account, but a professor at Delhi University was quoted as saying, "Because of the police involvement, this is one of the very best documented cases of seeming reincarnation I have seen."



## PART C. XENOGLOSSY

Xenoglossy (from the Greek *xenos*, “foreign” and *glossa*, “tongue, language”) is the paranormal phenomenon in which a person is able to speak a language he could not have acquired by natural means. For example, a person who speaks German fluently, but who has never studied it, has never been to a German-speaking country, and has never associated with German speakers, would be said to exhibit xenoglossy. The existence of xenoglossy is not generally accepted by linguists and psychologists. However, Ian Stevenson documented several cases that he considered authentic.

### 1. Rabbi Yaakov Astor, quoting Dr. Brian Weiss, *Soul Searching*, p. 115 – Children speaking Aramaic.

It wasn't my case, but a few years back parents of two-year-old twin boys noticed that the boys were speaking a rather sophisticated private language. They brought the twins to the Linguistics Department at Columbia University, where it was determined that the boys were speaking Aramaic to each other. Now, Aramaic is still spoken in a few remote villages in Syria, but basically as scientists and observers, as we all are, how do you explain that? Where is that coming from?

## PART D. PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF REINCARNATION.

### 1. *Indopedia, the Indological Knowledgebase: Reincarnation – Physical evidence of reincarnation.*

Perhaps the most significant anecdotal evidence in this regard is the phenomenon of young children spontaneously sharing what appear to be memories of past lives, a phenomenon which has been reported even in cultures that do not hold to a belief in reincarnation. Upon investigating these claims, Stevenson and others have identified individuals who had died a few years before the child was born who seem to meet the descriptions the children provided. In the most compelling cases, autopsy photographs reveal that the deceased individuals have fatal injuries that correspond to the unusual marks or birth defects of the child; for example, marks on the chest and back of a child line up precisely with the bullet entry and exit wounds on the body of an individual who has been shot.

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ Those who believe in reincarnation span different religions and cultures.
- ☞ Science is in the process of gathering the evidence in favor of reincarnation as demonstrated by the establishment of the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia School of Medicine.
- ☞ Evidence for reincarnation has been culled from (1) people remembering details of past lives while under hypnosis, (2) children remembering details of their past lives, (3) the uncanny ability some people have to speak foreign languages that they were never exposed to, or to performing skilled tasks they were never trained in, and (4) physical signs of past-life wounds.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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### SECTION I

Rabbi Yaakov Astor, Soul Searching

### SECTION II

Rabbi Chaim Vital, Sha'ar HaGilgulim

Ramban, Sha'ar HaG'mul

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Derech Hashem 2:3:10

### SECTION III

Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Reincarnation Audio Class –

<http://www.simpletoremember.com/media/a/rmb-reincarnation/>

Rabbi Dovid Begoun, Reincarnation Audio Class –

<http://www.avodashashem.com/begoun.html>

Yonassan Gershom, Jewish Tales of Reincarnation

### SECTION IV

Rabbi Yaakov Astor, Soul Searching

Ian Stevenson, 20 Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation

University of Virginia, Division of Perceptual Studies website –

<http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/personalitystudies/>

Brian Weiss, Many Lives, Many Masters, and Same Soul, Many Bodies