

REINCARNATION

Does Reincarnation Exist?

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...[eventually] 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.

[When a visit was arranged]...Titu 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 he could have known...[when Titu later visited Agra, he recognized 'his children'] immediately, singling them out from their playmates. Upon entering the video shop, Titu correctly identified changes made to the shop since Suresh's death.

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Does Judaism Believe in Reincarnation?

Zohar, Parashat Mishpatim

פתח ר' שמעון ואמר, ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם, תרגום, ואלין דיניא דתסדר קדמיהון. אלין אינון סדורין דגלגולא, דינין דנשמתין, דאתדנו כל חד וחד לקבל עונשיה.

"Rabbi Shimon opened with the words, 'And these are the judgments which you shall set before them' (Shemot 21:1). Meaning, these are the rules concerning reincarnation, the judgments of souls that are to be sentenced each according to its punishable acts".

Zohar, Yitro

פקד עון אבות על בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים. אלנא חדא, דאינציב חדא, ותרין זמנין, ותלת זמנין, וארבע זמנין, ואתפקד על חובי קדמאי, אב ובן. שלישי ורביעי חד הוא כד לא אתתקן, ולא חייש לאתתקנא, וכן בהפוכא דדא, לאילנא דאיהו אתתקן כדקא חזי, וקאים על קיומיה ועושה חסד וגוי.

It is written: "Punishing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation" (Shemot 20:5). This is the same [soul], coming once, twice, thrice, four times, being punished for the first sins. For the father, the son, the third and fourth generations, are one [soul] that has not been corrected or cared to correct itself.

Note: Rashbi intends to reconcile the quoted verse with the following; “nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers”, meaning one’s punishment should not be imparted to future generations. Therefore, Rashbi explains the quoted verse according to reincarnation.

Targum Unkelos speaks of a “second death”:

Deuteronomy 33:6

“Let Reuven live and not die [targum: a second death]...”

Meaning, despite his incorrect deed (see text for context), may he live in the World to Come and not have to be reincarnated to correct the misdeed and then die another time.

Isaiah 22:14, 65:6

“Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven until you die [targum: a second death]...”

Meaning, this transgression may only be rectified through reincarnation and subsequent death.

Ramban on Job 33:29

Job suffered because of deeds in a previous reincarnation:

הוּן כָּל אֱלֹהִים, יַפְעֵל אֶל פְּעַמִּים שְׁלוֹשׁ עִם גָּבֵר. לְהַשִּׁיב נַפְשׁוֹ, מִנִּי שְׁחַת לְאוֹר, בְּאוֹר הַחַיִּים.

“Behold G-d does all these, twice or thrice with man. To bring back his soul from the pit to be enlightened with the light of life.”

Chafetz Chaim, Sefat Tamim

A man once left his home country and family to travel to a distant land in order to engage in business. There, after many years of unsuccessful dealings, he decided to return to his homeland and family. However, when the king of that land heard of the debts that he accrued, he sent messengers ahead, asking the king of the homeland to bar the man’s entry until he returned to pay off his debts. Unable to return to his home and family, the man had no choice but to return to pay his debts. Only then was he permitted back into his homeland.

We see that scholars of all periods, including the Zohar, Tannaim, Rishonim and even a relatively contemporary and halachic authority of the stature of the Chofetz Chaim accepted reincarnation.

Note: There are some dissenting opinions. Rav Saadya Gaon, Emunot v’Deot 6:3, disputes reincarnation as Jewish concept. Also, in Baba Matzia 107a, on the verse, “You shall be blessed when you come [into the world], and you shall be blessed when you depart [from the world]” (Deut. 28:6), Rashash posits that since a primary reason given for reincarnation is to correct past misdeeds, the gemora’s assertion that one arrives in the world without sin implies that there is no reincarnation. However, these contradictions may be reconciled as follows: a Gaon (R’ Saadya) is not as authoritative as a Tana (Rashbi and

Onkelus). Also, Rav Saadya may not have been aware of reincarnation in the Jewish tradition because: a) Kabbalah was still very much hidden in his day; b) It is possible that he was aware but wanted to discourage people from over emphasizing it. Rashash on Baba Matzia may be reconciled with the sources suggesting transgression is a cause for reincarnation as follows: a) in any given reincarnation, one is born free of sin vis a vis that life time; b) one must strive to rectify now in order to leave the current lifetime free of sin as when he arrived in the first lifetime.

Purpose of Reincarnation

(from Rabbi Chaim Vital, Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introductory chapters)

1. To repair damage incurred to the soul through transgressions done in a previous life by reliving those experiences while refraining from wrongdoing.
2. To achieve perfection that wasn't achieved by reliving experiences as above and taking full advantage of the opportunity for spiritual growth (SHG Intro 8).

Note: The first time a soul enters this world, the person is supposed to perfect at least *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neschama*. If so, the soul goes to Gan Eden to await Resurrection (SHG I:2). If person doesn't perfect all three levels the first time, the soul must return to be perfected part by part. Each time a part is perfected, the person has fulfilled his purpose in the present lifetime, therefore dies and is reincarnated with emphasis on the next level of soul. Previously perfected levels are not damaged by sins of the next reincarnation (SHG I:2). The soul continues to be reincarnated this way until it is perfected at least in *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neschama* (SHG I:2). Question: Which reincarnation will be resurrected? Answer: The bodies of all reincarnations will be resurrected, but the 'first body' is the main one (SHG I:5).

3. To perfect others, therefore even the righteous may be reincarnated for the purpose of helping others reach spiritual perfection.

Note: Even though reincarnation involves a certain degree of suffering for the soul since it would rather be in spiritual realms, the *Tzadik* is willing to forgo spiritual pleasure for the benefit of the Jewish People, just as the righteous forgo physical comforts like proper food and sleep in order to help others.

4. To marry one's soul mate. Since a soul may only reach perfection together with the soul mate, if one "missed" marrying one's soul mate, or must be reincarnated for other reasons, the soul mate must also be reincarnated in order to enable the mate to achieve perfection.

Note: People have a lot of questions about soul mate and all the points cannot be covered here. Some include: How does one know if this is the soul mate, what if there's difficulty in the marriage, how can one "miss", and then what happens, etc. The main direction is that with rational, level-headed thinking and advice from close family, friends and especially rabbis, one can make the correct decision. Then, soul mate doesn't necessarily mean smooth sailing. After all, each must help the other attain spiritual perfection. Divorce is only an extreme, last recourse – and only after a couple has exhausted all possibilities, and this too must only be approached through experienced rabbis.

Proofs of Reincarnation

(from Nishmat Chaim 3:15, Menashe ben Israel, 1604-1658)

1. "Speaking infants".

In Shalshet HaKabbalah p. 46, R. Gedaliah b. Yosef Ibn Yachyah (1515-1587) relates how the infant Nachman Katufa spoke of deep Kabbalistic concepts such as Ma'aseh Merkava shortly after birth, and died at the age of twelve.

This implies that the soul was born already highly perfected from a previous incarnation, and reaches perfection relatively early, thereby resulting in early maturity, and "premature" death.

2. Children prodigies, similar to the above.

Consider the following story: Cliff and Helen's son had just started to speak. Like with most children, his parents had trouble understanding what Jeff was saying. They thought his words sounded a little odd, but he was able to point to what he wanted at the same time as he asked, so they soon learned to follow his baby language. Then one day a friend was at the house. When the young boy pointed to a drink and said 'his' word for it, the guest was astounded. After listening to the boy for a while, he told the startled parents that their son was speaking perfect Greek.

3. It's not logical that there should be an infinite number of souls.

The Zohar says that the 600,000 adult males (and their female counterparts) at Sinai represent the number of "root" souls of the Jewish people. Since many more Jews have lived during all the generations since then, many have been reincarnated.

Yevamot 63b

אמר רבי אסי אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו כל הנשמות שבגוף.

Rabi Asi said, the descendent of David (Mashiach) will not come until all the souls have been finished from the "guf" - "Body".

Rashi explains "guf" refers to a heavenly curtain or chamber that divides between G-d and the angels within which all the souls are placed in order to be put into bodies. The implication regarding reincarnation is that the souls are returned to this supernal "guf" or body in order to be reborn until they all attain perfection. At that time, the redemption will occur.

4. Dybuk, Rashba (Responsa 548) records this phenomenon from a reliable source.

Dybuk will be discussed in the next session, but in short, the idea here is that if a soul can return to possess a currently living person, certainly it can be returned to "possess" another body at birth, becoming that body's primary soul.

Reincarnation Explains “Tragedies”

(from Nishmat Chaim 4:11)

1. Why righteous people suffer: *tzadik v'ra lo - tzadik ben rasha*.

This means, a righteous person who suffers is himself righteous, but the son of a wicked person. However, since a person shouldn't suffer on account of his parent, what it means is that in this life he is righteous, but his suffering is a product of being wicked in a previous reincarnation.

2. Why children die young or are miscarried.

Yalkut Mishle 31

Rabi Meir's two sons died on Shabbat. His wife covered them and didn't reveal their death to R' Meir until he made havdalah and had something to eat. She then asked him, "a neighbor once deposited something with me, and now after many years, she has come to claim it back, must I return the deposit?" He answered, "of course, no matter how long the object was deposited with you, it still belongs to the owner". She replied, "so it is with our sons: G-d gave, G-d takes back, may G-d's name be blessed forever".

How did these words console R' Meir? Ultimately, it seems the sons died unjustifiably, and free of sin? Why should G-d have taken them back before their time? The Ben Ish Chai explained that R' Meir's wife intended to console him by the notion of deposit, referring to reincarnation which is not the first life but merely a deposit to be returned upon completing its purpose. She meant to convey to him that their children must have been reincarnated souls who were perfected to the degree that they could return to the spiritual realm. Remaining in this world any longer would cause the souls to suffer and unrightfully deny them to their master.

3. Birth defects, retardation, autistic children, etc.

The soul is reincarnated in a person who is unaccountable for sins. Alternatively, these are very holy souls that might reveal too much of the spiritual worlds, therefore they are placed in bodies that are essentially unable to communicate with their surroundings.

It is told of the Chazon Ish that he would stand up in the presence of autistic people because he considered them to be very lofty souls. Also, one might use this opportunity to investigate Facilitated Communication (F.C.), a method through which autistic individuals purportedly communicate very spiritual ideas and messages.

Experience of Reincarnation

1. Sefer Chasidim 41 – A person is not aware of previous reincarnations.
2. Derech Hashem 2:3:10 – One's status in a particular reincarnation is affected by the previous one.

The Baal Shem Tov once told a man who complained about his poverty to inquire after a certain man in a distant town. When he arrived, people spat at the mention of the man's name. The poor, bewildered man returned to the Baal Shem who revealed to him that the man he sought had been a wealthy miser who mistreated everyone, and in fact he (the

poor man) was a reincarnation of that miser. His poverty was caused by, and was intended to atone for, his misuse of wealth in his previous lifetime.

3. Arizal, Sefer HaGilgulim 84 – A person's religious duties are affected by reincarnation.

Avoda Zara 19a

אמר רבי: אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ שנאמר (תהילים א) כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו.

"A person should only learn those parts of Torah which his heart desires"

The Arizal explained that a person has less desire to learn what has been mastered in a previous reincarnation, but the areas he desires to learn are those that he still has to master.

The Alsheich once asked the Ari if he should learn Kabbalah. The Ari told him he had already mastered it in a previous reincarnation. Rather he must work now on Chumash. He became one of the greatest Torah commentators.

Shabbat 118b

אמר ליה רב יוסף לרב יוסף בריה דרבה: אבוך במאי זהיר טפי אמר ליה בציצית.

Rav Yosef asked Rav Yosef the son of Rova, what mitzvah was your father particularly scrupulous in performing? He answered, tzitzit.

Arizal: Those mitzvot that we find particularly difficult to keep are specifically those needing correction from a previous life.

3. Yibum

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

כִּי יֵשְׁבוּ אֲחִים יַחְדָּו, וְיָמָת אֶחָד מֵהֶם וַיָּבֵן אִין לוֹ, לֹא תִהְיֶה אִשְׁתּוֹ הַיָּתֵם הַחוּצָה, לְאִישׁ זָר;
בְּמָה יָבֵא עָלֶיהָ, וְלִקְחָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבַמָּהּ. וְהָיָה, הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד יִקְוֶם, עַל שֵׁם אָחִיו הַיָּתֵם;
וְלֹא יִמָּחֶה שְׁמוֹ, מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל.

If brothers reside together, and one of them dies having no son, the dead man's wife shall not marry an outsider. Her husband's brother shall marry her, thus performing the obligation of a husband's brother with her. And it will be, that the son she will bear will perpetuate the name of the deceased brother, so that his name shall not be obliterated from Israel.

Explanation: If a man dies without children, his brother is required to marry the widow in order to perpetuate his deceased brother's line. The Torah asserts that the couple will have a male child. Why does this necessarily follow? The deceased brother is reincarnated as the child of this couple, becoming the son of his wife and brother.

Note: Unlike usual cases of reincarnation, here: 1) all levels of soul are reincarnated together as in the first life; 2) the main resurrection is from the reincarnation of *yibum*, not

from the first life (SHG I:3). Pele Yoetz (*gilgul*) writes: the family must inform the “son” what to correct based on their knowledge of him as the “husband” in his previous life.

How Many Times is a Soul Reincarnated?

(from Nishmat Chaim 4:14)

The majority of Kabbalists say that in addition to the first life, there are three reincarnations and no more. This is based on the following:

1. Job 33:29,30 “G-d does all these things twice or three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to...the light of the living”.
2. Zohar (Gen. p.150) on Ex. 34:7 “punishing the iniquity...to the third and fourth generation”.
3. Amos 2:6 “for three transgressions of Israel I will turn away his punishment, but for the fourth I will not...”

However, this contradicts the Sefer HaBahir which states that a person can be reincarnated even 1000 times. Can you think of a resolution based on what we’ve learned in this session?

The purpose of reincarnation is to perfect the soul. If after three reincarnations no progress has been made, the soul has lost its chance. But if the soul is progressing, it can keep returning many times to be perfected incrementally.

The Arizal writes an additional resolution based on the wording in Job above: “G-d does all these things twice or three times with a **man**...”. That is, a soul can be reincarnated three times as a man. After that, the soul can be reincarnated even 1000 times as an animal, lower life forms or even inanimate objects. This introduces the next session on Dybuk that will begin with this concept of “transmigration” – reincarnation into lower forms.