

# **GILGUL/REINCARNATION IN SEFER HABAHIR, ZOHAR AND LURIANIC KABBALAH**

## **1. GILGUL IN THE EVENING SHEMA PRAYER:**

Master of the Universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or antagonized me or who sinned against me - whether against my body, my property, my honor or against anything anything of mine; whether he did so accidentally, willfully, carelessly, or purposely, whether through speech, deed, thought or notion, **whether in this transmigration or another transmigration** - בגלגול זה בין גלגול אחר -

## **GILGUL IN SEFER HA-BAHIR, Provence, c. 1170 CE:**

### **2. BIBLICAL PROOF TEXT**

R. Meir said: What is the meaning of the verse "*The Lord shall reign forever, your God, O Zion, from generation to generation?*" [Ps. 146:10] What [does it mean] "*from generation to generation*"? R. Papias said: It is written, "*A generation goes, and a generation comes*" ([Ecc.1:4]). And R. Akiba said: [The meaning of "*A generation goes and a generation comes*" is that] it has already come. (*Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 121)

### **3. PARABLE OF A KING**

To what is this similar? To a fable about a king who owned slaves, and he dressed them with embroidered silk garments according to his best ability. They disarranged them. He expelled them and drove his presence from them, and stripped them of his garments, and they went away. The king then took the garments, washed them thoroughly until there was no soiled spot left on them and placed them to be readily used. Then the king bought other slaves and dressed them with these garments. But he did not know whether or not these slaves were good. And here is a case where they [the new slaves] benefited from garments that had been worn previously by others and were not even new. .... (*Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 122)

## **4. GILGUL AS THEODICY TO EXPLAIN APPARENT INJUSTICE IN THE WORLD**

"Why is there a righteous person who has good, and [another] righteous person who has evil?" .... This is because the [second] righteous person was wicked previously, and is now being punished. Is one then punished for his childhood deeds? Did not Rabbi Simon say that in the Tribunal on high, no punishment is meted out until one is twenty years or older. He said: *I am not speaking of present life. I am speaking about what has already been previously.*" (*Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 195)

## **5. HOW MANY TIMES DOES A SOUL REINCARNATE?**

A person planted a vineyard in his garden and hoped to grow 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 grapes and planted again. When he saw that his planting was not successful, he tore it up and planted again. How many times? He said to them: For a thousand generations. It is thus written (Psalm 105:8) "*The words that He commanded for a thousand generations.*" (*Sefer Ha-Bahir* 195)

## **6. GILGUL IN ZOHAR, Guadalajara, Spain, c. 1290 CE:**

Truly, all souls, must undergo transmigration; but men do not perceive the ways of the Holy One, how the revolving scale is set up and men are judged every day at all time, and how they are brought up before the Tribunal, before they enter into this world and after they leave it. They perceive not the many transmigrations and the many mysterious works which the Holy One accomplishes with many naked souls, and how many naked spirits roam about, in the other world without being able to enter within the veil of the King's Palace (*Zohar* III, 99b).

## 7. REASONS FOR REINCARNATION:

*"If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work for six years; and in the seventh year he shall go out free, without liability. (Ex. 21:2)* Rabbi Shimon said to them, friends [students, disciples] the time has come to reveal some mysteries concerning transmigration of souls. This applies when the soul is required to reincarnate, either because of sins, or because it had not completely fulfilled obligations in Torah and mitzvot while alive in this world. It is forced to come back to this world and don a body, that is be born again and finish what was imposed on it for the seventy years of the life in this world. (Ibid)

*"in the seventh year [the Hebrew slave] shall go out free, without liability (Ex. 21:2)...*if the soul has emanated from the sphere of Shechinah Herself [i.e. the lower sephira of malchut] who is symbolized by the number seven, it "shall go free", because its owner is righteous and is not subjected to labor or servitude. (Ibid)

## 8. REINCARNATION AND CHILDREN:

Citing Exodus 21:3, *"If he came by himself, he shall go out by himself"* This means that if a person came into the world single, without children [from a previous incarnation] and did not want to engage in this activity [of procreation], even now he departs this world without seed. He leaves [dies] like a stone that is hurled from a sling... This is the meaning of the verse *"If he came by himself, he shall go out by himself"* (Ex. 21:3). The reference is to a man who refused to get married and beget children.

## 9. REINCARNATION WITH SOUL-MATES:

*If he is married* (Ex. 21:3), that is if he has married a wife and tried to have children with her unsuccessfully, then he is not thus driven out alone like the other person; he does not enter alone or go out alone. For the Holy One, blessed be He, does not hold back any reward of any creature, even though he has not merited having any children

*His wife will go out with him* (Ex. 21:3), this means that both [husband and wife] transmigrate together. They merit uniting once again as they were before. Such a man does not marry a divorced woman [which happens to a man who in a previous life did not marry and thus does not have a prearranged partner] but marries the woman who was previously his wife but did not merit bearing him children. Now they both may gain merit together [to have children] if they rectify their deeds. This is why it says *His wife will go out with him*.

## 10. REINCARNATION AND BURIAL:

After the soul has left the body and the body remains without breath, it is forbidden to keep it unburied [; Baba Kama, 82b]. For a dead body which is left unburied for twenty-four hours causes a weakness in the limbs of the Chariot [understood to be the sefirotic limbs of physical/spiritual body] and prevents God's design from being fulfilled; for perhaps God decreed that he should undergo transmigration at once on the day that he died, which would be better for him, but as long as the body is not buried the soul cannot go into the presense of the Holy One not be transferred into another body. For a soul cannot enter a second body till the first is buried, just as it is not fitting for a man to take a second wife before the first is buried. (Zohar III, 88b)

## 11. GILGUL FOR SAKE OF TIKKUN - SHAAR HAGILGULIM Safed, c. 17th cent.

It is essential that the sins of [a righteous person] be cleared so that he will be able to enter Gan Eden. Thus, there is no rectification for him except reincarnation. For every sin which he does not atone through suffering during his lifetime, and for which he cannot go to Gehenna to receive his punishment for them, he will require another reincarnation to rectify it. (*Sha'ar HaGilgullim*, Winston trans, p. 113)

## **11. PURPOSE OF GILGUL IN TIKKUNEI ZOHAR - FULFILLMENT OF MITZVOT:**

The primal shape of humanity corresponds to the mystical shape of the Godhead... **Everything in the individual, each of the 248 limbs and 365 sinews**, corresponds to one of the supernal lights, as these are arranged in the structure of the *Shi'ur Komah*, the primal shape of the highest manifestation of God. A person's task is to bring his or her own true shape to its spiritual perfection, to develop the divine image within. **This is done by observing the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments of the Torah**, each one of which is linked to one of the organs of the human body, and hence of one of those supernal lights. Whoever fulfills the Torah properly makes the body into a dwelling place for the *Shekhina*. But a person must undergo *gilgul* for every limb that does not become a 'Throne for the *Shekhina*' - that is, for every commandment that a person fails to observe or prohibition that one transgresses - until one has carried out his original task (Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 219)

## **12. GILGUL AND RELATIONSHIPS IN SHA'AR HAGILGULIM:**

Know that when a man is new, that is, his first time in the world [i.e. his first reincarnation] then his soulmate is born with him... When it comes time to marry her they make it possible for him [to do so] quickly, free of any trouble whatsoever. (*Sha'ar HaGilgullim*, Winston trans, p. 226)

However, if this man committed to a sin and needs to reincarnate because of it... his soulmate will also reincarnate returning for his benefit...

[And further] ... sometimes the woman will also reincarnate when it is because of her husband who must reincarnate, and he brings his wife with him, as mentioned... [quoting the Biblical text of the freed slave] If he was married then his wife will go out with him (Ex. 21:3). *Sha'ar HaGilgullim*, Winston trans, p. 229)

## **13. NESHAMA KLALIT - "UNIVERSAL SOUL":**

There is a soul that is called the "universal soul" [Reb Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, Ch. 2 and 42]. This soul is connected to all souls, and can also reincarnate solely for the purpose of helping other souls achieve their proper elevation. A universal soul has responsibility for all souls, being that it is connected with all souls. When this "universal soul" reincarnates to help other people reach their elevations, it is guaranteed that this elevated soul will not sin and will be inclined to do only good. (DovBer Pinson, *Reincarnation and Judaism*, p. 103)

## **14. HOLOCAUST PAST LIVES:**

When I thought about my past life in Holocaust, I somehow sensed that I had been adolescent Jewish girl between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Over the years, I have had many dreams in which I was a young girl. Now I also realized that I had carried internalized feelings of inferiority from that life into this one. Whenever I meditate on this Holocaust life, the word which comes to mind is *fear*. I am still afraid to explore that life in detail because it is so painful. But one thing I do understand now - that feeling of subhumanness is not my fault. I am free of it today, because I learned how the Nazis were playing with Jewish minds. As that young girl I had internalized their shame-based program. When I finally realized that the Nazis were game-playing with my self-esteem my whole life changed. (Yonassam Gershom, *From Ashes to Healing*, p. 111)

## 15. IBBUR & DYBBUK

..ibbur is one of the ways that God helps those who are sincerely interested in change and improvement. Receiving assistance from the soul of a *tzaddik* [a righteous being] in order to accomplish what one could not do on his or her own is certainly a great [act of compassion], for instead of having to wait until returning in another lifetime, the assistance provided by *ibbur* allows one to elevate his or her self in a current lifetime. Avraham Arie Trugman, *Return Again - The Dynamics of Reincarnation*, p. 99

*Dybbukim* were generally considered to be souls, which, on account of the enormity of their sins, were not even allowed to transmigrate and as 'denuded spirits' they sought refuge in the bodies of living persons. The entry of a **dybbuk** into a person was a sign of his having committed a secret sin which opened a door for the **dybbuk**. (Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 349)

## 16. ALIGNING WITH YOUR IBBUR ACCORDING TO ISAAC LURIA

Seclude yourself in an isolated house... [and] wrap yourself in a prayershawl, and sit and close your eyes, divesting yourself of the material world as if your soul had left your body, and was ascending to heaven. Following this abstraction [from matter], recite whatever single Mishnah that you wish, many times in uninterrupted succession. Concentrate your mind upon attaching your soul to that of the *tanna* mentioned in the Mishnah. And this is you should concentrate your mind upon: That your mouth is an instrument which articulates the letters of the text of this Mishnah. The soul becomes a throne so that in it there may be invested the soul of this *tanna*, the author of the Mishnah, and so that his soul will be invested in your own. When you become exhausted from reciting the text of the Mishnah - if you are worthy of it - it is possible that the soul of this *tanna* will become invested within your mouth while you are reciting the Mishnah. And then while you are still reading the Mishnah he will speak with your mouth and your ears will hear his words. It is not you yourself speaking, but he is the one who speaks. this is the meaning of: "*The spirit of the Lord speaks by me and His word is upon my tongue.*" (Chaim Vital, *Sha'are Kedushah*, folios 16r-16v)



## FOR FURTHER READING

Baron, Joel and Sara Paasche-Orlow, Eds. *Deathbed Wisdom of the Hasidic Masters - The Book of Departure and Caring for People at the End of Life*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2016.

Brener, Anne. *Mourning and Mitzvah - A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing*. 25th anniversary edition. Nashville, TN: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2018.

Charles, R.H. *Eschatology - The Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Schocken Books, 1963.

Chajes, J.H. *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists and Early Modern Judaism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Daimant, Anita. *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew*. New York: Schocken Books, revised edition, 2019

Ellison, Koshin Paley and Matt Weingast, Eds. *Awake at the Bedside - Contemplative Teachings on Palliative and End-of-Life Care*. Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2016.

Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014.

Gershom, Yonassan. *Beyond the Ashes - Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. Virginia Beach, VA: ARE Press, 1992.

Gillman, Neil. *The Death of Death - Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997

Goldish, Matt, Ed. *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003.

Hallote, Rachel S. *Death, Burial, and Afterlife in the Biblical World*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001.

Kraemer, David. *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Pinson, Dovber . *The Jewish Book of Life After Life*. Brooklyn: Iyyun Publishing, 2015.

Raphael, Simcha Paull. *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Third edition, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Grief Journey and the Afterlife: Jewish Pastoral Care for Bereavement*. Boulder, CO: Albion-Andalus Books, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Living and Dying in Ancient Times: Death, Burial and Mourning in Biblical Tradition*. Boulder, CO: Albion-Andalus Books, 2015.

\_\_\_\_\_. *May the Angels Carry You: Jewish Prayers and Meditations for Death, Burial and Mourning*. Boulder, CO: Albion-Andalus Books, 2016.

Singh, Kathleen Dowling. *The Grace in Dying – How We Are Transformed Spiritually As We Die*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.

Winston, Pinchas. Trans. *Sha'ar Hagilgulim - Gate of Reincarnation* by Chaim Vital. Toronto: Thirtysix.org, 2014).

## **DA'AT INSTITUTE FOR DEATH AWARENESS, ADVOCACY AND TRAINING**

is dedicated to providing death awareness education and professional development training. Working in consultation with synagogues, churches, hospice programs and other types of community organizations, **DA'AT INSTITUTE** offers:

1. **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS** on death, dying, bereavement and the spirituality of end-of-life issues and concerns;
2. **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING** to clergy, health care and mental health professionals and educators working with the dying and bereaved;
3. **BEREAVEMENT AND HOSPICE COUNSELING SERVICES** to individuals and families through counseling, professional referral and bereavement support groups;
4. **PRINTED AND AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES** on the various facets of dealing with grief and loss, and on the spirituality of death and afterlife and
5. **RITUALS OF TRANSITION** for dying, burial, bereavement, unveiling and memorialization, helping families create meaningful rituals of passage.

