

## ***Gilgulim* – Part 1 – JewishClarity.com**

### **What Is *Gilgul*?**

The Hebrew term for “reincarnation” is “*gilgul*,” like the word “*galgal*,” which means “wheel.” A soul in a body can go from birth to death, and to birth again, through a cycle involving reincarnation. Reincarnation allows a person to accomplish a degree of rectification in his next life which he failed to achieve in his previous one. If one dies before reaching his highest level of soul possible, he can continuously reincarnate to complete his *tikun* until he succeeds, or *Mashiach* comes. (Rabbi Pinchas Winston — Fundamentals of Reincarnation, pg. 55; Reincarnation Clarified, pg.3)

The **Ramchal** discussed this in ***Derech Hashem*** (2:3-10):

There is an important principle in terms of how Hashem supervises this world, and which is arranged by the upper wisdom to increase our likelihood of success. A single soul can come to this world a number of times in different bodies. It will then be able to repair [in its current existence] what had been damaged in its previous one, or to perfect whatever had not been rectified [previously]. The soul will then be evaluated after these different *gilgulim*, and its judgment will be based on everything which occurred with all of the *gilgulim*. It is possible that what occurs to a person that reincarnated will be the result of what his soul did in its previous existence. There are many details in the concept of *gilgulim*, as to how one is judged in one *gilgul*, and how this judgment depends upon previous *gilgulim*. The essential point, however, is that everything is true and straight.

### **Some Famous Reincarnations**

Hevel reincarnated into several important historical individuals. First his soul reincarnated into Sheis, Adam's and Chava's third son, 130 years later (*Bereshit* 4:25), and then into Moshe Rabbeinu an additional 2,238 years later. (*Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, chap. 29).

There is a tradition that the Messianic Era will not begin until all of the reincarnations of Hevel are complete. This means that Moshe Rabbeinu will reincarnate in every generation to remove souls from their impurity. And the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu himself will [ultimately] reincarnate into the body of *Moshiach*. (*Drushei Olam HaTohu*, *Drush Aitz HaDa'at* 11).

A part of Kayin's soul went to the Egyptian who was killed by Moshe Rabbeinu. This rectified it and caused it to go to Yitro, who converted that very day. Besides Yitro, Kayin's soul also reincarnated into Korach, who later rebelled against Moshe Rabbeinu (*Bamidbar* 15:1).

Terach, Avraham's father, reincarnated into and was rectified through the afflictions of Iyov. (Rabbi Winston, Reincarnation clarified, pp.15,16).

### **Why should one learn about *gilgulim*?**

**Rabbi Pinchas Winston**, the translator of *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, explained: The most important point in life is personal *tikun*, or rectification. There is really nothing else that matters, and this will become crystal clear to every one of us on our final day of judgment.

Too many people are unaware of this. They simply live from day to day, without any clear purpose or understanding of what the opportunity of life actually is. Consequently, people are born and later die, having accomplished very little in terms of personal rectification. Many do not even think in such terms and avoid situations which are spiritually challenging, thinking that nothing has been lost. This is tragically incorrect. (Rabbi Winston, Fundamentals of Reincarnation – 213, 214)

Being aware of the principles of *gilgulim* (reincarnation) will help us to live more meaningful lives, and to achieve personal rectification. In addition, they put the events of history, past and present, personal and national, into perspective, allowing people to learn from past mistakes and to be better prepared for the future. It also helps us to better appreciate other people, and how they act.

King David, however, points out an essential prerequisite for the topic of *gilgulim* — “*Sod Hashem lirei'av* — The secrets of G-d [are] to those who fear Him.” While learning secular subjects requires only accessing information and trying to comprehend its meaning, to know the “secrets of G-d,” which are the basis of the topic of *gilgulim*, one must also have fear of G-d. (Rabbi Winston, Introduction to *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*).

The **Pele Yo'etz (Gilgul)** wrote: *Emunat hagilgul* (belief in reincarnation) will awaken a person who wants to pay attention to *yirat Hashem* (fear of G-d) and to [have] *yirat ha'onesh* (fear of consequences).

We need to be concerned that perhaps in the previous *gilgul* there was much impurity and wrongdoing, and we will need to fix what was corrupted. We should, therefore, do a lot of *mitzvot*, *ma'asim tovim* (good deeds), and actions to atone for this.

And particularly in these generations, in which the *Mekubalim* have revealed to us that most people are from previous *gilgulim*, it is only a tiny number that are brand-new souls that are coming to this world for the very first time. For this reason, it is fitting for us to humble our hearts since we are so lacking, and we don't know what we really are, and what we are coming to repair, as it was previously, in the time of the Arizal.

When we look into the *Sifrei HaMekubalim* (books of *Kabalah*), which speak about the matters of *gilgulim*, with discerning eyes and hearts that understand, we will declare — “*Mah rabu ma'asecha Hashem* — How great are Your works, Hashem!” How wondrous is Your love towards us, where You have arranged that no one should ever be pushed away.

**Rabbi David Zauderer** explains: The concept of reincarnation is the key to understanding many of the events that happen in our lives, and many of the people with whom we cross paths during our soul's journey here on earth. [Of course,] if we knew exactly the things which we had done in a previous incarnation, then we would better understand the things that are happening to us in this life.

While we are not privy to the knowledge of what we went through in previous lives, to know [specifically] what it is that we need to rectify this time around, just the knowledge that our soul was here before, albeit in a different body — and that we came back to this world to fix something, is an important piece of information that can have a great impact on what we do during our time here on earth. ([http://www.torchweb.org/torah\\_detail.php?id=249](http://www.torchweb.org/torah_detail.php?id=249), **Parshas Ki Tisa (Parah) 5773 Come Again? Reincarnation in Judaism**).

**The Ramban discussed this in *Sha'ar HaGemul* (# 81, 83, 84, 85, 124, 125):**

Although there are principles [in terms of how Hashem runs the world] which we can understand ...there are still *tzadikim gemurim* (completely righteous people) who [seem to be] afflicted not according to these principles, and there are *resha'im gemurim* (completely evil people) who [seem to be] sitting in peace and quiet in the world... How is it possible that Hashem would allow this?

There is no real answer to this matter in terms of the understanding of people, but only according to Hashem... The matter is hidden, and can be understood only by Hashem Himself. Even so,

and with all that is hidden with this issue, there is still the secret that was passed down to the men of Torah and the *Kabalah*. It is hinted at in the words of our Rabbis and included in the *Sod Halbur* (concept of *gilgul*) which the Sages passed down to their students who were worthy.

One may ask — “Since aspects of justice are hidden and [therefore] we [ultimately] need to believe that G-d is the true Judge Who only does justice, why do we need to bother, and why should we learn the various explanations and secrets that were hinted at? Why can't we simply rely entirely on the final conclusion [that some aspects of *yissurim* will always be beyond our understanding] and that G-d will never deviate or ignore any aspect of the judgment?”

This is the claim of fools who despise wisdom. We benefit enormously from this learning which gives us wisdom and an understanding of G-d and His ways. And whether we end up gaining clarity or find that it is hidden from us, this will help our *emunah* (belief) and *bitachon* (trust) in G-d much more than those who never even tried. We will come to appreciate the hidden aspects of the judgment and recognize that they are all correct and just.

This attempt to know and understand the truth and justice of G-d's judgments as best we can, will settle our mind, and is the obligation of everyone who wants to serve G-d with love and fear... And certainly with the secret factor [of *gilgul neshamot*] no questions will remain, and there will be no doubts at all. And if one wants to place his complete understanding on this [secret of *gilgul*], he can, since this approach is sufficient for [appreciating] how the creation operates.

Rabbi Winston points out that the actual text of *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* is not that long, relatively speaking. The Hebrew version of *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* is less than 200 pages. It's somewhat straightforward approach to a not-so-straightforward topic can be very deceiving. Perhaps this is why the Arizal refers to the various sections of *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* as *hakdamot* (introductions), and not chapters. Apparently, whatever he wrote there is only a small introduction to a much longer discussion. (Rabbi Winston — *Fundamentals of Reincarnation*, pp. 213– 214; Introduction to *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*).

### Is *gilgul* an accepted Torah concept?

The **Gaon HaMaharahlbach**, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, wrote that there were two groups in his time (1483–1545) when it came to the topic of *gilgulim*. The philosophers, whose belief was based on their intellect alone, had a difficulty with accepting the concept of *gilgulim*.

But there was a second very large group [of scholars] that did believe in *gilgulim*. They all wrote that this was true and addressed the classical question of *tzadik v'ra lo* (the appearance of the righteous that suffer). He wrote that we must follow this latter group with no objections or doubts at all. (*Mishnat HaGilgulim*, Rav Boaz Shalom, pg. 32).

While there are many hints to *gilgulim*, there is nothing explicit in the Torah, *Talmud*, *Medrash*, or early *Ma'amrei Chazal* (writings of our Sages of blessed memory).

Two verses in *Kohelet* strongly hint at *gilgulim*: “*Dor holeich v'dor ba* — A generation goes and a generation **comes** (i.e., in *gilgulim*)” (1:4), and “*Mah sh'haya hu sh'yiheyeh, u'mah she'na'asah hu sh'yei'aseh* — What was is what **will be**, and what happened is what **will happen**” (i.e., through *gilgulim*)” (1:9).

There are, however, a number of **Medrashim** in the *Sefer HaBahir*, attributed to the first-century sage, Rebbe Nechunya ben HaKaneh, which speak about *gilgulim* explicitly. (*Bahir* 122, 155, 184, 185, and 195).

Reincarnation is cited by many of the most **authoritative classical biblical commentators**, including the **Ramban** (*Bereshit* 38:8, *Iyov* 33:30), **Ohr HaChayim** (*Bereshit* 1:26), **Recanti** (*Bereshit* 34:1), **Rabbeinu Bachya** (*Bereshit* 4:25, *Bereshit* Chap. 38, *Devarim* 33:6), and the **Malbim** (*Rut* 3:4, 4:15), as well as the **Maharsha** (*Niddah* 30b), the **Baal Shem Tov**, the **Vilna Gaon**, (*Sefer Yonah*, and many other places), the **Ohr Somayach** (*Hilchot Teshuva* 5), the **Chafetz Chaim** (*Mishnah Berurah* 23:5, *Sha'ar HaTzion* 622:6), and the **Steipler Gaon** (*Chayei Olam*). (Rabbi Yaakov Astor, *Soul Searching*, Targum Press).

**Rav Yaakov Emden**, in his commentary on the *siddur* (prayer book), addressed the question of how we can say the sections of the *viduy* on Yom Kippur where we are certain we didn't violate those particular *aveirot* (transgressions). One of the answers he gives is: "*al derech sod* (in terms of the secret), our *kavana* (intention) is also to include our previous *gilgulim*."

Reincarnation is, of course, mentioned in numerous places throughout the classical texts of Jewish mysticism, particularly the **Zohar** (1:131a, 186b, 2:94a, 97a, 2:99b, 100a, 105b, 106a, 3:88b, 215a, 216a; *Tikunei Zohar* 6 (22b, 23b), 21 (56a), 26 (72a), 31 (76b), 32 (76b), 40 (81a), 69 (100b, 103a, 111a, 114b, 115a, 116b), 70 (124b, 126a, 133a, 134a, 137b, 138b); *Zohar Chadash* 33c, 59a–c, 107a; *Ruth* 89a) (Rabbi Yaakov Astor, *Soul Searching*).

The **Chayei Adam** speaks about *gilgulim* within his exhortation to be very careful to avoid *sheim Shamayim l'vatalah* (taking G-d's Name in vain) (*Chelek Aleph, Klal Hei, S'eif Aleph*), and also within his explanations of the *viduy* of Yom Kippur. (*Hilchot Shabbat u'Moadim, Klal Kuf Mem Gimmel*).

The **Chafetz Chaim** speaks about *gilgulim* in the **Mishnah Berurah** (23:5) when discussing the *issur* (prohibition) of *lo'eg l'rash* (mocking the dead) — A man should tuck his *tzitzit* in so they won't be visible when walking within four *amos* of a *kever* (grave) — "even with the *kever* of a *katan* (young child) because of *lo'eg l'rash* (mocking the dead), perhaps this is the soul of an adult."

Even many of the great minds of the Western world acknowledged and/or espoused some form of belief in reincarnation — Plato, Pythagorus, Voltaire ("After all, it is no more surprising to be born twice than it is to be born once"), Benjamin Franklin, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Mark Twain. (Reincarnation & Jewish Tradition, aish.com, Rabbi Yaakov Astor).

**On the other side of this debate, there were some early authorities who held that *gilgul* was not an accepted Torah concept.**

**Rav Sa'adia Gaon** (10th century) rejected the concept of *gilgulim*. He had received no tradition to support it, and was not convinced by the arguments for it — "I have found some people called Jews who believe in *gilgul*... They think that Reuven's spirit could enter Shimon, and then Levi, and then Yehudah. Some, or perhaps most of them, believe that a human soul may enter an animal, or the spirit of an animal could enter a human. There is much foolishness and confusion with this." (*Emunot v'Deyot* 6:8).

**Rav Chasdai Crescas** (14th century) and **Rav Yosef Albo** (15th century) both also argued against reincarnation. (*Or Hashem* 4:7; *Sefer Ha'Ikarim* 4:29) (What's the Jewish View on Reincarnation and Past Views? Rabbi Gil Student, December 21, 2016).

The **Rashash** wrote a short, six word, comment suggesting that a *Gemara* in **Baba Metziah** (107a) was a **slight** contradiction to those who believe in *gilgul*: "*M'kan stirah k'tzat l'ba'alei de'ah hagilgul* — From here there is a **slight contradiction** to the believers in *gilgul*." (*HaGa'hot v'Chidushei HaRaShash*).

**Rav Moshe Shternbuch** wrote that many scholars strongly disagreed with him, and held that we should not argue on the secret of *gilgul*, since it was accepted from the Arizal, the Gra, and all those who studied the *Kabalah*. (*Ta'am v'Da'at, Ki Tavo, Amud Kuf Pei Aleph*).

**Rav Chaim Kanievsky** even suggested that this particular comment may not actually have been written by the Rashash. (*Derech Sicha, Ki Tavo, Amud Taf Reish Vav*).

### ***Gilgul Is a Tremendous Chessed***

*Gilgul* gives us the chance to fix all that was either damaged or not completed in our previous existence or existences. And whatever we were able to rectify beforehand is protected from being damaged again. Very appropriately, the *gematria* of *gilgul*, which is 72, is the same as for *cheded*. (*Megillat Amukot, Parshat Pinchas, Drush Hei*).

**This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat* Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun**