



Despite **opinions** endorsing reincarnation (gilgul)  
**God** told Adam he will return to dust. (Gen. 3:19)  
**A Rabbi vs. God: you choose.**

**Also of interest:** those creations that go through a metamorphosis  
 still die with no return. How much more so will man remain dead  
 who doesn't possess any metamorphic design.

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# JewishTimes

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 of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume VIII, No. 29...July 10, 2009

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## Letters

# Reincarnation:

A Fact Arrived at through Rational Study?  
 Or Simply a Cherished Belief?

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## Weekly Parsha

# Pinchas

RABBI BERNIE FOX

## Hashem's Covenant of Peace with Pinchas

Therefore say that I give to him my covenant of peace. (BeMidbar 25:12)

The closing passages of Parshat Balak provide an introduction to our

(continued on next page)



(Pinchas cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

## JewishTimes

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parasha. Women from the nations of Moav and Midyan enter the camp of Bnai Yisrael. These women seduce some of the men of Bnai Yisrael. The heathen women use these illicit relationships to lead their partners into idolatrous practices. Discipline and sexual restraint begin to break down. Ultimately, Zimri – a leader of Shevet Shimon – publicly enters into a romantic liaison with a woman from Midyan. The woman, Kazbi, is a princess of Midyan. Hashem strikes Bnai Yisrael with a plague. Pinchas, the son of Elazar and grandson of Aharon, takes action. He executes Zimri and Kazbi. In response to Pinchas' zealotry, Hashem ends the plague.

Hashem acknowledges Pinchas' righteous zealotry and responds with two rewards. First, Pinchas receives from Hashem a covenant of peace. Second, he becomes a kohen. Pinchas had not been a Kohen until this point. Rashi explains that originally this status was bestowed upon Aharon and his children. The subsequent children of these individuals would also become kohanim. Pinchas was born to Elazar prior to the creation of the institution of priesthood. Therefore, although he was a grandchild of Aharon, he was not among the original kohanim. Hashem now extended the status of Kohen to Pinchas.[1]

What was this "covenant of peace"? Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers the simplest explanation. He explains that Pinchas placed himself in danger. He executed a leader of Shevet Shimon. Zimri's friends and followers would seek retribution. Hashem promised Pinchas that he would live in peace. Zimri's comrades would not succeed in disturbing Pinchas' life.[2]

Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel offers an alternative interpretation of this "covenant of peace". He explains that Hashem promised to transform Pinchas into an angel. As an angel, he will be the harbinger of the Messiah. This interpretation presents two problems. First, the passage does not seem to offer any support for, or allusion to, this interpretation. The pasuk merely states that Hashem is entering into a covenant of peace with Pinchas. It makes no reference to Pinchas' transformation or his role in announcing the Messianic Era! Second, Hashem's rewards are not arbitrary. They correspond to our actions. How does Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel's interpretation of the reward correspond with Pinchas' actions?

In order to answer these questions, we must reevaluate the events described above. The behaviors and experiences of Bnai Yisrael at the end of Parshat Balak mirror, or presage, the phenomenon of the Jewish people's exile. In exile, we have been faced with two great threats: persecution and assimilation. These two threats are related. However, this relationship has sometimes been misunderstood. It is sometimes assumed that assimilation prevents persecution. This theory maintains that persecution is directed against outsiders. The most effective method for avoiding persecution is assimilation into the host society. Jewish history seems to invalidate this theory. The Jewish people have not succeeded in stemming persecution through melting into its surroundings. In fact, attempts at assimilation have often been greeted with increased persecution.

The events at the end of Parshat Balak suggest an alternative relationship between assimilation and persecution. In this incident, Bnai Yisrael began to assimilate. The people joined in liaisons with the women of Moav and Midyan. They adopted their heathen practices. This behavior evoked Hashem's retribution. The nation was struck with a plague. Assimilation led to punishment. This suggests an alternative relationship between assimilation and persecution. If the events in our parasha are a model then persecution is a punishment or Hashem's response to our attempts to assimilate.

Now let us consider Pinchas' response. Pinchas recognized that the plague was a consequence of the nation's iniquity. He realized that the plague could only be arrested through a return to Torah. He acted energetically and zealously. He demanded that the nation change direction and return to Hashem. Pinchas saved Bnai Yisrael. He also provided future generations with a model for responding to national tragedy. We must return to Torah. This is the only way to avoid persecution. This is the only means of survival in exile.

Based on this analysis, we can understand the relationship between Pinchas' reward and his behavior. He demonstrated the appropriate response to the national tragedy. He demonstrated the proper response to the experience of exile. He provided us guidance in how we should deal with the sorrows of our banishment. Therefore, it is fitting that he should announce the end of exile and the advent of the Messianic Era.

(continued on next page)



This interpretation of our passage is not inconsistent with the plain meaning of the words. Pinchas ended the plague. He restored peace between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael.[3] Exile is banishment by Hashem. It is a disruption of the peace between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael. The Messianic Era represents the restoration of this peace. Pinchas is promised a covenant of peace. He will proclaim advent of the Messianic Era and the reestablishment of perfect peace between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael.

Nonetheless, this is a homiletic interpretation of the passage. The simple explanation is that Hashem promised Pinchas a life of peace. Why was this blessing, above all others, awarded to Pinchas? To answer this question we must first consider the human personality.

Some people are passive, and for this reason, they seek to avoid conflicts. They find it difficult to stand up for their beliefs and confront others. They will always attempt to avoid situations or challenges that involve disharmony and strife. For such individuals, peace is not a blessing. Peace allows the person to neglect confronting his passivity. For him, unavoidable conflict would be a blessing, forcing this person to deal with conflict and stand up for beliefs and values.

The righteous person realizes that conflict is not desirable. However, sometimes it is unavoidable. The tzadik knows that important values and convictions must be defended regardless of the disharmony that may result. Despite the unpleasantness of the resultant strife, the tzadik is willing to stand up for his beliefs. Because the tzadik is not dominated by passivity and avoidance, but instead is willing and able to endure conflict, peace is a blessing. This individual can enjoy the benefits of peace without harm to his personality. Pinchas demonstrated that he could confront and vigorously oppose evil. He was willing to risk his life for his values. Pinchas had the resolve and strength of conviction of the tzadik. For Pinchas, peace was a true blessing.

### The Role of the Kohen Gadol and the Urim VeTumim

*And before Aharon the Kohen he should stand. And he should ask him for the decision of the Urim, before Hashem. By his word they should go forth and come, he and all Bnai Yisrael with him and all the congregation. (BeMidbar 27:21)*

Hashem tells Moshe that he will not lead the

nation into the Land of Israel. Moshe asks Hashem to appoint a fitting leader to direct Bnai Yisrael in the conquest. Hashem commands Moshe to appoint Yehoshua. He tells Moshe that Yehoshua will not lead alone. He will be guided by Elazar the Kohen Gadol. Yehoshua will seek Hashem's guidance through the Kohen Gadol. He will place questions before Hashem through the Urim VeTumim, worn by Elazar.

These Urim VeTumim were the stones upon the Choshen – the breastplate – of the Kohen Gadol. Elazar would face the Aron – the Holy Ark. Yehoshua would stand behind Elazar and ask his question. Elazar would receive the spirit of prophecy. He would look upon the Choshen. He would find the response to Yehoshua's question expressed through the letters engraved upon the stones of the Choshen.[4]

What type of question would Yehoshua ask through the Urim VeTumim? Rashi explains that a decision to go to war required this consultation.[5] Gershonides explains that this was Yehoshua's practice; before initiating any military campaign, he would consult Elazar and the Urim VeTumim.[6]

Don Isaac Abravanel raises a question. Yehoshua was himself a prophet. We find that Hashem, on numerous occasions, addressed Yehoshua directly. Why would Yehoshua require the prophetic guidance of the Kohen Gadol? Abravanel concludes that Yehoshua was not required to consult the Urim VeTumim. According to Abravanel, what is the meaning of our pasuk? The leader has the authority to consult the Urim VeTumim. Other leaders and kings of Bnai Yisrael sought Hashem's guidance through this means. However, Yehoshua was not required to resort to this medium.[7]

The position of Abravanel now is understood. However, the opinion of Gershonides remains a mystery! Yehoshua was a prophet! Why was he required to consult the Urim VeTumim?

In order to resolve this issue we need to consider the basic relationship between the leader and the Kohen Gadol. Rashi's comments will be helpful. As our pasuk explains, the Kohen Gadol was given a role in the decision to engage in war. Rashi explains that this role was created in response to a request of Moshe. Moshe was told by Hashem that he would not lead Bnai Yisrael into the Land of Israel. Moshe hoped that his role as leader would be transmitted to one of his children. Hashem chose Yehoshua to be the next leader. However, a leadership role was created

for Moshe's family. This is the authority given to Elazar, Moshe's nephew. Through the Kohen Gadol, Moshe's family would remain represented in the leadership of Bnai Yisrael.[8]

Gershonides maintains that Hashem qualified and limited the authority of the leader or king. Yehoshua did not have complete authority. He was required to consult the Kohen Gadol before entering battle. Yehoshua was a prophet. Yet, according to Gershonides, he was required to consult Elazar. This was because he was commanded to share authority with the Kohen Gadol.

Abravanel understands the relationship differently. The authority of the leader was not qualified or shared.

Other leaders would not be prophets. They would turn to the advisor appointed by Hashem. They would seek the guidance of the Urim VeTumim worn by the Kohen Gadol.

*And one male goat for a sin-offering to Hashem, in addition to the regular Olah offering, shall be made with its libation. (BeMidbar 28:15)*

Parshat Pinchas outlines the special offerings brought on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, the festivals and holidays. On all of these occasions, special Olah sacrifices are brought in addition to the daily offering. With the exception of Shabbat, a sin-offering is also brought on each of these occasions. The Olah sacrifice is referred to as an offering to Hashem. However, the sin offering is generally not described as an offering to Hashem. Maimonides suggests a simple explanation for this distinction. He explains that the Olah sacrifice is completely consumed on the altar. Therefore, it is appropriate to describe the sacrifice as being entirely for Hashem. In contrast, a portion of the sin-offering is burned on the altar and a portion is eaten by the kohanim – the priests. Because the priests participate in the consumption of the sin-offering it is not appropriate to refer to this sacrifice as being entirely for Hashem.[9]

Our passage represents the single exception to the pattern described above. The sin-offering for Rosh Chodesh – the observance of the new month – is referred to as a sin-offering to Hashem. The commentaries are concerned with the obvious question: Why is this sin-offering alone referred to as a sin-offering to Hashem?

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(Pinchas cont. from previous page)

## Weekly Parsha

Rashi provides an enigmatic response. He explains that we are commanded to bring atonement for Hashem. This offering atones for Hashem's decision to decrease the size of the moon.[10] Rashi's comments can be better understood in the context of his comments in Sefer Beresheit. In his commentary in Sefer Beresheit, Rashi is bothered by a problem in the Torah's account of creation. Initially, the Torah describes the sun and the moon as the great luminaries. But later – in the same passage – the Torah describes the sun as the great luminary and the moon as the small luminary.[11] In other words, the passage first equates the sun and the moon but then, it refers to the sun as a major luminary and the moon as minor! Rashi explains that, originally, the sun and the moon were identical in size or illumination. But the moon complained to Hashem that it is not appropriate for two kings to share the same crown. In other words, it is not appropriate for the sun and moon to be “equal” luminaries. Hashem responded by diminishing the moon.[12] This is the context of Rashi's comments in our parasha. Hashem diminished the size of the moon. The sin-offering of Rosh Chodesh is atonement for Hashem. He asks that we bring atonement for His diminishment of the moon.

Rashi's comments are actually derived from a discussion in the Talmud. But Rashi's explanation seems to present more problems than it solves. The conversation between Hashem and the moon seems intended to communicate an allegorical message. Yet, the message of the allegory is not obvious. Second, regardless of the interpretation of the allegory, the Talmud and Rashi seem to be attributing sin to Hashem. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the concept of human beings atoning for Hashem!

Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chajes offers an interesting explanation for this material. The following is a summary of his main points. Rav Chajes begins by drawing from comments of Maimonides. Maimonides observes the Kaporet, the ark covering, incorporates two Keruvim (cherubs). According to Maimonides, these Keruvim symbolize Hashem's angels. These Keruvim are incorporated into the Kaporet to communicate that prophecy is received by human beings through the agency of Hashem's angels. The Torah – contained in the Ark – was received through prophecy. Therefore, acceptance of the existence on prophecy is essential to acknowledgement of the authenticity of the Torah as revelation from Hashem. Why are two Keruvim incorporated into the Kaporet and not a single Keruv (cherub)? Maimonides explains that if

only a single Keruv were used, the observer might mistakenly assume that it is intended to represent the image of Hashem. In order to assure that the Keruvim are not wrongly interpreted to represent the one G-d, a set of two Keruvim are incorporated into the Kaporet.[13]

Rav Chajes observes that throughout ancient history various idolatrous sects mistakenly worshipped the sun as G-d and the moon as His chief minister. Each month these sects celebrated the renewal of the moon. To some extent, this error was enabled by the very design of the universe. The sun is the largest luminary in the heavens and the moon the second largest. In other words, Hashem's “diminishing” of the moon contributed to the error of the idolaters. The sin-offering of Rosh Chodesh is not atonement for Hashem in a literal sense. Rashi's comment that the Rosh Chodesh sin-offering atones for Hashem's diminishment of the moon alludes to the idea that Hashem's own design of the universe led to the error of the sun and moon worshipers.

Rav Chajes further notes that we also celebrate the renewal of the moon with the offering of sacrifices. These offering include the sin-offering for Hashem. The insertion of the word “for” communicates the message that although we – Bnai Yisrael – celebrate the renewal of the moon, we are not misled by the magnificence of the sun and the lesser magnitude of the moon. We recognize that the relative sizes of the sun and moon does not indicate that the sun is G-d and the moon His minister. Instead, both are creations of Hashem. He created the sun—in its magnificence—and the lesser moon. We are not offering our sacrifices to the sun or its ministering moon. Our sacrifices are offered to Hashem. For this reason the Torah specifically states that the Rosh Chodesh sin-offering is for Hashem. [14]

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno offers an alternative explanation of the Sages' allegory. His comments are based on three principles. The first principle is one of his major theses. According to Sforno, the sin of the

meraglim, the spies, and the refusal of Bnai Yisrael to follow Moshe into the Land of Israel changed the course of our history. If we had entered the Land of Israel without delay, the Messianic Era would have begun immediately. The Bait HaMikdash would have been built immediately and never destroyed. Bnai Yisrael would have been permanently established in the Land of Israel and we would never have experienced suffering and exile. However, the refusal to enter the Land changed this design. The Bait HaMikdash was built, but was destroyed and we were exiled from the Land of Israel. We await the Messiah, the complete redemption of Bnai Yisrael, the rebuilding of the Bait HaMikdash, and the ingathering of all exiles.[15]

Second, Sforno explains that Bnai Yisrael is similar to the moon. The moon does not generate its own light. Instead, it only reflects the light of the sun. Like the moon, Bnai Yisrael cannot directly control its own destiny. The successes of our people are always a result of the providence of Hashem. He is our sun — or the source of our light. Without the benefit of His providence, we live in darkness. We are exposed to and experience constant tragedy. Of course, we can influence our fate. When we serve Hashem, we are rewarded with His providence. When we are not faithful to Hashem and to His Torah, we are

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deprived of the benefit of His providence and suffer tragedy and persecution.

Finally, it is important for us to recognize that when we are deprived of Hashem's providence and we suffer banishment and persecution, our experiences represent more than a personal tragedy. Our tragedy is also a desecration of Hashem. The nations of the world are provoked to contend that our destitution and suffering discredit our claims of Hashem's omnipotence and our special relationship with Him. They ask how an omnipotent Creator can allow His people to be persecuted and oppressed.

Sforno combines these three principles in order to explain the comments of the Sages. Like the moon, our light – our success – is a reflection of Hashem's providence. We refused to follow Moshe into the Land of Israel. As a result of this sin, we altered the course of our history and created the potential for the exile and oppression of Bnai Yisrael. When we are unfaithful to the Torah and persecuted and oppressed, we discredit Hashem. Our persecution discredits our claims of Hashem's omnipotence and our special relationship with him. We can only restore the glory of Hashem through the repentance and atonement that will lead to our redemption and complete

restoration.

The sin-offering of Rosh Chodesh is recognition of our responsibility to restore the honor of Hashem through our repentance and atonement. Because of our sins Hashem has deprived us of His light. We are the moon whose reflected light has been diminished by Hashem. We are responsible for restoring the light to the moon and for bringing about the redemption which will return our light to its full intensity.

The Rosh Chodesh sin-offering is referred to as a sin-offering to Hashem in order to communicate this message. The moon represents Bnai Yisrael. We bring a sin-offering to atone for our sins. But, we must recognize that this atonement is not only essential for our own well being; our atonement and subsequent redemption restores Hashem's glory. We make the sin-offering in recognition of our duty to correct the desecration of Hashem that our sins and punishment have engendered.[16] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:12.

[3] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), p. 141.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Klai HaMikdash 10:11.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 27:21.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shoftim 1:1.

[7] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer Shoftim 1:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 27:21.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, Volume 3, Chapter 46.

[10] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 28:15.

[11] Sefer Beresheit 1:16.

[12] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 1:16.

[13] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, Volume 3, Chapter 45.

[14] Rav Tzvi Hirsch Chajes, Darchei Moshe, Volume 1. (Collected Writings, pp. 445-446).

[15] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 14:28.

[16] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 28:11.

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## Letters



# Letters

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### Reincarnation

**Alberto:** Shalom. In the past, we talked about conversion, and the Brazilian Noahide communities, as I got your positive answer to be a Rabbinic reference to us in that time. I'm still checking your web site and learning from it, and also sharing those precious instructions with Noahides and Jews around me.

But I'm still having trouble in understanding your position against Reincarnation. I think it is because my understanding of it is not just from Jewish sources (if I may say so) but from others as well. By this, your criticism does not seem to affect reincarnation itself. To solve this trouble I'm reading a lot about it, as I read your assertions about it.

I know that Maimonides instructed that man should not believe in things unless they are proved logically, apprehended by the senses and received from prophets and sages. I agree with that.

But I noticed that when you mention reincarnation, you mention as metempsychosis, since this is the doctrine attacked by the Vilna Gaon. It seems that for you, reincarnation and metempsychosis is the same thing. But as I understand the thing, Reincarnation is not exactly the same thing as metempsychosis. In fact they oppose each other.

My point is that Reincarnation could be proved via logic. As a spiritualist doctrine, Reincarnation is demonstrated by logic alone, as God Himself, can't be proven "physically", but only by way of understanding or logic. I mean, all spiritualist doctrines cannot be proven, unless by logic, since we have not means to "show" the spiritual world or dimension while we are in this world.

Let me present the answer I received from Rabbi XXXX about it: He says as follows:

"The Torah was given to Moses, by God, accompanied by an oral counterpart. The Oral Torah is just as much God's word as the Written Torah. As the years passed, the sages

became concerned that the Oral Torah would be forgotten or garbled if it would not be recorded. Rabbi Judah the Prince and subsequent rabbis committed much of the Oral Law to writing. The oral traditions, combined with the rabbinical enactments, form the Talmud and much of the rest of Jewish literature.

There are many concepts which are alluded to in the Written Law but were only recorded fully in subsequent writings. This does not mean that they are any less God's word. God, in his unfathomable wisdom, decided that they be recorded that way. Reincarnation is one such concept. Allow me to share just a few places where reincarnation is alluded to in the Written Torah. These are not places which shout "reincarnation" in bold letters but they do form part of a greater picture.

Ecclesiastics 1:4: "A generation departs and a generation comes." If this would refer to the normal flow of generations, a generation cannot come after the previous generation has gone. Rather this refers to the same soul(s) returning in consecutive lives.

Job 1:21: "Naked I left my mother's womb and naked I shall return there." Who comes back to their mom's womb? Enter reincarnation.

These are just a few samples. There are a number of such places scattered throughout the Torah. The bulk of what we know about reincarnation is from the Oral Torah and these are just a few places where this dynamic is evident in an almost offhand manner in the written part.

The question remains though: Reincarnation is a major theological issue. Why such a major issue is not explicitly discussed in the Written Torah? Allow me to point out, however, that neither does the Written Torah include any information about what happens to the soul after death, heaven and hell, the nature of the soul—or even much about God for that matter. The Five Books of Moses simply cannot be seen as a theological work. It is principally a practical guide, couched in story form. As for the rest of the Scriptures, even Proverbs and the Book of Job read as commentary on tacitly assumed knowledge.

It is quite apparent from reading these texts that Jewish Theology (which is all that the Kabbalah is), was meant to be transmitted orally, not in writing.

True, many of the ancient cultures transmitted their theology and mystical teachings in writing, including the ancient Egyptians and Hindus. But the difference is quite simple: Ancient Egypt, India and the like were

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## Letters

illiterate societies, save for a small number of priestly elite. When that elite wished to transmit secrets for the initiated, they committed it to writing--and such forms of writing that could only be deciphered by the initiated.

The Jews, on the other hand were uniquely a literate society. To read Hebrew, you only needed to master 22 letters--as opposed to the hundreds or even thousands of glyphs used in several ancient scripts. The common Jewish child in the ancient world was expected to be literate. Therefore, those matters that could easily be misunderstood, distorted and misused had to be transmitted orally.

This is especially true of reincarnation. As Rabbi Moshe Cordovero asserted, "Those who know do not tell and those who tell do not know." In other words, the secrets of reincarnation are meant to be held only by those who can be trusted not to spill the beans.

I hope that I've been helpful today.

Yours truly, Rabbi XXXX"

**Mesora:** Alberto, the Rabbi you quote says, "There are many concepts which are alluded to in the Written Law but were only recorded fully in subsequent writings. This does not mean that they are any less God's word. God, in his unfathomable wisdom, decided that they be recorded that way."

To suggest "God, in his unfathomable wisdom, decided that they be recorded that way" is baseless and arrogant. The only works that lay claim to a God-given status are the Five Books of Moses, Prophets, Writings and the Oral Law -- the Mishna. But subsequent to Sinai's Written and Oral Laws...and to the writings of the Prophets, if any human writes his thoughts on these works, such writings in no way obtain a divine character, as this Rabbi wrongly suggests. For if we follow this Rabbi's view, Jesus' writings could lay claim to Divine origin. This point is vital to the continuation of Judaism. This Rabbi abandons the teachings and traditions of our great Rabbis and Prophets.

The Rabbi also accuses other cultures of illiteracy, when in fact, it is he who is illiterate, as I shall now show you.

The Rabbi quotes Ecclesiasties 1:4: **"A generation departs and a generation comes, but the world stands forever."**

This means what it says: generations come and go. People are born, they die, and new generations arise...NEW generations of NEW people. We have never witnesses a person or generation dying and then finding those who expired once again

roaming the Earth. To suggest this denies reality. An intelligent and plain meaning -- also supported by reality -- is that generations depart Earth...permanently. It does not say that expired generations return. Furthermore, the Rabbis teach that a Torah verse cannot be interpreted against its plain meaning. Suggesting this verse refers to reincarnation, violates the Rabbis' words. It is contrary to reason, to reality, and leads one on a path where imagination outweighs clear perception.

If this Rabbi were to grasp the context, he would realize that King Solomon is steering man away from following the immortality fantasy. In the previous verse (1:3), the king teaches that one should not seek out fantasy in his labors..."What more is there to man in all his labors that he toils under the sun?" "Under the sun" refers to man's search for a happiness that is earthbound. Man seeks earthbound happiness as he truly denies his mortality. Therefore, the king -- in an attempt to direct man away from the immortality fallacy and towards true happiness -- warns man against seeking out earthbound happiness by saying "What benefit is there?" King Solomon experimented with all pleasures, luxuries, and pursuits. He did so in order to set an example for all mankind by sharing his firsthand experiences. Having arrived at the conclusion that earthbound pleasures are fleeting and unsatisfying as an end, he warns man against following his fantasies and the foolish masses. He tells man "generation comes and go", meaning, "you too do not remain long on Earth...do not seek to render this temporal stay, into a timeless destination. Generations come and go."

In fact, this verse teaches the exact opposite of what the Rabbi wished this verse to mean. It teaches that man's Earthly stay is temporal, and occurs but once.

Job 1:21: **"Naked I left my mother's womb and naked I shall return there."**

Metsudas Dovid says with these words, Job admits he will die in the same, poor (naked) state being stripped of all possessions...just as he was at birth. Metsudas Dovid says, as our ultimate destination of the grave is understood by all men, the last word of this verse "there" suffices to convey this point. One need not say he shall return to the "grave", but simply, I shall return "there". From Metsudas Dovid's final remarks, we learn a ridicule of any person who cannot grasp this obvious destination. But the Rabbi you cited feels this means he will return to the womb! Unbelievable. Why didn't this Rabbi read the Rishonim, our great Sages? Not one offers this opinion.

Declaring this verse teaches reincarnation, this Rabbi also opposes Rashi and Ibn Ezra. Rashi says Job's return to "there" means the dust of the

Earth. And Ibn Ezra teaches this means the grave. So what propelled this Rabbi to oppose some of the greatest minds? Certainly, he has not compiled deep and voluminous works like those composed by Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Metsudas Dovid. Of course, these giants hold no monopoly on God's wisdom. Yet, when someone suggests an idea that's not only different, but the exact opposite of the Rishonim's collective view, we are startled. This is compounded by Rashi's statement that "I shall return there doesn't refer to the womb". Rashi wished to make it quite clear that man does not return to the womb as this Rabbi suggested. So this point is if gravity, and not innocuous.

When any person possesses an emotional wish, he will distort even what is plainly simple, so as to maintain his cherished beliefs. But this is the exact opposite of what is required in true Torah study. Torah study requires the student to display complete humility, leaving all preconceived notions at the door and accept 1) what the words say, 2) what reason dictates and 3) what reality displays. This Rabbi ignored all three.

One must examine him or herself as to why one enjoys baseless beliefs. Perhaps here, reincarnation allows the person to live irresponsibly and without culpability, since he always has a "second chance". But as we said many times before, Moses (Deut. 30:15,19) offered the Jews a choice and pick life OR death. He did not say they could have both, i.e., earthbound life after death. God too in many cases says that "so and so slept with his fathers". And our great prophets are seen crying for their deceased fathers, embalming them, laying them to rest, mourning them...all knowing that their embalming, mourning and burial were justified. They are not coming back. This being so clearly stated in Torah, it is alarming that Rabbis -- those directing others -- ignore it.

This type of approach, where Rabbis and Jews parrot others, with no grounds for their positions; where they speak contrary to the Torah's very words...severely diseases Torah and Judaism. This path strays from God's words, and favors Rebbe's and the masses instead.

"If the Rebbe said it, it cannot be wrong", "If so many Jews do it, it cannot be wrong", etc. Jews today are so insecure, they cannot act independently, if it means others withdraw their approval. They cannot accept that a man, is a man. A Rabbi errs too. We must not deify man.

The Three Weeks just commenced, recalling the destruction of the original Ten Commandments. What will you do to reverse Torah's decay: will you too follow reputations and masses, or will you consult God's Torah before accepting and spreading ideas? ■

## Letters

# Refuting Reincarnation

**Boris G. Yuabov:** Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Thank you very much for very interesting discussions. I always felt very lonely in my belief that reincarnation is not supported by Tanach, Talmud, and Midrashim, as well as Gaonic tradition, Rashi and Rambam and others. Thank you for speaking out loud about it. I have noticed that you quote Rav Saadia primarily with extrapolation from Sforno on Sefer Devarim. I'd like to add many other sources that directly or indirectly refute reincarnation.

1. Reincarnation is not mentioned anywhere in Tanach, Talmud, or Midrashim where as numerous other ideas about afterlife are discussed. The only one who sees evidence of gilgul (reincarnation) in Tanach, Talmud, or Midrashim is strong BELIEVER of that idea. But that is similar to Christian philosopher who sees idea of trinity in pasuk Shema Yisrael. (Green glasses will easily make entire world green in observer's eyes). The only gilgul that is discussed in Talmud is gilgul shevua (when person makes additional swearing in bet din).

2. Statements by proponents of reincarnation that it was hidden and unknown subject are historically false. (Many nations had that belief for thousands of years and many authors - Greek and others - had written about it explicitly) yet Chazal never cared to mention it even once. Making old Platonic, Egyptian, Hindu, or Buddhist belief into Jewish belief is not called revelation of secrets, but philosophical plagiarism.

3. In the text of prayer, Chazal never state reincarnation as form of punishment. All mentions of gilgul in prayers are later additions by anonymous editors. For example compare text of Yom Kippur prayer in Mishna Torah, Old Taimani text, or text of Rav Amram Gaon with today's Sephardic text. Pay careful attention to "al chet shechatanu lefaneicha." It goes in alphabetical order, from alef to tav, and back. Each letter has one corresponding statement. Letter Gimel however, has two statements assigned to it, one of which is gilgul statement. Anyone can see that this is a later addition to the prayer. For why would original author break his own rule and assign two statements to letter Gimel, while shortchanging all other letters.

4. In sefer Hakuzari, the wise man openly states to the king that any descriptions about afterlife are not discussed by Chazal, but found in other religions, and are nothing but a human fantasy.

5. Chazal instructed us to say every morning "Elokai neshama shenatata bi tehora hi." That statement of Chazal excludes ideas of reincarnation, but openly speaks of resurrection. From that statement it becomes clear that a soul is created out of nothing (barata) for individual use, and not for multiple recycling.

6. Proponents of reincarnation feel that concept of gilgul is essential in understanding the idea "Tzadik ve ra lo" (evil that happens to the righteous) as well as suffering of innocent children. But Chazal tell us quite opposite that "Tzadik ve ra lo" implies that Tzadik has inner deficiency that needs to be addressed and that suffering in fact is not just form of punishment but an opportunity to reveal to him his own defects (see book of Job with commentaries, see also More Nevuchim and Taniya) and that children suffer for sins of their parents until age of 12-13. Once again there is no smell of reincarnation in words of Chazal. I am aware of the statement of Zohar about gilgul, but that in my opinion is yet another one of numerous, strong arguments that Zohar is of very controversial origin and unlikely to be work of Chazal.

7. Some suggest that statement "Pinchas hu Eliyahu" refers to idea of reincarnation. But that is at least naive. Chazal mention "Pinchas hu Eliyahu" from the possibility of Eliyahu being a cohen (see Gemara or Midrash were Rabbis ask Eliyahu "are not the master a Cohen" see Rashi there) I don't know of any proponent of gilgul that would suggest that kehuna can be transmitted by gilgul.

8. Rashi to sefer Bereshit 2:6 clearly states that animals are not subject to divine judgment, as suggested by proponents of reincarnation of a human soul into the animal.

9. Chazal openly rejected opinion of Tzedukim that Shore HaNiskal (the stoned bull) is a "punishment to the bull"; rather it is a punishment to the owner who will now lose his property. Proponents of reincarnation however, are clearly favoring opinion of Tzedukim.

10. Rambam, in his Eight Chapters, makes a clear and unequivocal statement that soul of the human being and soul of the animal are

totally different spiritual entities, by quality and quantity. He also warns against equating the human or animal soul in any way, stating that this led many to serious philosophical errors. How strange to the Jewish eye are the ancient Egyptian or Greek pictures of humanized animals or animalized humans. How strange to a Jewish mind are these ideas. (Review Bereshit with commentators to "Naase adam betzalmeinu kidmuteinu.")

11. Ramban mentions the possibility of gilgul in explanation to the book of Job. He explains the words of Elihu as referring to reincarnation that can happen only 2-3 times. Chazal however state openly that words of Elihu refer to gravely ill, but not a dead patient that recovers.

12. Sefer Hayekarim (Rabbi Yosef Albo) who was aware of the statements in the Zohar, nevertheless rejects the opinion of reincarnation by means of logical argument, and even points out to the thought that made some thinkers accept the idea of reincarnation.

13. Rav Poalim (Rabbi Itzhak ben Latif) page 9 sentence 21 states, "every soul that comes to the world is brand new and even if it's similar to another soul it's still different from it and idea of gilgul is already refuted."

14. Some feel that only reincarnation can truly explain mitzvah of yibum. However, this is so only if you believe in reincarnation. If you don't, this mitzvah makes perfect sense without idea of reincarnation (see Moreh Nevuchim regarding mitzvah of yibum).

15. See the opinion of recent authorities such as Hegyonei Uziel [HaRav Ben Zion Uziel] Vol. 1 pg. 371 and Rav Yosef Kapach (pirush on Emunot va deot)

These are only a few points out of many that prove that reincarnation is not from Chazal but a medieval novelty adapted either from Plato and Pythagoras (most likely together with many other "kabalistic" ideas) or from Hindu or Buddhist sources. The rise of Neo-Platonism in Western Europe of 13-15 century affected very deeply, not only the Jewish, but also the gentile world. And even though some Rabbis don't find it conflicting with the fundamentals of Judaism and they embrace it, there is no mitzvah or chiyuv to believe in it, because it's not from Chazal. Moreover one that rejects the belief in this idea is clearly in no violation of Torah; on the contrary, such a person can be called a strong follower of

(continued on next page)



(cont. from page 8)

## Letters

authentic tradition of Chazal with all honors that come with it.

My fellow Jews, brothers and sisters, Torah prohibits us to speak lashon hara even if it's true, even with the best intentions, even if it's a praise. The best and in my opinion only way to accomplish that is not to discuss a person, group of people or other particulars, but to discuss ideas. Ideas can and should be discussed, criticized, rejected, accepted, and scrutinized. This is what our Talmud is all about. This, at no point, is diminishing the person or group of people that expresses this idea. As an example, 99.9% of Halachic and philosophical opinions of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai are rejected by Talmud; however they constantly refer to him as one of the greatest Sages. We should never allow ourselves to mix discussions of ideas, with discussions of personalities. Naming authors of statements can help only on the level of belief and trust, but on the level of understanding, naming authors has absolutely no bearing. Having said that, I'd like to state that any names of the Rabbis and books mentioned above are there for quick reference of ideas and for indication that idea of gilgul is not universally accepted.

If anyone chooses to accept the concept of reincarnation because of its acceptance by many, relatively late Jewish scholars, he/she is on the level of trust and belief, and his/her arguments are useless on the level of understanding truth. At the same time, any logical statements are useless for pure believer. It's important to note that classical Judaism limits our beliefs to words of prophets and tradition of Chazal. All other ideas are not obligatory. Dear readers, if you can, count how many beliefs Torah prohibits, and how little it leaves for realm of belief. See how Torah encourages knowledge and understanding. This in fact is one of the key differences between Judaism and other religions. May God bless us with understanding to differentiate between truth and its opposite.

Thank you,

Boris G. Yuabov

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