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✧ GILGULIM: HOW TO FIGURE OUT YOUR TAFKID (PART 1) ✧



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JUDAISM DEFINITELY BELIEVES IN REINCARNATION

Tonight, we are going to begin a series on a subject that is very intriguing to most people, a subject that really has much more relevance than most people wish to acknowledge.¹ It's the subject called *gilgul neshamos*. In English, the word is reincarnation.

Throughout Jewish history, reincarnation has been a subject that has been discussed in the Jewish literature. What do we believe about it? In our generation, one of the great leaders who put this controversy to rest was the Steipler, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Kanievsky, who resided in Bnei Brak for the latter part of his life. He wrote a *sefer* in which he says, there was once a controversy about this issue. The Arizal, the Vilna Gaon, the Chofetz Chaim and numerous others have already put this issue to rest and they have clarified many of the points.

Judaism definitely believes in reincarnation. As a matter of fact, in our times, most of us, and perhaps all of us are reincarnated. That means to say that our souls were here in this world in a prior lifetime. Not once, not twice, perhaps many times. It doesn't even mean we were here in the recent past. It is possible that the last time we came to this world was many, many years ago. It could be 100, it could be 300, it could be 1000 years ago.

WHO AM I, REALLY?

Understanding this, demands one to understand the function and the relationship between one's body and one's soul. When we talk about ourselves, we generally talk about our physical selves and the conditioning with which we were conditioned. Most people talk about themselves in terms of their job. If you ask somebody, "Who are you?" A doctor, a lawyer, a professor, this, that. But that is what you do for a living; that is not who you are. We relate to ourselves as a body. "I am a housewife, I am a mother." That is a job that a person has in this world. The body is merely a tool through which we communicate, and by which we are able to bring ourselves out into the physical world.

But the essence of the person is his soul. The soul holds all of your genetic characteristics. The soul is your underlying force for everything you will face in this world. When you are feeling happy, it relates to your soul. When you are feeling depressed, it relates to your soul. When I say, "I am depressed," it doesn't mean to say my body is depressed. It means, me, my soul is depressed. When I am feeling challenged, it is my soul being challenged.

¹ Ed. note: this shiur was given to a mostly non-observant audience. (part 2 of the shiur is next week, parshas Eikev)

And when a person leaves this world, no change happens. The only thing that happens is the soul separates from the body. It's like somebody would take off your suit and say, "You know what? It's time for a new suit. Remove your old suit." And he throws the old suit onto the ground. When a person dies, he becomes separated from his suit, from his body. Your body is your suit—no more. So when a person dies, they die with all of their baggage. When you die, your body stays behind. But every single experience that you had, you bring with you when your soul separates from your body. You don't take your job with you. But you take every positive or negative thing that you have experienced and put your soul through in this world.

THE REASONS FOR GILGUL HAPPENING

Why is there such a concept of reincarnation? The reason why there is such a concept is based on the subject which we spoke about last week, and that is that there are X number of souls in the world. And every single soul has a unique function, a unique job. This is a huge business. It's Hashem's business and everybody has a different role. And each one of us must fulfill his mission, for Hashem's will to come to fruition, to be manifested. Therefore, we must come back again and again, because our souls were created by Hashem to fulfill that role. Whether we understand how that role is being fulfilled or not is irrelevant. If I worked for a huge company and I don't understand how my position is actually enhancing the company, you know what I say? "Thank G-d, they haven't discovered that. Thank G-d, they are still giving me a check. I am very thankful. I am going to try to come every day, do my job as best as I can." You are going to say to yourself, there is obviously somebody up there who thinks my job plays some role. Hashem knows what role we play and the job He chooses for us. Every one of us is placed in a very unique place. Each person is assigned to be in a specific city, with these parents, to fulfill that mission he was designated for.

Some people are not fulfilling their mission. Some fulfill their mission in place A, and then they could do a job in place B, so Hashem moves them. He moves people from one place, sometimes from one neighborhood to another neighborhood, sometimes from one city to another city, from a state to a state or from a country to a country. It is not an accident, it's not a coincidence. This is a pre-plan in order for us to do our job.

Now, what is the purpose of having this knowledge?

HASHEM RUNS THE WORLD

One reason is, it gives us the strength, the *chizuk*, the constant strengthening that we need to remind ourselves that there is a Hashem who runs the world. When you have an understanding of how the system works, then you can begin to see how somebody is controlling and directing all the traffic. That definitely strengthens your faith in Hashem. If you don't understand the system and then things happen around you – you don't know why they are happening, who is making them happen, you are totally disoriented. You read about what happened last week in New Orleans? (i.e. hurricane Katrina). We may not understand it. And you read about the amazing – I mean, just amazing, it's more than mind boggling. Thousands, tens of thousands of homes, businesses and who knows what were destroyed. You understand then, that there is a system. It gives you an insight that there is a system. That is number one.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

The second thing is that when you know the system, the mechanics of how *gilgulim* work, you understand there is a system of reward and punishment. And you understand that there is a system of why things happen and why things don't happen. People ask, "Why does a child get suffering?" This is a very common question. But all the *sefarim* explain that the reason children suffer is not because of anything that they did wrong. It is not because of their parent's sins. G-d doesn't punish children for their parent's sins. The reason why children suffer is because they were here in a previous lifetime and they lived their lives out as adults - and in that lifetime, Hashem didn't collect from them.

There is a famous story with one of the most famous rabbis. His name was R' Chaim Vital (1543-1620). R' Chaim Vital was a student of the Arizal, R' Yitzhak Luria (1534-1572). The Arizal told R' Chaim Vital that his main mission of coming into this world was to bring this soul named R' Chaim Vital to perfection. The Arizal listed to him a number of reincarnations that he had gone through in the past five lifetimes. He told R' Chaim Vital, "At one point you were a very wealthy person. You were religious, you gave charity and you used to come to *shul* early and you were a good citizen, but you ate part of a *kosher* animal which the Torah says you incur the *kareis* punishment. (*Kareis* means your life is shortened). And you ate this knowingly. You fell into a trap and you lived your life until a ripe old age during that lifetime. And you thought you beat the system. But you didn't, because then you were born again the next time." He told him what his name was in the next life. "And you died the year you became *bar mitzvah*. And the reason why your life was shortened in that lifetime was not because of anything you did during that lifetime but because of what you did in a previous lifetime." And this is how we have to understand things that happen in this world.

GET ANOTHER CHANCE TO GET IT RIGHT

There is a famous story with the Maharal, R' Yehuda Loew (1520-1609). There was a child living in the Maharal's neighborhood who was mute. A totally mute child. And the Maharal was always asking about this child's welfare. One day somebody came to the Maharal with a question regarding the *kashrus* of an animal, to find out whether it was kosher or not. (It was very common to bring the animals to the rabbi to ask him if it was kosher or not. That was one of the major functions of a rabbi in Europe. Today, they do everything in-house *sheilos* of *kashrus* are dealt with in the slaughterhouse. But in those days there were *shtetlach*, so the rabbi of the city would either come to the slaughterhouse, or if a butcher had a problem, he would bring it to the rabbi and he would say, "What do you think about this?") The Maharal said, "Call that young boy. Bring him here right now." They didn't understand, the young boy is mute. What do they need him for this *shaileh*? They brought the young boy and the Maharal presented the *shaileh* to this child. And the child rendered the halachic *psak*. This was a mute child. He spoke the only words of his lifetime. Then he lay down on the floor, said *Shema Yisrael* and died.

So the Maharal told the parents, "I'm going to tell you about your child. This child was a very big scholar in a previous lifetime, a very big sage and scholar. This

shaileh that was brought to me today was presented to this person when he was a great rabbi and he made a mistake. He ruled quickly and he messed up. And what happened was, he passed on to the next world and they told him, he's got something to correct. So they said, we can send you back for a second time. So he begged Hashem for two things. He said to Hashem, "Please let me be born a mute because I don't want to be able to sin again in that lifetime." And he said, "I only want to live until that *shaileh* comes up again. Let me rectify it. And today was that day." He was 8 years old when the *shaileh* came.

This is beyond us. We can't understand. The parents can't understand. If you understand this concept correctly, however, everything becomes so clear. It becomes a different story.

NO SINNING THIS TIME

The Chofetz Chaim says, a young boy is born with hands that are deformed. The parents were waiting for this child anxiously. They were so excited. But all of a sudden, their great joy, the great mazel tov is shot to pieces when the doctor informs them that the child's hands are deformed and they are not going to be able to be used in the normal fashion. And the parents start to wail and bemoan, "What is going to be? How is he going to grow? How is he going to this, how is he going to do that." The Chofetz Chaim says, you should know, the way to look at it and to understand it is that this child pleaded before Hashem to create him that way. Because he made a mistake. He might have *patched* somebody in a previous lifetime. He might have used his hands in an unlawful manner and he asked Hashem, "Please, I'll go back to the world but this time I want to go back with hands that cannot sin." And Hashem acquiesced. Not always does Hashem acquiesce. But in that case, Hashem acquiesced and Hashem said okay, and Hashem gave into him. This was a *chessed* that Hashem did.

So here, he is happy, and the parents are distraught. They don't understand what is going on. You have to understand, this is all a plan and purpose by Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Now, is it a bad thing to be reincarnated? Do we feel bad that we are reincarnated? So the answer is, part of the great kindness of Hashem is that when you are reincarnated in a human being, you don't feel bad. You know when you feel terrible? When you leave this world. The reason why we don't feel bad during our lifetime is because we are not in touch with our past. We are not in touch with our previous lifetimes. Most of us aren't. And because we are not in touch with that, therefore we are capable of going through this life happily. But the Chofetz Chaim says, if you want to understand it, the way to understand it is with the following *mashal*.

THE GUY WHO TRIES TO BEAT THE SYSTEM

There was a fellow, a married man, who had a family he needed to support. He couldn't raise the funds to support his family, so what did the fellow do? He picks himself up and travels to a foreign country. He heard that in that foreign country, you could make money. They are running a new gas line, there is money to be made.

So the fellow joins that country. He goes over there and he starts to make some money. Finally, after he is there a couple of years, the time comes to return. He is yearning to see his family. He sends a telegram to his family informing them that he's coming home. The guy gets on the boat to leave this country. Before he gets on the boat, there is a big sign. The sign says like this: Before you leave this country, if you are leaving for the last time, make sure to settle up all your debts. If you have any outstanding accounts of money you still owe to somebody, any debts, rent, whatever it might be, insurance, whatever, pay it up before you leave the country. You will not be allowed to disembark the ship if the payments are not complete. You are not going to be allowed to disembark the ship. So the person says, "Okay."

The guy starts to think, "Do I owe anybody big money?" He says to himself, "Eh, I didn't pay my last electric bill. Big deal, who'll know that? Well, the last insurance payment, I got a couple of dollars extra, okay. They are not going to make a fuss about that. When I get to my country, the local customs are going to be in charge. I'm a citizen of that country, who is going to stop me? If they say you can't get on the boat, okay, that is one thing. But I'm on the boat." The guy thinks, "Eh, big deal." He gets on the boat and he starts traveling. He's thinking about how he misses his family. He's thinking, "Wow, what a *simchah* it's going to be when I see them." And his family is waiting for him with who knows what. His family, wife and kids. He hasn't seen them in a couple of years. They are waiting by the boat. And everybody disembarks from the boat except this fellow. The wife is wondering, "Where is my husband? Where is my husband?" And all of a sudden, they hear the husband screaming to the guys, "Please, let me say hello. Let me come home, my family is waiting for me!" You know what they say? "Didn't you see the sign? The sign said you can't disembark. You've got to go back." And the guy begins to cry. And the family gets no more than a wink at him. You know what they say? "Now it's too late."

The Chofetz Chaim explains, that is exactly what we experience when we leave this world. When we leave this world, each one of us thinks we beat the system. Every one of us thinks, "Yeah, I'll take the chance. I got away with 'murder' all my life. I did what I wanted, when I wanted. Eh, I heard all these threats, these frights, these fears, this and that, *teshuvah*, etc." You hear all this type of talk. But when you're going to come to the next world, there is going to be a sign. The sign says, "All dues have got to be paid." You've got to settle up accounts.

And you're going to come to the next world and you're going to see your family. You are going to have a concept of what peace means, of what serenity means. You are going to have a concept of what it means – what you thought was enjoyable in this world, making a few pennies. What you thought was nice in this world, having a nice home with four bedrooms, five bedrooms, having a nice plane and going traveling on a plane, who knows what. You are going to come to the next world and you are going to have such a taste of what peace means. You are going to come to Hashem, that is what it is. And all of your ancestors are going to be waiting for you. They are going to be waiting for you to join them. You know why? Because that is your place.

REINCARNATION AS A PERSON

It's only while you are in this world that you think this world is your place. Many people who get too comfortable here - Hashem sends them a message. Hashem doesn't want us to get too comfortable in this world. This world is not forever. This world is temporary. You are going to return to your real home. You are going to go back to your real place. And we're going to come to the next world and we're going to say, "Can I get a little peek at it?" They are going to say, "Sorry, but you've got to go back."

REINCARNATION AS A DOG

Now, this kindness of reincarnation is only afforded to an individual while he is in this world in the form of a human being. Many people are reincarnated not in the form of human beings. You can come back in the form of an animal. Very common, most common, is coming back in the form of a dog. For many well-known sins, which we are not going to discuss today, you come back as a dog. And when you come back in the form of an animal, you are fully aware every moment that you are a human being in an animal.

So here, you come back either as a little, cute chihuahua or as a big pit bull. And you have some little cute old lady, who likes a little chihuahua and this lady, holding this cute little doggy all day long, and really it's you in her hands, and you are fully aware of it! And that is the most humiliating, the most painful experience you can possibly have. And that is what a person has to be aware of when they consider the possibility of being reincarnated.

CAN ONE AVOID REINCARNATION?

Now, how does a person save himself? Can a person save himself from *gilgul*? Can a person spare himself from reincarnation? The answer is yes. You've got to do your job. You've got to do the job for which you came to this world. Or, you've got to do *teshuvah*.²

Now, I want to explain something. Let's say, my mission is to teach Torah to people, but one day I decide, "You know what? People always hassle me. People don't like what I say; they think I'm this, they think I'm that." So, I decided, "Forget this job. I'm going to sit and become a private citizen. I'm going to open up a store, maybe I'll go to law school. I'm not the stupidest guy in the world. Maybe I'll become a little lawyer, maybe I'll play medicine, maybe I'll play with the market, maybe I'll make a real estate investment. I'll move out in the country on a nice big farm. I wouldn't mind a quiet life. Maybe I'll get a cow or two, a couple of horses, and I'll live a great life. Maybe I'll go boating a little bit. I'll go fishing. Maybe I'll even get one of those jet ski things. I'll be a nice person, never interact with anybody. Don't do anybody bad, raise my family in a nice, natural, wholesome environment." Right?

² Ed. note: the Rosh HaYeshiva, Shlit"á, drew an important distinction between the teshuva to prevent reincarnation due to aveiros and the teshuva to prevent reincarnation for not fulfilling one's tskid in life. When it comes to the former, teshuva does help to prevent a gilgul, because it can erase the aveirah that would otherwise bring about a gilgul; however, when it comes the latter - if someone didn't fulfill their unique tskid in this world - even teshuva cannot prevent a gilgul, because it cannot restore or bring back somehow a person's tskid if it was never fulfilled in the first place!

You will come to the next world, and you know what Hashem will say? Maaaa (a sound like a buzzer signaling you are out of the game). “Hashem, what do you mean?! I did the job. I never hurt anybody, I brought my family up nicely.” And Hashem says, “Yeah, but you had talent. I didn’t give you talent for a farm. I didn’t give you the talent to raise cows. I want you to raise people.” So what is your answer? “It was tough. It was rough. People were challenging me all the time. One *talmid* says that, one *talmid* says this, and another *talmid* doesn’t like the way you stand, the way you look, the way you talk.” “And so what?! That is your job,” Hashem says. “Who says you’ve got to like your job? Every client, every patient you’ve got to love? So what? If that is your job, you’ve got to do it. Not every customer makes you feel great. That’s life.”

FULFILLING YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

That’s number one. So all the *teshuvah* in the world, all the repentance in the world, is not going to help you if you didn’t fulfill your life’s *tafkid* (as opposed to doing teshuva for aveiros that may necessitate reincarnation, as explained above in the footnote #2). I could do *teshuvah* from today to tomorrow. Hashem says, “I know, I feel bad, you’re a wonderful guy, but you had a job. You didn’t do the job. So, you’ve got to go back.” The only way you can avoid the *gilgul* is the following: If you did your job.

But you are a human being. Human beings tend to sin. They mess up. It’s human to err. אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא - “there is not one good man on earth who does what is best and doesn’t err (Koheles 7:20)

There is no *tzaddik* in the world who only does good and never sins. But you know what the difference is? The difference is, the *tzaddik* corrects his mistakes. The *tzaddik* works on his mistakes. The *tzaddik* is somebody who says, “I’m going to try to better myself. If I can avoid this mistake, I’m going to avoid it.”

Here is a guy who has a challenge studying Torah. It’s a very common challenge, you should know. You know what the problem is? Hashem put us in this world to study Torah. That’s life. You’ve got to study Torah. That is one of the *mitzvos* you do every single day. I understand and I empathize and I sympathize. It’s challenging and it’s difficult. It’s Hebrew and it’s Aramaic and it’s Yiddish and it’s English and you have a difficulty with languages and you struggle. I understand all of that. But, you’ve still got a job. That’s the job. So what if a person didn’t like to do their job? It doesn’t make a difference. You’ve got to do that job. I’m not saying you have to be the biggest scholar, but whatever your obligation is, you’ve got to do it.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS

But what if a guy fulfilled his obligation but he messed up along the way in other areas, and he didn’t do *teshuvah*? He did not clean up the baggage. So then, he has to come back to this world in order to rectify everything he did. There are no freebies, rabbosai. It’s impossible. There is no system of freebies because everything has a consequence. My actions create real consequences. I’ve got to clean up my own mess. That is the *metzius*, that is the reality.

Now, sometimes Hashem has a system in the next world for a guy who messed

up in this world. There is a “therapy system.” Just like in this world there is a concept called hospitals and hospitals cure illnesses, so too, Hashem has a “hospital,” called Gehinon, which is another, tremendous chesed of Hashem, by the way. This hospital has chemotherapy, different kinds of therapies to cure you of your spiritual ailments. If a guy has a little disease, they can do it on an easy basis. He has a difficult disease – some guy has a cancer, G-d forbid, that has metastasized. In that case, you can’t just give him a little aspirin and say, “Go home and rest.” Of course not. You’ve got to get to the *kishkes* of the problem. It’s not *pashut*. So this is what Gehinon is for - to cleanse you of your spiritual diseases that you didn’t clean up through mitzvos and teshuva. But sometimes a person comes to the next world and he has so much rot that he has picked up that even Gehinnom can’t cure him. So he has got to come back to this world and rectify it.

This is a little bit of a window into how this system works.

WHO WAS IYOV PREVIOUSLY?

Let me give you an insight into two major things. Who is the quintessential example of suffering in this world? Iyov. He is the person who personifies it. If you want to study evil, you want to study *yissurim*, you want to study suffering, you want to study a person that became tormented, you want to study a person who went through everything in this world - and it was done openly in Hashem’s presence - you need to study the life of Iyov. He was a prophet. He was a person who Hashem challenged. He was a person that discussed his suffering with his friends. The book on suffering is the book of Job. If you want to know anything about suffering, you’ve got to study the book of Job.

Iyov’s friends told him all kinds of explanations of what happened to him and why. So the question is, why did he suffer? You know what the Talmud tells us? The Talmud tells us that one day Hashem told Satan, “There is no *tzaddik* like Iyov. The man is righteous.” And you know what the *satan* said? “Yes, of course he’s righteous. He’s wealthy, he has a great wife, great kids, great assets. He is important, he gets *kavod*, people give him honor. So, of course he’s righteous! But let’s challenge him. Let’s see how he deals with the challenge.” And after he’s challenged, he starts to falter and he challenges Hashem. You know what it sounds like when you read this section of Talmud? “It’s not fair.” It sounds like just because Satan dared Hashem to give him a little tickle, “So okay, Hashem, let’s go play ball on this guy.” I mean, that’s what it sounds like. That’s ridiculous.

So came along the Arizal and gave us an amazing insight. He says that Iyov was a reincarnation of somebody who attempted to destroy the whole world, when he had the whole world in the palm of his hands. He says that Iyov was the father of Avraham, Terach. Iyov was a reincarnation of Terach, the father of Avraham. Now, Terach wasn’t just anybody. Terach was the father of Judaism. That means he was the father of Hashem’s purpose in the world. The Torah teaches us that Hashem created the world for the Jewish nation to carry out His will and mission. Terach was a minister of religion. He had a son that challenged the religion of that era. He had a son who was principled, a son who was rational, a son who

went against the world and, unbeknownst to Mr. Terach, his son became the father-figure of the world. Avraham is the father of the Jewish people and all the people.

Terach challenged that. Terach fought it until the end. Terach let his son go to jail for 10 years. Terach allowed his son to be burned at the stake because of his beliefs. Terach was no liberal. He didn't say: "I love 'em all, I believe in whatever you want, however you want." No, he wasn't one of those kinds of guys. This was a man who took Avraham and helped him go into the furnace and said, "Bye bye son, you deserve this." Hashem stepped in and saved Avraham. So Terach, therefore, came back as Iyov.

Now, I want you to know what Terach's destiny was. Terach's destiny was to be the father of the fathers. Had Terach passed the test and said to Avraham, "Son, I am proud of you. You are the man. You are rational. We live in a world of *meshugaim*. We have to believe Nimrod is the God. Nimrod says he is the god. I am selling idols over here, total stupidity. We are believing in these wooden *getchkes*, the wooden this, the wooden that. This whole thing is nonsense, it's *narishkeit*. Son, I'm behind you all the way!" If he would have said this, "You know what would have happened?" He would have become the father of all the fathers! You know what the Arizal says? This idea lies in Iyov's name. If you take a look at his name, it's in his name. Iyov is *alef, yud, vav* and *veis*. He says, it's Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov *u'banav*. The letters stand for Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov *u'banav*. That was his destiny. Arizal says that had Iyov fulfilled his destiny, you know what we would have said? We would have said, "Elokei Iyov, Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak and Elokei Yaakov." Unbelievable! And he blew it, and blew it big time. And because he blew it, you know what happened? He now became the modern lesson of all *yissurim* and all suffering in this world. He fulfilled his mission in the world by being the paradigm, by being the one who personifies all suffering and every type of suffering possible you could have in this world.

Then the Arizal says something amazing, What was the end of Iyov? You know what his punishment was? He became a *tazrua*, he got *tzaraas*. *Tzaraas* is similar to leprosy. The Arizal says, where does it say that in the Torah? It says it in the *chumash*; in the second section of Shema The *passuk* (Devarim 11:16-17) says, וּסְרַתָּם, you will turn away, וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, and you will serve foreign gods. וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם, and you will bow down to them. ה' יִחַר אַף ה', the anger of Hashem will flare up, בְּכֶם, in you, וַעֲצַר, and Hashem will close down the Heavens. He says, if you take a look at the words, אַף ה' בְּכֶם וַעֲצַר, you'll see that the first letters of those four words spell Iyov. Now, the word וַעֲצַר is a very strange word. The Torah rarely uses the word וַעֲצַר, which means "he'll hold back." Ve'atzar (ועצר) is also the letters of *tzarua* (צרוע), leprosy. That is the type of anger Hashem brought upon Iyov.

And he goes on and explains so many other difficult aspects related to this, it's just mind blowing.

WHO WAS CHANA PREVIOUSLY?

There is another famous story. Anyone who grew up in a Jewish home grew up on this story. It's a heartrending story. The story took place during the time of the

Beis Hamikdash. From all the stories of the destruction, and there were thousands – there were stories of children having their heads bashed against rocks and being hung from trees, horrendous stories – there is one story that stands out amongst all the stories.

There was a woman named Chana who had seven children, and the emperor tried to get her children to bow down to an idol. He said, “If they are not going to bow down, I’m going to kill them one by one.” There is a whole piece of Talmud, in *Meseches Gittin* (57b) that discusses the destruction of the temple. And over there, it explains how each child was called before the emperor. The emperor said, “Will you bow down?” And each one refused, responding each in a different way. And every one of them, one after another, was put to death. And when the last child was being taken away to be killed, Chana turned to that child and said, “My child, go up to *shamayim*, and tell Avraham Avinu: You willingly offered one child on the altar for Hashem, but I offered seven!” If you read the story in detail, it *mamish* rips your heart apart! If you are a person that has some kind of imagination, it gets to your *kishkes*. And I remember thinking, what is the *pshat*? So I knew Hashem has a *pshat* but we don’t understand it.

And the *sefarim* say, you know who this lady was? She was the reincarnation of the mother of Avraham Avinu. Her name was Amaslai bas Karnevo. She was the wife of Terach. And when Avraham went to sacrifice himself for his principles of Hashem, she went out of her way to stop him. She tried to get him not to do it. “Don’t be silly, my son. My son, don’t be silly. Don’t do that. Don’t give up your life, it’s not worth it.” She tried to do everything in her power that her child should not go through with this. And that explains what inspired her to address Avraham. A thousand years later she comes back to this world, produces seven children and now with each one, she is challenged again. “Yes, my child, give your life up for Hashem.” “Yes, my child. Go back to Avraham and tell him, I passed my test! Tell him, I was *mesaken* I corrected my faults! I now understand, there is nothing else but Hashem and if Hashem calls, I’m coming.”³ (Rema MiPano, 1548-1620)

We see things, and we don’t understand why they happen. But it’s not from this world, it’s not from this lifetime.

OUR LIFETIME IS AN INCOMPLETE VIEW

We look at everything in life with a very limited view. It’s like looking at a person who, G-d forbid, has Alzheimer’s when he’s 95 and thinking, “The guy was born when he was 94½. Such a young man, and he lost his mind already! He acts like a kid! He acts like a baby.” No, he is a 95-year-old man! He’s been here for 95 years! You don’t know what he’s been through. You have to know his genetics. You don’t know what his condition is. There are so many factors. We, too, didn’t come here to this world just now.

But now the question is, how do we figure out what our purpose is in this world?

³ אמתלאה בת כרבוו אשתו של תרח אמו של אברהם אבינו עליו השלום [סנהדרין צ"ה ב'], נתקנה בהאשה עם שבעה בניה דהמיתם המלך כנזכר בדברי רבותינו ז"ל בנישין פרק הנוזקין [נ"ז ב'], דאמרה תתם בני לכו ואמרו לאברהם אביכם, אתה עקדת מובח אחד ואני עקדתי שמעה מובחות, אתה נסיון ואני מעשה, וגם היא עלתה על הגג ומתה, וכמו שתרח נתקן באיוב על ידי יסוריו, וכאן גם היא נתקנה על ידי יסוריו אשר באו עליה, ויצתה בת קול ואמרה אם הבנים שמחה, ושם נמרוד השליך אברהם בנה לכבשן האש ולא עשה רושם, וכאן עשה רושם לתיקונה על קידוש השם. (גלגולי נשמות לרמ"ע מפאנו, אות א')

THE SECRET OF GILGUL IN SEFER YONAH

Now, I want you to know, there is a famous book which we are all familiar with, which is called The Book of Gilgulim. It is the Book of Yonah. The prophet Yonah. Everybody knows the story. Yonah was given a mission by Hashem and he tried to flee from the mission. He didn't want to carry it out. He attempted to go on a ship and take off, but Hashem brought a storm. He was thrown into the water, and was swallowed by a whale. Hashem then made the whale spit Yonah out and he still tried to run away and flee. And Hashem said, "There is no running away, you've got to go back and fulfill the mission which I set for you."

The Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797) wrote a commentary on Sefer Yonah explaining how the entire book is simply a description of reincarnation (Yonah 1:4).⁴ This is exactly how it is. Every person is given a mission and every person gets on the "boat" and attempts to flee his mission. And then the "storm" comes and he gets thrown over and he wants to die and Hashem says, "Oh, don't die. You've got to come back." You jump into the sea, the whale swallows you up - that is the earth. And you get spit back out. And then you get depressed and then Hashem comes to you, "What are you being depressed for? Do your job and we'll move on. You've got a mission." There is no place for depression here. You can't beat the system. And he describes it in such detail of how we go through this and what we go through.

We have to know that there is nothing in our lives that is coincidental. Everything that we have experienced and everything we will experience, every challenge we have, is the challenge for which we came to this world – to fulfill our unique mission.

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

To answer this question, we have to study two areas in our lives. Number one, we have to study: what baggage have we picked up, what negative traits have we picked up, what negativity are we sunk into, what negativity overwhelms us? For some people, it's *kavod*. Pursuit of *kavod*, of honor. Ego is one of the most powerful urges that people have. There's jealousy. Greed. People go nuts from greed! I can't tell you how many people have called me up and talked to me about greed, how their neighbor "kills" them. Their neighbor is this, the neighbor is that. Why do they have and I don't have? It's terrible, it's unbelievable. And then there are people that just can't control their lusts. There are many types of lusts. Lust for money, lust for women, lust for food. People are just very consumed by their desires. And the desire eats them up.⁵

⁴ "והאניח חשבה להחביר" (יונה א:ד). והגוף חושב שעל כן ישר עתה, כמו שנאמר בוהר שכל ימיו חושב שכל העולם הזה הוא שלו אבל עכשיו רואה ומתחיל להזכיר שעל כרחו ימות עכשיו. והנשמה שאף על כרחו תסבול עוונותיו מכל מקום לא יאבד לנצח, שיתוקן בגלגול כמו שכתוב "פעמים ושלוש עם גבה וכו'" [איוב לג:כט] מה שאין כן הגוף שאינו מתוקן בגלגול חשבר לנצח והוא דומה לכלי חרס שצריכין שבידה. ואמרו שכיון שנשבר שוב אין לו תקנה. ומדויק לשון חשבה שאינו שייך על הספינה ממש. [ועוד כתב הגר"א איוב דג, ה"ל: כי טוב מותי מחיי כמ"ש [בגמ' תענית כ"ה א'] "ושבח אני את המתים שכבר מתו מן החיים אשר הם חיים כו" ולכאורה "שכבר מתו" וכן "אשר הם חיים" יתור דברים, אלא שרצה לומר שטובים הם המתים שכבר מתו ולא נצטרכו לבוא בגלגול מאותן שהם חיים עדינה שבאו בגלגול, ובוה מיושב דאמרו נמנו ונמנו טוב לאדם שלא נברא כו' עד יפשפש במעשיו [עירובין יג]. דקשה היאך אפשר לומר שטוב יותר אם כן למה נברא. ועוד, "ועכשיו שנברא" קשה להולמו, ועוד מאי "יפשפש" כו', הוה ליה למימר יעבוד את ה' ויעשה טוב, אלא נראה דנחלקו בשבוע אל הגלגול השני, שאלו אמרים טוב לו שנברא, כי בכל פעם הוא עושה מצות כמו שכתב קצת מפרשים. ואלו אמרים טוב לו יותר אם היה מתקן לגלגול ראשון ולא יצטרך בגלגול שני. וכן נמנו ונמנו כו"ל. והוה "ושבח אני את המתים כו"'. וקאמרי "ועכשיו שנברא" על כרחך לתקן מעשיו שמקודם ולא בשביל מצות לעשות, כי טוב לו כו"ל, ועל כן יראה עיקר לתקן במה שפשפש מקודם כמ"ש אבוח במאי זהיר טפח, וכו' [

⁵ והיאך ידע מה שקלקל מקדם, יש על זה שני סימנים, א' במה שנכשל בה בגלגול זה הרבה פעמים. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו" באיזה נכשל, ב' באיזה עבירה נפשו שקלה לו מאד לפי שהורגלה מקודם ועשה טבע, ולכך יש בני אדם שחושקין בעבירה אחת יותר חוה בעבירה אחרת. ועל זה אמרו "יפשפש במעשיו", שימשמש מעשיו, (הגר"א על איוב דג):

So number one, we need to figure out: “What is the negativity which we need to drop off and let go of?”

Number two is: “What is the mission we need to fulfill in the positive sense?” What talents do I have? One person might be smart, and he can absorb massive amounts of knowledge. So what does he do? He tries to become a human computer. What a waste of time! He tries to remember all the words. That’s so silly. Is that the purpose he came to the world?! It might be a side benefit. If he remembers the phone book, wow! Who needs information from the phone book? I can look in the phone book, I don’t need him for that. But there is so much that a person can do.

Here is a person who has a warm heart. Not everybody does. But there are people who have warm hearts. They really want to help others. So do you help anybody? Are you working on it? Are you doing your mission? Here is a person who has empathy. He feels for other people. I’ve heard many people telling me, “I don’t feel for other people. Other people’s plights have no bearing on me. It doesn’t do anything for me.”

If you feel for others, that is a message from Hashem. You have a talent. That is a power. Use it. How do you use it? Develop it and find ways to help others.

USE WHAT MOVES YOU, AS AN INDICATOR

Here is a fellow who’s wearing a flag. What is the flag? “Solidarity,” he said. I asked him, “Why? For what?” He feels bad for Russian Jews. This goes back years ago. I said to the guy, “So what do you do for them?” He said, “I wear a flag.” That’s it?! That’s really sad. If you feel the plight of Russian Jews, it’s a message. If it’s bothering you, that means there is something you should do about it! He said, “What should I do?” I said, “Start by *davening*. Start by thinking, what can I do? How can I help them? Maybe you can send them religious articles. If you have a feeling for something, maybe Hashem puts you in a place to help these people.” It’s not normal to be connected to Russian Jews. They are thousands of miles away and yet you feel for the Russian Jews? I have a problem with the Jews next door, I have to worry about the Russian Jews?! But if Hashem gets you worked up about that you should take it as a message.

There were certain *rabbanim* who got worked up with the Russian Jews and they wouldn’t let go. They started school systems, they started educational systems for boys, for girls. That was their mission. I once heard a rabbi say, “I feel that this is my mission.” He said, “You know why? Because I have feelings for them. If I have the feeling for them, that is Hashem’s way of telling me, do something.” So most of us, what do we do when we have a feeling? “Yeah, yeah, I feel terrible.” And turn over on the other side, and go back to sleep, that’s it. Do nothing about it. You’ve got to do something about it. That’s the mission we’re here for.

This is the first step in opening the door and the window to understanding *gilgul neshamos*. We will continue this in our future classes, to show you many, many cases and examples.

PAYBACK IN THE FORM OF A DIFFICULT CHILD OR SPOUSE

Sometimes a person has a difficult child. It's possible that a person could have destroyed somebody in the previous life and now the job of that person is to give birth to that person. He comes back to this world and gives birth to that person and now he gives that person life. And of course it's not easy. You gave that guy a hard time in the previous life, now it's not easy either. What do you want, easy street? You've got to work for the *nachas*. And so on and so forth. There are many things like that. It could be you had a neighbor whom you had a fight with. You come back and he's your sister. You come back and he's your wife or your husband. A husband could come back as a wife and a wife could come back as a husband. It's very possible. Payback day, that's what it is.

Here is a fellow suffering. He goes to a big rabbi. You know what the rabbi says to him? "I will reveal something to you. It's payback time. There is nothing wrong with your wife. In the last life, you abused her, now it's payback time." So she's not well or she's demanding and she's this and she's that. "Oh, I don't want to deal with this, I can't deal with this. It's too much stress for me, I can't." Well, you can't run away from yourself. That is life. That's the window.⁶

⁶ The following was the Q&A after the shiur.

Question: How many times can you come back? How many times can you come back as a human being? Do you come back as an inanimate object?

Answer: You can come back in a stone, come back as a vegetable, come back as an animal. You can come back many times.

Question: Do husband and wife come back together?

Answer: Not necessarily. But if their *tikun* is dependent upon one another, then yes.

Question: If we come back without knowing who we were, how can we correct it?

Answer: All we have to deal with is the present [this is really the question the Gr^a addressed above]. The reality is the present. Whatever challenge is in front of me today, I have to believe this is the job that is going to get me to fulfill my mission. Because our challenges are not coincidental. Our challenges are hand picked by Hashem.

Question: What about people who need therapy to get through life, is that a sign?

Answer: Regressive therapy? Yeah, there is such a concept. That is definitely possible, such a thing. Sometimes people are born in a way where they are called "disturbed." When I say disturbed, it means the presence of their previous lifetime is not so deep in their subconscious. It is closer to their conscience than other people. And Hashem does that to give them a sense of awareness of their mission because these people have denied or have not been willing to deal with this in the past. When people go into denial mode, so what Hashem does is, He'll make you nervous. He'll give you a certain sense of fear. That gives you an awareness of [your job, so that] you can't get away from it anymore. You've got to deal with it. So again, one person takes pills and tries to forget about it. And one person tries to get to the bottom of it to understand. We'll talk about this next time also at length, the different disorders people have, like OCD, compulsive disorders people have. This is all what is called underlying, near the surface there is something. Multiple personality disorder is another kind of form of a *gilgul*. And all this is what drives certain people to do strange things. We'll talk about that in *yirtze Hashem* next time [Ed. note: see *parshas Eikev*]

THE BOTTOM LINE

The *neshama* of each of us was created to fulfill a specific and unique *tafkid* in this world. Although there are many things we don't understand, and are not expected to understand regarding *gilgulim* on the most basic level, this system was set in place to give a neshama another chance to come back and rectify something that it didn't fulfill in this world, which is a tremendous *chesed* by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Knowing this principle gives us *chizuk*, that Hashem monitors and measures, with the utmost precision and kindness, our unique role in the world, and it also informs us about the mechanics of *sechar v'onesh*. As the Gr"z taught us, to fulfill our *tafkid*, we need to correct our negative traits and to further develop our positive traits, strength and talents. Though we all have a number of negative traits, this coming week, I will primarily focus on identifying the one which constantly detracts from my goals in my Avodas Hashem, and/or challenges relationships in my life. This shouldn't be hard to accomplish. I will also, *bli neder*, identify one positive trait which I could develop further to help my fellow *yidden* - whether it's empathy towards others, or ability to teach and explain Torah clearly, or *askanus* of some sort for the Klal. Next, I will discuss with my rebbi or rebbetzin how to work on minimizing the negative trait and maximize one of my talents to help others!

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