

## TRANSMIGRATION AND DYBUK

### Summary of Reincarnation

We saw in the previous lesson that reincarnation is a universal phenomenon, recorded in many cultures. Reincarnation is also considered an authentic Jewish belief, as expressed by authoritative rabbis throughout the generations, from Tannaitic times to the present.

There are four primary reasons for reincarnation: 1] To repair damage incurred to the soul through transgressions done in a previous life, by reliving those experiences while refraining from wrongdoing. 2] To achieve perfection that wasn't achieved by reliving experiences as above and taking full advantage of the opportunity for spiritual growth. 3] To perfect others, therefore even the righteous may be reincarnated for the purpose of helping others reach spiritual perfection. 4] To marry one's soul mate, since a soul may only reach perfection together with the soul mate.

Over the centuries, rabbis have suggested several proofs for reincarnation, including "speaking infants", children prodigies, the unlikelihood of an infinite number of souls, and *dybuk*. The phenomenon of *dybuk* will be discussed shortly, but as a proof for reincarnation the idea is that if a soul can return to possess a person who is currently living, certainly it can return to another body at birth, becoming that body's primary soul. Reincarnation explains "tragedies", such as why the righteous suffer, why children die young or are miscarried and birth defects such as retardation and autism.

Regarding the experience of reincarnation, we saw that while a person is (normally) not aware of previous reincarnations, the previous one affects his status in the current reincarnation. A person's religious duties are affected by reincarnation as well: one has more desire to learn what has not been mastered in a previous reincarnation. Also, those mitzvot that one finds particularly difficult to keep are specifically those needing correction from a previous life.

We concluded with the question of how many times a soul is reincarnated? The majority of Kabbalists say that in addition to the first life, there are three reincarnations as in the verse, "G-d does all these things twice or three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to...the light of the living" (Job 33:29,30). However, an early source states that a person can be reincarnated 1000 times. One resolution is based on the wording "Three times as a **man**" implying that one may be reincarnated as a man only three times. However, after that, the soul can be reincarnated even 1000 times as animals or other living creatures, trees and plants and even inanimate objects.

This reincarnation into sub-human forms is called transmigration since the human soul migrates into other species. In so far as transmigration resembles *dybuk* in that the soul enters a foreign realm, we shall begin our discussion with transmigration and then explore the phenomenon of *dybuk*.

## What is Transmigration?

Sha'ar HaGilgulim ch. 22 p. 59

אחר פטירת האדם, נפרעים ממנו על חטאתיו, קודם שיכניסוהו בגיהנום, בהרבה מציאות של עונש, וכולם נקראים גלגולים. רוצה לומר: כי יתגלגל או בדומם, או בצומח, או בחי, או במדבר. וכמעט רוב בני האדם לא ימלטו מלהתגלגל בגלגולים אלה. והטעם הוא, כי אינו יכול לקבל ענשו, עד שיהיה מוגשם בגוף ונפש, ואז בהתגלגלו שם, סובל ומרגיש הצער ההוא, ועי"כ מתכפרים עונותיו. ואמנם כפי ערך חטא האדם, כך בחי' אופני גלגולו, אם בצומח, אם בבע"ח וכו'.

*After a person dies he is punished for his transgressions even before he enters gehinom in many ways and all of them are called gilgul. He may be reincarnated in inanimate objects, plants, animals or humans. Nearly all people will not escape being reincarnated in one of these ways. The reason for this is that he cannot receive his [spiritual] punishment until he is rematerialized in a body, and while reincarnated there, he experiences pain and suffering, and in this way his transgressions are atoned. The degree of transgression determines whether he'll be reincarnated into plants, animals, etc.*

Note: It is difficult for many people to accept what seems to be an over emphasis on punishment. It is important to understand that punishment, in essence, is not spiteful retribution. Rather, it is a way to spiritually cleanse the soul in order to enable it to earn and enjoy eternal reward in the presence of G-d. As long as the soul is clothed in sullied and torn garments, it is not fitting to stand in the presence of the King. The different forms of punishment, then, are intended to purify and benefit the soul.

## Source for Transmigration

Nishmat Chaim 4:13

על פסוק "ויפץ ה' אותם משם על פני כל הארץ" (בראשית י"א ח') דרשו חז"ל שבשלושה חילוקי דינין נדונו דור הפלגה, הטובים שבם נדונו בבלבול לשון, והכת שנתכונה לשם עבודה זרה נעשו מהן קופין וחתולין וכיוצא בהם, והכת השלישית שאמרו נעלה לשמים ונכנו בקרדומות הושלכו למטה ונעשו מהן שדין ומזיקין ורוחין בישין, רצונם [של חז"ל לומר במדרש], שקצת מהם נתגלגלו בבהמות האלו.

*On the verse, "And G-d dispersed them from there to all parts of the earth" (Gen. 11:8) our Sages expounded that the people of that generation (Dor Hahaflaga) were punished in three ways: the better ones had their language confused, those who intended idolatry were made into animals, and the third group [who intended to war with G-d and] said, let us go up to heaven and attack G-d with axes were thrown down and made into demons and evil spirits (Yalkut Shimoni, Noach 62). With this they meant to say that some of them had their souls reincarnated into animals.*

## Experience of Transmigration

Would you expect there to be any difference between the experience of the soul when reincarnated in a human as opposed to some other being or object?

The Ramchal in Sefer HaMa'amarim, Inyan HaGilgul explains that when a soul is reincarnated in a sub-human form it doesn't fully reside in the object as when it's

reincarnated in a human. Simply put, the soul fits naturally into a human body as a hand fits a glove, but in any other thing it “feels” awkward and out of place. This is very clearly expressed in the following source:

Sefer Chasidim p 41

ודע, שאמרו המקובלים, שאף על פי שכשמתגלגל אדם בצורת אדם, אינו יודע בגלגולו ראשון, מכל מקום כשמתגלגל בצורת בהמה חיה או עוף, הוא יודע בגלגולו ראשון ומצטרך ומצטער איך ירד משמים מצורת אדם לצורת בהמה.

*The Kabbalists say that even though a soul reincarnated as a human is not normally cognizant of its previous reincarnation, nevertheless, when it is reincarnated in the form of an animal, beast or bird, it is aware of its previous reincarnation and it has anguish and regret at having gone down from the level of human to animal.*

What this means is that a soul that didn't take advantage of the opportunity to perfect itself in previous reincarnations as a human, is now subjected to the shame and frustration of being reincarnated into something in which it is no longer able to perfect itself.

Is there then no chance for repair at this stage? Is there no hope?

While the soul can no longer exercise free will to achieve perfection, it can still be elevated by external forces. And even though this passive dependence is a source of anguish for the soul, this too is part of the atonement process. The Arizal (SHG 22 p 61) explains how this may work:

A soul reincarnated in a stone may by chance be rolled in the grass. The soul would then enter the grass. If an animal ate the grass, it might then be elevated into the animal. If a person then ate the animal, it might further be elevated to the status of human. At that point it may be allowed to be reincarnated into a body again, in order to achieve perfection as a human. After suffering the spiritual straightjacket of transmigration, hopefully the soul will exercise its free will for good this time around as a human.

Sha'ar HaGilgulim 22 p 59

וכבר כמה פעמים הייתי עם מורי ז"ל הולך בשדה, והיה אומר לי, הנה איש אחד הנקרא בשם כך, והוא צדיק ותי"ח, ולסיבת עון אחד פלוני שעשה בחייו, הוא עתה מתגלגל תוך אבן זה, או צומח זה, וכיוצא בו, וכמו שיתבהר לקמן. ומעולם לא הכיר בו מורי ז"ל, והיינו חוקרים אחר הנפטר ההוא, ומצאנו דבריו כנים ואמיתיים.

*Many times I [Rabbi Chaim Vital] was with my master [the Arizal] walking in the fields and he would tell me, 'here is a man named so-and-so, and he is righteous and a scholar, and as a result of one transgression that he did in his life he is now reincarnated into this stone, or plant, etc. My master never knew him and when we would investigate after the deceased person, we would find that his words were honest and true.*

Here are a just a few stories in a rich tradition of many on transmigration:

Once a mysterious black dog appeared hanging around a certain house. One day when the owner of the house went on an errand into town, the dog leaped into the house and attacked the man's wife. When the husband returned, he found the dog attacking his wife

and he killed it. In the meantime, however, the dog killed the woman. Word got out about the unfortunate and peculiar occurrence until finally the Arizal heard of it. He explained what was going on behind the scenes: the dog was a reincarnation of the couple's neighbor who had an affair with the woman. He had been sent in the form of a dog in order to bring upon her and himself penalty for adultery, which had gone heretofore unpunished.

There was once a man in Jerusalem named R' Shalom who was known as "the clapper" since he made rounds early in the morning waking people for the morning prayers. One day a certain heretic harangued him for his dedication to prayer. The very same day, the man died, and two days later an unfamiliar dog started following R' Shalom on his early morning rounds. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld heard about it, investigated and understood that the dog was a reincarnation of the curser. He told the clapper to forgive the dog when he saw it next, which he did, and it never showed up again.

Another story of reincarnation in animals is told, this time on the humorous side:

The Kotsker Rebbe was sitting in a room learning with his students. All of a sudden, a bird perched upon the window above where they were sitting and seemed to be listening to their learning. The Rebbe didn't seem disturbed by it, but the students thought it was very peculiar. Eventually, one of the students asked, 'Rebbe, maybe the bird in the window listening to our learning is a reincarnation?' To which the Rebbe sarcastically replied, 'Mmmm. Or maybe it's a bird!'

## DYBUK, Definition and Causes

### Punishment

Above, we explained that after three reincarnations without repair, the soul is not permitted to *gehinom*, nor to be reincarnated any more as a human being (SHG 4). In such a case, it may be reincarnated in a sub-human form.

However, in very extreme cases, a soul may not even be permitted transmigration. Prohibited from the spiritual realm, it is thrust back into the physical world with no "body". There, demons and spirits pursue the bodiless soul as it frantically seeks refuge from their torment. Sometimes it finds respite in a sub-human host, such as an animal, plant or inanimate object. This is different than transmigration, though, since it is not placed there with the potential for repair, rather it invades the object from without, merely seeking refuge in "exile".

Another possibility is that it finds "room" in another person's body. Usually this happens when the desperate soul finds a spiritual "breach" in a person. This "niche" is often found in one who is steeped in transgression, where the connection between his soul and body is already tenuous. Similarly, intense emotional or mental turmoil can create this "crack" in one's spiritual conscious that can draw fetid souls like flies to a festering wound. Once a soul enters such a "breach", it cleaves tenaciously to its human host who shelters it from its pursuers. This "cleaving", or possession, called a *dybuk*, usually takes over the person's speech and behavior.

### Premature Death

A very early Kabbalistic work, *Shalshet HaKabbalah* (R. Gedaliah b. Yosef Ibn Yachyah, 1515-1587) writes that as opposed to punishment, a second reason for *dybuk* is premature

death. While an in depth explanation of “premature death” is beyond our scope here, the idea may be understood from the following teaching of our sages:

#### Baba Kama 60a

תאני רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב (שמות יב) "ואתם לא תצאו איש מפתח ביתו עד בקר"? כיון שניתן רשות למשחית אינו מבחין בין צדיקים לרשעים.

*Rav Yosef taught, what is intended by the verse, “and you shall not go out, any man from the entrance of his house until morning” (Ex. 12:22)? [Meaning, since the plague of the first-born was directed against the Egyptians, why shouldn't the Jews be allowed to leave their homes?] This teaches that when the Angel of Death is given permission to destroy, it doesn't differentiate between righteous and wicked.*

Premature death does not only mean death at an early age, but includes any case where a person dies “before his time”. This can result in a prematurely disconnected soul that has not yet lived out its purpose in this world. As a result, it refrains from undergoing reincarnation, which would initiate a new life. Rather, it clings to this world seeking to fulfill its unrealized potential in its current life by cleaving to another person's body.

#### Exorcism

Whether the *dybuk* occurs because of punishment or premature death, it can be removed by exorcism, which is a spiritual reparation whereby a tainted soul publicly confesses the sins of its previous life, or a prematurely parted soul is promised fulfillment; each case is accompanied by the spiritual influences of a Kabbalistic ceremony:

#### Sha'ar HaGilgulim 13

כל אלו הנשמות כאשר יוצאות מתוך הקליפות לעלות אל הקדושה...אינם יוצאות אלא על ידי תפלותיהם של ישראל, כי אז הם יוצאות ועולות אל הקדושה...או ג"כ יוצאות ע"י איזה יחוד שמייחד האיש הצדיק בעה"ז...או יוצאות ע"י איזו מצוה שיעשה האדם בעה"ז.

*All of these souls when they escape their detention to rise to holiness...they are enabled to escape on account of the prayers of other Jews...or through the [Kabbalistic] intentions of the Tzadik in this world...or they escape on account of a mitzvah performed by a person in this world.*

Before being exorcised, the *dybuk* relays what it did in its previous life, its experiences upon death, after death, what needs to be repaired, and even what people in the room have done wrong and need to repair.

The following account from the Talmud serves as an authoritative source for exorcism. Although it is specifically referring to the exorcism of a demon, the same will apply for removing a possessing soul:

#### Meila 17a,b

פעם אחת גזרה המלכות גזרה שלא ישמרו את השבת ושלא ימולו את בניהם ושיבעלו את נדות...אמרו מי ילך ויבטל הגזרות? ילך ר' שמעון בן יוחאי שהוא מלומד בנסים...יצא לקראתו בן תמליון. רצונכם אבוא עמכם? בכה ר' שמעון ואמר מה שפחה של בית אבא

נזדמן לה מלאך שלש פעמים ואני לא פעם אחת, יבא הנס מכל מקום. קדים הוא על בברתיה דקיסר כי מטא התם אמר בן תמליון צא בן תמליון צא וכיון דקרו ליה נפק אזל. אמר להון שאילו כל מה דאית לכוון למישאל ועיילינהו לגנזיה לשקול כל דבעו. אשכחו ההוא איגרא שקלוה וקרעוה.

*Once the authorities made an decree forbidding Sabbath observance, circumcision and ritual immersion. The Jews asked, 'who will go and nullify the decree?' R' Shimon ben Yochai [shall go] since he is accustomed to [having] miracles [occur for him]... The demon Ben Temalyon went out to encounter [R' Shimon]. 'Would you like me to accompany you?' R' Shimon cried and said, 'the maid servant [Hagar] of father [Abraham] had an angel appear to her three times, and for me not even once. Nevertheless, let the miracle come from anywhere. [The demon] proceeded ahead and possessed the daughter of the king. When he arrived there, [R' Shimon] said, 'Ben Temalyon leave, Ben Temalyon leave'. When they called him [to leave] he departed and went [from the daughter]. [The King] told them, 'ask of me any request, and enter my treasure vault and take anything you want'. They found the decree and took it and ripped it.*

Since according to mystical sources every soul has some "ethereal mass" (called *tzelem* or *guf dak*), the departing *dybuk* is observed as a small mobile bump as it exits from the body. Also, It is because of this ethereal mass that a window in the room is usually left open for the *dybuk* to leave. Here is one of many sources that speak of this ethereal body (we'll explore this in more depth in the session on ghosts and apparitions):

Zohar, Parashat Vayera

כל אנון נשמתין דהוו מיומא דאתברי עלמא, כלהו קימין קמה דקודשא בריך עד דלא נחתו לעלמא, בההוא דיוקנא ממש (דקימי בהאי עלמא) דאתחזון לבתר בעלמא ובההוא חיזו דגופא דבר נש דקאים בעלמא דא הכי הוא לעילא וכדין בשעתא דנשמתא זמינא לנחתא בעלמא, ההיא נשמתא בההוא דיוקנא ממש דקימא בהאי עלמא הכי קאים קמי קודשא בריך הוא.

*All the souls that exist since the creation of the world are present in front of G-d even before they come into this world, just as they appear when they come into this world in the body of a person. Just as the body appears in this world, so the soul appears in front of G-d.*

Note: What this means is that every soul has a spiritual "body" that distinguishes it from every other soul. In fact, this spiritual body is manifested in the physical body resulting in each person's distinctive appearance. This spiritual body actually represents some spiritual mass which when condensed, as in exorcism, is physically noticeable as a moving lump, and can actually break a pane of glass upon departing through a window in the house. This phenomenon is recorded in many of the accounts of exorcism, as in the story involving the Chofetz Chaim, below.

After the exorcism, the person usually returns to normal. The soul of the *dybuk* is then admitted into the spiritual realm, and may continue on its path toward perfection: it may go to heaven, *gehinom*, or be reincarnated, depending on the judgment decreed upon that particular soul and the degree of repair it achieved through the exorcism.

## Dybuk Nowadays

Rabbi Chaim of Velozhin purportedly said that before the coming of the messiah, spirituality will be so hidden that even *dybuk* will be uncommon (Publisher's introduction to Neshamot Mesaprot by Rabbi Yehuda Pataya). Nevertheless, a famous *dybuk* involving the Chofetz Chaim was reported by an eye witness, the great Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, to his son R' Tzevi Yehuda Leib (in Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, Chaye Olam, vol.1 p 20):

On the way from Isisock to Vilna there is a town called Stretzi where there lived a Jew named Nachum. Once this man came to Radin with his 14-year-old daughter who was ill. The father said that she was possessed by a *dybuk*, and told my father what happened:

After Chanukah, a horse fell dead in the barn. Everyone went outside to see what happened, including his daughter. The daughter, very excited and sweaty, went into the house and drank cold water from an open vessel. From then on she became progressively ill. At first, she started convulsing and would fall lifeless like a stone but afterwards she wouldn't know what happened. After this happened several times, a voice started speaking out of her.

The voice said that it was the soul of a daughter of elderly parents who, when 12 years old, converted to Christianity. She later moved to another town, and the Jewish children would run after her, jeering her. In her anger, she joined several non-Jews and strangled two Jewish children. Five years later, when she was seventeen, she died and was judged in the heavenly court to be reincarnated for 15 years.

At first the soul entered into the cross over her grave. When the cross was crushed, she went into a tree, the tree was cut, and she went into a stone that was in the stall where the horse was. When the horse stepped on the stone, it fell and died. From the horse, the soul went into the vessel of water from which the daughter drank.

At that time, 5 years had passed and she still had another 10 years. The father asked the soul why it possessed his daughter. She answered in a sad voice, 'Nachum, she is a sinner. She drinks without making a blessing. If she had blessed, I could not have entered her'. All this, the man told my father, R' Elchonon.

On Friday morning, my father, R' Naftali and R' Koller were in the attic where they learned *Kodshim*, and the Chofetz Chaim came up and asked them to go see the girl. R' Eliyahu Dushnitzer asked her who rules over her, and she said demons. He asked, 'what is their name?' She answered, 'why do you need to know?' And then she explained that when she enters some object, she is protected from the demons that wait for her, and when they find her they torment her. When the voice spoke, the onlookers saw that the girl's tongue didn't move normally, but rather by some other force.

R' Goldberger, who learned in Radin, told me that he heard R' Eliyahu ask, 'even the wicked in that world rest on Shabbat'. She replied, 'whoever doesn't rest on Shabbat here, doesn't rest on Shabbat there'. On Shabbat in the afternoon she started talking; my father asked her if she knows the Chofetz Chaim. She answered, 'yes he is as great as a *Tanna*'. 'If he commands you to leave, will you leave?' She said, 'yes'. My father said, 'the Chofetz Chaim orders you to leave'. 'I'll go'. 'When?' 'Tonight'. 'After you leave, you won't return?' 'If they will say Kaddish for me, I won't return but if not, I'll enter her or her sister'. 'Who shall say *Kaddish*?' 'Two rabbis'. My father asked, 'how long should they say *Kaddish*?'

'One week'. She asked, 'from what part of her body should I leave?' He told her, 'from her small finger'.

During *ma'ariv*, people came in saying that the *dybuk* left the girl. When it left, four people were there and they described that the girl started to scream, 'my side hurts', then 'my shoulder hurts', and then 'my arm hurts'. Then her hand swelled and after that her small finger swelled. Then they heard breaking glass from the window as the *dybuk* left. After waiting to see that girl was stable, her father took her home and the Chofetz Chaim ordered that they say *Kaddish* in the *Kollel* and learn *mishnayot*. R' Eliyahu and R' Gershon of Salant said *Kaddish* the whole week, and the *dybuk* never returned.