

## **GHOSTS AND APPARITIONS**

Contrary to popular belief, a ghost is not a white-sheeted figure flying through the air. A ghost is nothing more than a departed soul that resides in this world without a body. Bodiless, this concentration of “spiritual energy” cannot be perceived in physical ways, however its presence may sometimes be felt in spiritual or extra sensory ways. The causes for this phenomenon of wandering, bodiless souls are similar to those discussed in the section on Dybuk/Soul Possession.

### **Punishment**

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, is called a *dybuk*.

In many cases, the bodiless soul finds no such breach, and continues to wander throughout the physical world. This is one cause for the phenomenon of ghosts.

### **Premature Death**

Another cause for ghosts is found in a very early Kabbalistic work, *Shalshet HaKabbalah* (R’ Gedaliah b. Yosef Ibn Yachyah, 1515-1587). He writes that in addition to punishment, a second reason for the presence of bodiless souls in this world 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

תני רב יוסף, מאי דכתיב (שמות יב) "וואתם 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 seeks to fulfill its unrealized potential in its current life by lingering in this world, often hovering around the place of a tragic or premature death.

### **Proofs for Phenomenon of Ghosts**

1. The British Society for Psychic Research (SPR), a group of qualified scientists, asserts that while most ghost reports are due to illusion, the scientists themselves have verified many.
2. People often sense an indescribable sensation of there being "something there". Different people, who are unrelated and unaware of previous reports, perceive this feeling. In cases where ghosts were reported as a result of sudden, tragic deaths, people totally unaware of the death attested to "feeling" something in the place. This is understood based on what our sources say about a prematurely departed soul hovering around the place of death, intending to linger in this world to fulfill its purpose.
3. The existence of such lingering souls may also be corroborated by the reaction of animals, which seem to have an extra sense for these matters. In a certain home in Kentucky, which was reported as being "haunted", researchers noticed that a cat, a dog, and a rattlesnake independently reacted strongly against a certain unoccupied chair in the house.

The extra sensory advantage animals have over humans is documented in the following sources:

Baba Kama 60b

ת"ר כלבים צועקים מלאך המות בא לעיר.

*The Rabbis taught, when dogs are howling, the Angel of Death has come to town.*

Be'er Ha-Golah, 5 p 98.

מענה יש לדעת, כי אם זה שהאדם הוא היותר במעלה מכל התחתונים, והוא קרוב אל המדרגה הרוחנית ביותר מכל שאר הנבראים עד שהוא יתברך מדבר עמו, אבל כשהרוחניות לא נשלחו לדבר עם האדם, אין לומר בזה שהוא מקבל הרגשה מן רוחניים יותר מן שאר הנבראים, ואדרבא בעלי חיים קודמים.

*While man is on a much higher plane of existence than all other creatures, and is closer to ultimate levels of spiritual consciousness than all of creation - even to the point that G-d speaks to him in prophecy - nevertheless when spiritual beings are not sent to him deliberately to communicate with him, we cannot assume that during such moments he has a greater awareness of the spiritual realm than the lower creatures. On the contrary, the animals exceed him in this.*

## Explanation of “Sense”

There are several explanations offered in our sources as to why even humans sometimes sense the presence of these bodiless souls.

1. Just as a person sees another person, the soul perceives the presence of another soul. Even though the person doesn't see the soul with his physical eyes, the soul sees it with its spiritual “eyesight”. This is manifested in the subconscious awareness that “something” is there, and this awareness is transmitted through the soul to the mind and emotion.
2. Just as a person can feel someone staring at him, and may subconsciously turn around to find a pair of eyes fixed on him, so too the soul feels that self-conscious feeling when another soul is in its presence “staring” at it.

Megilla 3a

אע"ג דאינהו לא חזו מזלייהו חזו.

*Even though a person doesn't see, his mazal sees.*

The Ramchal, in Derech HaShem 3:1:5, explains this to mean that the soul perceives and interacts with unseen spiritual forces which the conscious mind is unaware of except for a faint impression. This faint impression of being “stared” at results in a person feeling spiritually “self-conscious” and gives rise to the feeling that “something” is there.

3. As discussed regarding *dybuk*, and will be examined in detail below, the soul has some ethereal mass (called *tzelem* or *guf ha-dak*). The presence of this ethereal mass is perceived either in a very subtle physical way or by a 6<sup>th</sup> intuitive, subconscious sense; this gives rise to the sensation that something's there.

## Causes of Perception

Sometimes a person may experience more than just a faint, indescribable sense that something is there; he may have a more concrete perception of the bodiless soul. This may occur for several reasons:

1. ESP, Extra Sensory Perception. Some individuals are born with and can develop a special sensitivity to supernatural/spiritual phenomenon. These people are more likely to have an encounter with, and perceive a bodiless soul.
2. Psychic/spiritual “crack”. As we discussed regarding *dybuk*, extreme anger, emotional turmoil, fatigue and hunger can all cause a rift in the psyche or spiritual connection between the body and soul. The resulting vacuum is like an open wound that attracts spiritually parasitic forces like demons and wandering souls. A person in such a state is also more likely to perceive a ghost.

Note: This is similar to a dream state about which the Ramchal (The Way of G-d, 3:1:6) (based on Zohar Chadash 90b) explains that the soul is loosened from the body and interacts with forces in the spiritual world. Here too the “dislocated” soul perceives the wandering souls that are drawn to it.

The following account from the Talmud may be an example of extra sensory perception as a result of emotional turmoil:

#### Berachot 18b

מעשה בחסיד אחד שנתן דינר לעני בערב ר"ה בשני בצורת והקניטתו אשתו והלך ולן בבית הקברות ושמע שתי רוחות שמספרות זו לזו. אמרה חדא לחברתה, חברתי בואי ונשוט בעולם ונשמע מאחורי הפרגוד מה פורענות בא לעולם. אמרה לה חברתה איני יכולה שאני קבורה במחצלת של קנים אלא לכי את ומה שאת שומעת אמרי לי. הלכה היא ושטה ובאה ואמרה לה חברתה חברתי מה שמעת מאחורי הפרגוד? אמרה לה שמעתי שכל הזרע ברביעה ראשונה ברד מלקה אותו. הלך הוא וזרע ברביעה שניה; של כל העולם כולו לקה, שלו לא לקה.

*It is related that a certain pious man gave a dinar coin to a poor man on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in a year of drought, and as a result his wife argued with him. He went to spend the night in the cemetery, and he heard two spirits conversing with one another. One said to the other, "My friend, come wander about the world and let us hear from behind the curtain what suffering is coming on the world." The other responded, "I am not able because I am buried in matting of reeds. But you go and whatever you hear, tell me." So the one went and wandered about and returned. The companion said, "My friend, what have you heard from behind the curtain?" the other replied, "I heard that whoever plants after the first rainfall will have his crop smitten by hail." [Having overheard this] the pious man went and did not sow till after the second rainfall. Everyone else's crop was smitten and his was not smitten.*

3. Near-death, or deathbed experiences. People who lost full control of consciousness in serious accidents or intensive surgery have reported seeing and communicating with ghosts of the deceased. This may be explained as above, namely, the loosened soul is freed from the physical restrictions of the body and is better able to perceive the spiritual realm.

Consider the following near-death soul sightings recorded in the Talmud:

#### Berachot 28b

בשעת פטירתו [של רבי יוחנן בן זכאי] אמר להם פנו כלים מפני הטומאה והכינו כסא לחזקיהו מלך יהודה שבא.

*At the moment of [Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's] death he said to [his assembled students], "Remove the vessels so that they will not become impure, and prepare a seat for [the soul of] Hezekiah the king of Judah who is coming.*

#### Yerushalmi, Sota 9:16

רבי אליעזר תלמידיה [של רבי יוחנן בן זכאי] פקיד ואמר פנו חצר מפני הטומאה והתקינו כסא לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי. ואית דאמרין מן דחמא רביה חמא.

*Rabbi Eliezer, [Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's] student, commanded at the time of his own death, "Clear the courtyard on account of the impurity and prepare a seat for Rabbi Yochanan be Zakkai." There are those that say that he saw what his master saw.*

4. Soul swearing. The previous explanations for perceiving bodiless souls are based on indirect, passive causes. There is, however, a way to actively induce communication with a departed soul through soul swearing. This is evident from the following sources:

Moed Katan 28a

אחווה דרבא הוו יתיב קמיה דרבא חזייה דהוו קא מנמנמ... א"ל ליתחזי לי מר איתחזי ליה א"ל הוו ליה למר צערא א"ל כי ריבדא דכוסילתא.

*The brother of Rova was sitting before Rova. He saw that he was about to die. He said to him, "appear to me after your death." He appeared to him. He asked, 'did you have pain?' He said, 'it was like a blood letter's needle'.*

Yoreh Deah 179:14

להשביע את החולה לשוב אליו לאחר מיתה להגיד לו את אשר ישאול אותו, מותר. ויש מתירין אפילו לאחר מותו אם אינו משביע גופו של מת רק רוחו.

*To take an oath from a sick person to return after his death in order to answer whatever one may ask is permitted. And there are those who permit this even after death if he doesn't swear the body of the deceased, just his soul.*

Reb Yechiel, the father of the Rosh, and R' Shelomo HaCohen made a pact with each other that whoever died first would appear to the other and reveal what occurred to him after death. R' Yechiel died first, and at his burial in front of the assembled congregation, R' Shelomo reminded the deceased of their pact. After several days, R' Yechiel appeared to R' Shelomo while he was learning in the synagogue. R' Yechiel told him that he has great pleasure in heaven and he was also given permission to appear to people, and even to go to his home as when he was alive. Six months later, at midnight on the Sabbath, R' Yechiel appeared to his wife and told her that the authorities had decreed that all Jews in the province would be murdered in the morning. She fled with her family during the night and in this way they were saved.

[from Chida, Shem HaGedolim, Gedolim, R' Eliezer bar Natan 199. The Chida writes that he found a hand written manuscript of R' Chaim Vital which records finding a letter of R' Yehuda, son of the Rosh, in which he attests to hearing this account from the Rosh himself about his father, R' Yechiel.]

## Apparitions

Definition: When the bodiless soul appears as a form, with facial features and even with clothing. Here the occurrence of the ghost is not just a feeling or perception, but what seems to be an actual appearance.

A striking example of this is with King Saul and the witch who summoned the departed soul of Samuel the prophet:

## I Samuel 28

3. Now Samuel had died, and all Israel lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, and (each one lamented him) in his own city. Now, Saul had abolished necromancers and those who divine with the Jidoa bone from the land. 4. And the Philistines gathered, and came and encamped in Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped in Gilboa. 5. And Saul saw the camp of the Philistines. And he feared, and his heart trembled greatly. 6. And Saul inquired of the Lord, and the Lord did not answer; neither by dreams, nor by the Urim, nor by the prophets. 7. And Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a necromanceress; and I shall go to her, and inquire of her." And his servants said, "Behold, there is a necromanceress in En-dor." 8. And Saul disguised himself, and donned other garments. And he went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night, and he said, "Divine now for me with necromancy, and conjure up for me whom I shall tell you." 11. And the woman said, "Whom shall I conjure up for you?" And he said, "Conjure up Samuel for me." 12. And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried aloud. And the woman said to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? for you are Saul!" 13. And the king said to her, "Fear not, for what have you seen?"... 14. ...And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a cloak." And Saul knew that he was Samuel; and he bowed down with his face to the ground, and prostrated himself. 15. And Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you roused me, to bring me up?" And Saul said, "I am greatly distressed, and the Philistines are battling against me, and G-d has turned away from me, and has not answered me anymore, neither through the prophets, nor through dreams. And I have called you to let me know what I shall do." 16. And Samuel said... 19. "And the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow, you and your sons will be with me. Also, the Lord will deliver the camp of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." 20. And Saul hastened and fell his full length to the ground; and he was very frightened because of Samuel's words. Furthermore, he had no strength, for he had not eaten bread all that day and all that night.

Note a few interesting details. When the witch saw the soul of Samuel rising, how did she realize she was summoning for King Saul? Also, why did Saul ask her what she saw, as if he didn't? After all, Saul spoke to the soul, didn't he see it?

Rashi explains: She realized she was calling up for a king since she saw Samuel ascending not in the usual manner of those who ascend through necromancy, for when one conjures up the dead through necromancy, they ascend with their feet upward, while he was ascending with his head upward, in honor of King Saul. Furthermore, the one who conjures the dead up sees him, but does not hear his voice. The one who inquires of him hears him, but does not see him. Therefore, Saul asked her what she saw, but once she told him Samuel had risen, it was Saul who communicated with him. Finally, it may be the fact that Saul was in such anxiety and also had been fasting all day that created the "crack" needed by most people to experience the supernatural.

Ralbag (Rabi Levi ben Gershom 1288-1344) elucidates the experience of such a sighting. He notes that in the experience of both the conjuror and the inquirer, the apparition is not a real sight or sound but rather an illusion of a spiritual reality. This illusion of reality is nevertheless not imaginary nor a hallucination. It is an illusion of a spiritual reality, which cannot be seen with the physical eye, but rather with the spiritual eye. Maimonides succinctly states this notion:

## Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 4:7

והצורות שאין להם גולם, אינן נראין לעין, אלא בעין הלב הם ידועים.

*The forms that are devoid of matter cannot be perceived with the physical eye but only with the mind's eye.*

Consider the following examples of "ghost" sightings recorded in the Talmud:

### Ketuvot 103a

ת"ר בשעת פטירתו של רבי אמר לבני אני צריך. נכנסו בניו אצלו אמר להם הזהרו בכבוד אמכם נר יהא דלוק במקומו שולחן יהא ערוך במקומו מטה תהא מוצעת במקומה...מאי טעמא, כל בי שמשי הוה אתי לביתה. ההוא בי שמשא אתאי שבבתא קא קריה אבבא. אמרה אמתיה שתיקו דרבי יתיב. כיון דשמע, שוב לא אתא שלא להוציא לעז על צדיקים הראשונים.

*Our Rabbis taught: When Rabbi [Yehuda the Prince] was about to depart from this life he said, 'I require the presence of my sons'. When his sons came he instructed them, 'Take care that you show due respect to your mother. The light shall continue to burn in its usual place. The table shall be laid in its usual place and my bed shall be spread in its usual place.' What is the reason? [After his death] he used to come home at twilight every Sabbath Eve. On a certain Sabbath Eve a neighbor came to the door speaking loudly. The maid whispered, 'Be quiet for Rabbi is sitting there.' As soon as he heard this, he came no more, in order not to slight the honor of earlier sages [who were not permitted to appear].*

Note: Sefer Chassidim 327 explains that after Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi died, every Sabbath Eve he would come to his home and would appear in the precious clothing he had worn for Shabbat and would fulfill the mitzvah of *kiddush* for his family. He was unlike the other dead that are free from mitzvot because *tzadikim* are still considered alive [even after death] and can free others [through their recitation] from the obligation of *kiddush*.

### Kala Rabati ch. 2

רבי עקיבא נפק להווא אתרא, אשכחיה להווא גברא דהוי דרי טונא אכתפיה ולא הוה מצי לסגויי ביה והוה צוח ומתאנח. אי"ל מאי עבידתך? אי"ל לא שבקנא איסורא דלא עבידנא בההיא עלמא ועכשו איכא נטורין עילוון ולא שבקין לי דאינוח. אי"ל רבי עקיבא שבקת ברא? אי"ל בחייך לא תשהין דדחילנא ממלאכי דמחו לי בפולסי דנורא ואמרין לי אמאי לא תיתי בפריע. אי"ל אימא לי מאי דקא מנחת. אי"ל שבקית אתתא מעברתא. אזל ר' עקיבא עאל לההיא מדינתא אמר להו בריה דפלוני היכא ליה? אמרו ליה יעקר זכרו דההוא שחיק עצמות. אי"ל אמאי? אמרו ליה ההוא ליסטים אכל אינשי ומצער בריתא ולא עוד אלא שבא על נערה המאורסה ביום הכפורים. אזל לביתה אשכח אתתיה מעוברתא נטרה עד דילדה אזל מהליה. לכי גדל אוקמיה בבי כנישתא לברוכי בקהל. לימים אזל ר' עקיבא להווא אתרא, איתחזי ליה אי"ל תנוח דעתך שהנחת את דעתך.

*Rabbi Akiva went to a certain place where he found a person who was carrying a load on his shoulders but was having a hard time walking with it and was screaming and groaning. He said to him, 'what have you done?' He replied, 'there wasn't a sin I didn't transgress and now there are watchmen over me and they don't let me rest.' Rabbi Akiva asked him, 'did you leave over a son?' He replied, 'by your life, don't delay me [by your questions] for I*

*am in dread of the angels that hit me with rays of fire and they say to me, 'why don't you go faster?' He asked [again], 'who did you leave behind?' He replied, 'I left behind a pregnant wife.' Rabbi Akiva went to the place [of the apparition]. He asked them, 'where is the son of that person?' They replied, 'may his memory be blotted out and his bones crushed.' He asked, 'why?' They replied, 'he was a bandit who destroyed people and distressed the populace. In addition he had illicit relations with a betrothed girl on Yom Kippur.' He went to the home of his pregnant wife and waited until she gave birth. He circumcised [the son] and when he grew older he set him up in the synagogue to pray for the congregation. Some time later Rabbi Akiva went to the place [where he had originally seen the apparition]. He appeared to him and told him, 'may your mind be put at ease for you have put my mind at ease.*

### **How an Apparition Appears**

The appearance of a soul to the living is nevertheless aided by what is referred to by the Kabbalists as an ethereal body (called *tzelem* or *guf hadak*). This spiritual body clothes the soul with form and substance and closely resembles the appearance of the person in his lifetime. In fact, it is the form of this ethereal body that actually fashions the physical appearance of a person as he develops. According to the Kabbalists, the ethereal body is what enables a soul to be perceived by the spiritual mind's eye, resulting in the illusion of the spiritual reality popularly referred to as ghosts.

We'll conclude with descriptions of the ethereal body as explained by Kabbalists throughout the Ages: [from *Nishmat Chaim* 1:13, R' Menashe ben Israel (1604-1658)]

Zohar, Parashat Vayechi

*All the souls that exist since the creation of the world are present before 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.*

Rabeinu Bachaye (app. 1050-1120), Parashat Vayechi

*The ethereal body in which the soul is clothed...has substance but is extremely fine. In this way it sometimes appears in the form of a body, for example from Sabbath Eve to Sabbath Eve, or from Yom Kippur to Yom Kippur. It floats around in the world according to the will of G-d, and appears to whom ever it chooses.*

Abarbanel (1460-1535), Mifa'alot Elokim 48:6

*Souls, from the time of their first creation are connected to an ethereal, spiritual matter of a heavenly nature that is imperceptible to the sense of sight. The soul never parts from this ethereal, spiritual matter, not before joining the body, not while in the body, nor after leaving the body.*

Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (1513-1586), Ma'aseh Breishit ch. 2

*"With skin and flesh did You clothe me" (Job 10:11). Just as garments clothe the body, so the body clothes the soul, implying that the soul is body-like. It is through this spiritual body that the soul experiences bliss or suffering in the world to come.*