

CHAPTER 3:10 PERSONAL PROVIDENCE

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Derech Hashem - The Way of G-d 2:3:10

We'd seen before that G-d grants us various means of achieving perfection ¹ and we'll find that there's yet another one ². We're taught that we're incarnated again and again, and that that enables us to either rectify things in this life that we'd damaged in previous ones, or to perfect things now that we hadn't been able to before ³.

The individual soul ⁴ will be judged at the end of all of these incarnations based on everything that happened to it in the course of them and on its standings in them ⁵. In any event, your current spiritual or material successes or failures may thus be a consequence of what happened to you in past lives.

It's important to know that G-d's judgments about your standing in this life are utterly precise and that He takes *all* exigencies into account ⁶. And He'll see to it that in the World to Come, which is where your ultimate standing will manifest itself, you'll bear no blemish that wasn't your own doing but was a consequence of the situation G-d placed you in and the burden you had to bear then.

Needless to say, very many of your past-life events might dispose G-d to arrange one thing or another to happen to you in your present one, but at bottom the operative principle is always that G-d's "works are perfect and all of His ways are just" (Deuteronomy 32:4) ⁷. It's just that we haven't the wherewithal to know what to take into account when it comes to all of that, yet what we do know is that they're among all of the other things that go into determining your circumstances in life and that lead to your eventual perfection.

Footnotes:

¹ See 2:2:4 and 2:3:8.

² ... which also helps to explain our spiritual or material successes failures, as we'll soon see.

³ Ramchal's point is that we thus all have numerous chances to better ourselves in the course of different lives, and that what you would have succeeded at on a spiritual level in a previous life

might explain your spiritual or material success here in this one just as what you'd failed at then could explain your current failings.

Many don't realize that reincarnation is a factor in the Jewish Tradition, but it certainly is. We grant you that Judaism doesn't tout it as much as others do, but that's probably because there's the concern that if you depend on being reincarnated you might not exert yourself in the here and now to grow spiritually, thinking that you can always "come back and try again", so to speak. In any event, one's actions in past lives certainly help explain some seemingly unjust and otherwise inexplicable things like the suffering of the young and the righteous, etc. in this one.

Ramchal cited reincarnation a number of times in his works. He offered the very fascinating idea that each one of us is comprised of five soul-components termed *nephesh*, *ruach*, *neschama*, *chaya*, and *yechida*, and that each one of them are themselves comprised of a *nephesh*, *ruach*, *neschama*, *chaya*, and *yechida* of their own, etc. His point is that any one of those elements might have to be reincarnated themselves depending on circumstances, which opens our eyes to the complexity of factors that go to explain our situation in this life (*Ma'amar HaChochma*).

He indicates that one is only given *three* chances to be reincarnated and no more, since one shouldn't be given a chance to fail yet again, though others say we're given seven chances or as many as needed (*Pitchei Chochma v'Da'at* 119-123). And see *Clallot Hallan HaKodesh* 10:3 and *Peirush al Ma'amar HaZohar Reish Mishpatim* (found in *Ginzei Ramchal* p. 272) for the role that reincarnation plays in the grand design aside from one's own personal growth.

And for other traditional discussions of reincarnation see Zohar 1:94a, 186b, 3:215a; *Tikkunei Zohar* 22b, 76b, etc. Also see *Sefer HaBahir* 195, Ramban's *Sha'ar HaGemul*, and Ari's *Sha'ar HaGilgullim*.

⁴I.e., you, who will have lived again and again.

⁵That's to say that reincarnation isn't necessarily a gift: one could *lower* his standing in one life or another as well as raise it, and you'll be judged for the lot of them.

⁶I.e., those of your past lives and your current one.

⁷I.e., G-d's judgments are perfectly attuned to everything, and He's utterly fair.