

THIS TIME

by Rabbi Label Lam

Dedicated by Ephraim Sobol in loving memory of his father, Shlomo Mordechai ben Yaakov a"h

And G-d saw all that He had done and behold it was very good... (Breishis 1:31)

What was so very good about the creation? Up until this point everything had received the seal of "good" and now suddenly the report is "very good". One approach that makes "very good" sense is that the totality of creation adds up to more than the sum of its parts. Individually, each ingredient was deemed good. The synergy of all the pieces functioning harmoniously weave together a tapestry entitled "very good".

That's all very nice and reasonable but the Midrash has a different and surprising take. "Very good: This refers to death!" The introduction of death takes this beautiful picture and somehow makes it "very good". Is this some macabre attempt at humor?

There is a topic that I am woefully unqualified to speak about and that is the subject of Gilgulim. The Zohar and the Arizal confirm repeatedly the reality of what the world calls reincarnation. Yes, it may well be that "we have all been here before". One may be spooked or comforted to know that life has a do-over option just in case something is done in a less than perfect way.

A fine fellow, who had taken a mystical path, was alarmed to hear that a great Rabbi whose tapes he had grown to appreciate for their depth and practicality dismissed the notion of Gilgulim. When questioned in a public forum he said that the Talmud does not discuss it and neither does he! This fellow was crushed He told me that he thought that everyone held that there is such a phenomenon as reincarnation.

I consoled and told him that the Rabbi had not rejected the idea entirely. He had merely indicated that the Talmud doesn't talk about it. Why doesn't the Talmud talk about it? I offered the following analogy: A bride and groom stand beneath the wedding canopy in the presence of hundreds of invited guests. The officiating Rabbi approaches the microphone to speak.

He begins customarily by reflecting on the special ness of the occasion they are about to participate in but then he informs the bride and groom in front of the assembled masses that they are not to worry if for any reason this relationship does not work out, then there is always divorce and

remarriage and again as many times as is necessary to get it right. I imagine that before he even finishes his sentence the microphone would be yanked from him and he would be forced off the stage by the hissing crowd. No one with any tact or intelligence would dare whisper aloud such a thing at that prescient moment.

The Talmud is very practical. It speaks to us the way we imagine the Rabbi would and should as we stand under the Chupah, offering advice and counsel on how to make this life work. Relying on the Gilgul-option may induce laziness, and is not a pleasant option, no more than divorce or being left behind in school. Once a soul has tasted the ultimate sweetness of eternal life only a competing pain could force it to assume whatever form once again down here.

Victor Frankel, the father of Logotherapy and Author of Man's Search for Meaning writes the following: "So live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!" It seems to me that there is nothing that would stimulate a man's sense of responsibility more than this maxim, which invites him to imagine first that the present is past and second that the past may yet be changed and amended. Such a precept confronts him with life's finiteness as well as the finality of what he makes out both his life and himself."

Driven by a finite clock a casual warm up session is suddenly intensified. As the minutes and seconds wind down and the sound of that time piece pounds ever louder the urgency increases. One is made to realize how "very good" and precious life is. It forces one to scramble for guidance on how to make better use of and to appreciate this time. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.