

# JUST PASSING THROUGH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who left Egypt as a nation under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. (Bamidbar 33:1)*

This week's parshah about "journeys" happens to coincide with the publishing of my next book, *Just Passing Through: The Impact of Reincarnation on Everyday Life*, which can be ordered through my site, [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org). It is the third in a series of books, after *The Physics of Kabbalah: Accessing The Energy of Creation*, and *Be Positive: Is Not Just a Blood-Type, It Is The Way of Life*.

After spending a fair bit of time learning the Arizal's work on gilgulim, (reincarnations), "Sha'ar HaGilgulim", one thing I came to appreciate more than anything else is how each individual soul is on its on personal journey. Aside from the remarkable information it provides about life in this world, it was fascinating to see how certain key figures kept returning as part of a process of personal rectification.

One example is Aharon HaKohen. We all know that at Mt. Sinai, while Moshe Rabbeinu was on top of the mountain receiving Torah, Aharon HaKohen, as a stall tactic to keep the Erev Rav at bay, was forced into being involved with the building of the golden calf. According to the Midrash, he had seen how they had killed Chur, his nephew, and in order to avoid being killed as well, he faked compliance.

The Talmud explains why. It was not that he had been a coward in any way. Rather, because he was the Kohen Gadol, and Mt. Sinai had the status of the Temple, the killing of the Kohen Gadol in the Temple is a sin that can only be atoned for through death. To save the generation, he saved his own life, even though he knew that his involvement could still be held against him, and indeed it was: he lost two sons because of it, and would have lost all four had Moshe Rabbeinu not prayed on his behalf. However, says the Arizal:

Nachor (the brother of Avraham) reincarnated into Chur, the son of Miriam, while Haran reincarnated into Aharon HaKohen. Chur (Chet-Vav-Raish) took the three letters of Nachor (Nun-Chet-Vav-Raish), while the "Nun" from Nachor remained for the root of Achav king of Israel, as we will explain. However, Aharon (Aleph-Heh-Raish-Nun) has the three letters of Haran (Heh- Raish-Nun), and an additional "Aleph" ... Now, Haran himself had come to rectify the sin of Adam HaRishon who had performed idol-worship. However, not only did he not rectify it, but he even didn't believe in G-d

until after Avraham came out of the fiery furnace, as Chazal say. Therefore, Haran burned in Ur Kasdim. After that, he reincarnated into Aharon to rectify the sin but in the end, he did just the opposite by making the calf. Really, he should have sacrificed himself when the Erev Rav came to him and said, *"Arise and make a god for us"* (Shemot 32:1). However, he erred, thinking that it was enough that they had already killed Chur, who was also from the root of Hevel. This is the sod of, *"And he built an altar before him"* (Shemot 32:5), which Chazal interpret to mean: he built an altar from the slaughtered before him, that is, Chur. Thus, he didn't stop them and instead sacrificed himself, and sinned as a result. This was not rectified until Uriah HaKohen... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 33)

Apparently, Aharon had not known this, otherwise he would have known to sacrifice himself rather than build the calf. All we tend to know is who we are in the present, and even that is not always so clear. In quiet moments, we might consider the fact that we have been in this world several times before, and in different eras, or we might consider the possibility when things happen in our lives that disturb us and for which we can find no logical reason.

However, beyond that, the only journey we tend to relate to is the one from birth to death, which may not be enough.

### **SHABBAT DAY:**

*"In the end, after all has been heard, fear G-d and keep His commandments, for that is all of man."*  
(Kohelet 12:13)

We are all alike and yet we are all very different. One person's love of life can often be the disdain of someone else's. We all have preferences, and the amazing thing is how, even within one family, those preferences can change from family member to family member. What's driving us all? Physical appearances and similarities are certainly a function of genetics, but what about likes and dislikes?

How one relates to the world is a function of consciousness, and consciousness is a function of the soul. And souls can come from all kinds of different places, which means that in a single family it is possible for there to be many souls from different soul roots, from different families of souls. So, physically family members are related, but on the level of the soul, they may not be. Thus, the vast differences from person to person.

It could be that a family of people are all from the same root and reincarnate together, or it could be that they are not, and that a family in a particular lifetime is like a "station" along the way. Just like a bus station, for example, unites everyone in it with a common purpose, that is, everyone there is waiting to catch a bus to their next destination. Likewise, a family unites all the souls in it, who have come together for the sake of personal tikun, which occurs because each one will get from the interactions what he or she needs.

Family members do not need to be soul-mates, like husbands and wives ought to be.

Another very interesting gilgul revealed by the Arizal is that of Rav Sheshet (c. 250 CE). The Arizal taught:

The Talmud says that Rav Sheshet was blind, and how when he learned Torah he was joyous and would say, "Rejoice my Nefesh! Rejoice my Nefesh! For you have I read ...for you have I learned!" (Pesachim 68b). However, this is difficult to comprehend because it was for his own benefit (that he learned Torah), and not for that of another, as it says, "If one becomes wise, it is for himself that he becomes wise" (Avodah Zarah 18b).

Furthermore, why did he specifically say "my Nefesh"? And, why is all of this recorded regarding Rav Sheshet and no one else? To answer these questions, we require an introduction regarding his gilgul. Baba ben Buta the Pious was a student of the elder Shammai. All of his life he brought an "Asham Sufek" — Doubtful Transgression-Offering (Kritot 26a; this is brought when one is unsure if he committed a transgression or not, and Baba ben Buta, just to be safe, assumed that he was always in need of such atonement and brought the offering continuously though, in reality, he probably never sinned in any significant way). It was Baba ben Buta who returned as the gilgul of Rav Sheshet, to complete his tikun. Now, since Herod had blinded him (Bava Batra 4a), Rav Sheshet also ended up being blind. Thus, in "At-bash" (a type of gematria in which the last letter of the Aleph-Bait corresponds to the first — Tav-Aleph, the second-last to the second — Shin-Bait, and so on), the letters of Bait-Bait-Aleph — Baba, are the same as "Sheshet" (Shin-Shin-Tav). For, a person who does not complete his tikun in his first gilgul, even if just by a small amount, must come back to complete it in a second gilgul. However, when he does reincarnate the second time, all the reward for the Torah and mitzvot performed at that time in the second gilgul are for the sake of the Nefesh that came to complete its tikun. At the time of Techiyat HaMeitim (Resurrection of the Dead), the Nefesh will return to the first body within which the majority of Torah and mitzvot was performed. Rav Sheshet knew that his Nefesh had first been in the body of Baba ben Buta, a man of great learning and well-known for his piety. Therefore, he could only have reincarnated a second time to rectify only a small amount which had been left incomplete. This made his body sad, because it meant that all of his efforts were for the sake of that Nefesh, which in the end would return to the first body in Techiyat HaMeitim. For, learning Torah and performing mitzvot only helps the Nefesh, and not the body. Therefore, it is the Nefesh which rejoices and not the body. Thus, he (Rav Sheshet) would say, "Rejoice my Nefesh! etc.," and not me; for you I read, and not for myself; for your purpose I learn, and not for my own purpose. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 4)

### **SEUDAT SHLISHIT:**

*"(Behold, G-d does these things) three times with a man..." (Iyov 33:29)*

One of the questions that often comes up with respect to the concept of gilgulim is, how many times can we reincarnate? The Arizal taught:

Sometimes, we see that a person only reincarnates three times, b'sod *"(Behold, G-d does these*

*things) three times with a man" (Iyov 33:29), b'sod "For three sinners of Israel, and for four I will not return..." (Amos 2:6), and b'sod, "Visit the sins of the fathers on the children for three and four (generations)" (Shemot 20:5), and yet it says in Sefer HaTikunim (69) that a righteous person reincarnates up to one thousand generations, or something like this. In truth, the posuk itself answers this because the "four generations" refers to evil people, as it says, "Visits the sins of the father, etc., to those who hate Me" but, "doing kindness to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." The explanation is: when a person's Nefesh comes into the world for the first time and sins, becoming blemished and forcing it to reincarnate to become rectified, it is considered the first gilgul.*

If he doesn't become rectified, then he has to return in a second gilgul; if he again fails to become rectified, then he requires a third gilgul. From that point onward, he will not be able to reincarnate again, and this is the sod of *"the Nefesh will be cut off from his people,"* completely (Bereishit 17:14). However, this is only when the person failed to accomplish any rectification over the course of the first three gilgulim. If, on the other hand, at some point during the three he began the process of tikun, even a little, then he will not be cut off, but will be allowed to continue the process over the course of even one thousand generations, if necessary. Hence, one who does not rectify at all is called "evil," and one who rectifies even a little is called "righteous". All subsequent gilgulim will complete the rectification process. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 4)

Well, at least "righteous" as far as continuing the process of reincarnation. It is hard to fathom how someone could live a lifetime and not undergo some kind of tikun along the way, but obviously it is possible. If that in fact is the case for three gilgulim, then that Nefesh will not come back again, and more than likely will go to Gehenom instead to complete its tikun of its Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah. That's a lot of Gehenom.

On the other hand, the "righteous person" who is at least moving in the right direction can have been here already many times. Until today, 5,767 years have passed, and if the average generation is about 30 years long, that could amount to 192 gilgulim, providing that the person lived only 30 years each time, and reincarnated immediately upon death, an unlikely scenario.

Then again, this calculation does not take into account the concept of iburim, when a soul comes, even temporarily, into the body of a person already living, to help the host person, or the soul itself. That could happen several times in one lifetime, and several times into different bodies during a very short period of time, as the Arizal explained:

Gilgulim which occur during the lifetime of a person the rabbis call, "Sod Ibur" — the Mystery of Impregnation; this is the basic difference between a regular gilgul and an ibur. Sometimes, it is even possible for the Ruach of a righteous person to come as an ibur, even from the Forefathers, even at this late stage in history. It will all depend upon the level of the mitzvah being performed by the person. Some mitzvot have the power to draw down the Nefesh of a righteous person whereas

others can even draw down the Ruach ...Ibur occurs for two reasons. To begin with, through the ibur of the righteous, the Nefesh of a person can become rectified to the level of the Nefesh of a righteous person. In the World-to-Come he will ascend to that level since the righteous person will have helped him to add mitzvot and holiness to his life. This reason serves the person himself. The second reason is for the sake of the righteous person who was the ibur. For, by helping with mitzvot and rectification, he has a portion in them. This is the sod of what Chazal wrote: "Great are righteous people, for even in death they merit children" (Sanhedrin 47a). In other words, when they cause the person to increase his merit they become like "fathers" who guide and help. This is to their merit. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 2)

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, stopped My anger towards the Children of Israel because he was zealous on My behalf, which prevented Me from destroying them because of jealousy."* (Bamidbar 25:10)

One of the most famous examples of an ibur was in Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, the hero at the end of Parashat Balak. The following is a part of the chapter right out of *Just Passing Through*:

A trivia question: Who were Eliyahu HaNavi's (Eliyahu the Prophet's) parents? When it comes to the other prophets, we are told the names of their parents. However, Eliyahu is simply known as "HaNavi", a depiction of his role in history more than of his family lineage, which seems to be a mystery.

The answer is, Eliyahu did not have parents; Eliyahu was never born. On the other hand, he was, at one point, a real person in a real body, though he did not "acquire" that body through conventional means. The Arizal explains:

The soul that comes to a man when he is born is an actual gilgul, even if it is the combination of two sparks, as in the case of Pinchas who had a spark of Yosef and a spark from Yitro. Nothing else is required to join them together. However, in the case of a soul that comes b'sod ibur after birth, like that of the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu that came to Pinchas, another spark must accompany it. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 32)

The Arizal is talking about Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen, first mentioned in the Torah in Parashat VaAira:

*"Elazar, Aharon's son married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she gave birth to Pinchas."* (Shemot 6:25)

Not able to be kohen since he was born before the Torah was given, he eventually became the zealot who heroically killed Zimri and Kozbi —

*"When Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, saw it, he rose up from amongst the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. He followed the Israelite into the tent and speared the Israelite man and the woman through their lower bodies. The pestilence stopped from the Children of Israel. The number of those who died from the plague was 24,000."* (Bamidbar 25:7-8)

— and he became a kohen as a result:

*G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, stopped My anger towards the Children of Israel because he was zealous on My behalf, which prevented Me from destroying them because of jealousy. Therefore, I give him My covenant of peace. The covenant of the priesthood will be his and his descendants forever, because he was zealous for his G-d, and atoned for the Children of Israel."* (Bamidbar 25:10-13)

The question is how and why? The answer is: b'ibur, as the Arizal revealed. According to the Arizal, for his act of mesirat Nefesh (self- sacrifice for G-d), Pinchas merited additional souls, those of Nadav and Avihu, previously the eldest sons of Aharon HaKohen, who had already died when they brought their unauthorized fire during the inauguration ceremony of the Mishkan (Vayikra 10:1).

Receiving this additional Nefesh (according to the Zohar, the souls of Nadav and Avihu are counted as two parts of a single entity), Pinchas was transformed, able to become a kohen even though he had killed a man. However, it was a transformation that was to lead to even bigger and better things.

Since Nadav and Avihu came to Pinchas as an ibur, not as a gilgul like his own soul, they were loosely affiliated with him. Therefore, the Arizal explains, Pinchas required an additional spark, a "new" spark, to join more permanently the souls of Nadav and Avihu to his existing soul, a necessity of ibur.

This spark must be new to the world and not a reincarnation. Such a spark joined with the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu which came b'ibur, to unify it with the Nefesh of Pinchas, which was an actual reincarnation. Therefore, another new soul had to come b'ibur into Pinchas, and it was called "Eliyahu HaTishbi" from the inhabitants of Gilad, and from the root of Gad, which was a new soul at that time. This was in order to combine the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu with the Nefesh of Pinchas, a gilgul from the time of his birth. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 32)

Thus, Eliyahu came to be. However, to complete the process, an additional spark was required as well:

He also required an additional new soul in order to unite the new soul called "Eliyahu HaTishbi" with the rest of the older souls, that is, with the Nefesh of Pinchas and that of Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, he received an additional soul called "Eliyahu" from the root of Binyomin, mentioned in Divrei HaYomim in the posuk, *"And Ya'areshyah, Eliyahu, and Zichri were the sons of Yerucham"* (I Divrei HaYamim 8:27), as Eliyahu himself wrote to the Chachamim, "from the children of the children of Rachel" (Bereishit Rabbah 71:12) ...Thus we find that four levels were in Pinchas: the Nefesh of

Pinchas with which he was born, a single soul even though it was the combination of two drops, one from Yosef and one from Yitro. The second level was the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu, which came b'sod ibur and was also called "one soul" as is known from the Zohar (Acharei Mot 57b). The third was a Nefesh called "Eliyahu HaTishbi" from the root of Gad, and the fourth level was "Eliyahu" from the root of Binyomin. (Ibid.)

Hence, Eliyahu was actually Pinchas, after he received additional souls as iburim. He was not born from parents, but came into existence as a result of the transformation of Pinchas after his act of zealousness. Pinchas merited as a result of his zealousness to become the host for the holy souls of Eliyahu HaNavi, and became him as a result. He was no longer called "Pinchas" again, but "Eliyahu".

There is much more to the story of Pinchas-Eliyahu, and to the story of each and every one of us. We are all on our own private journeys, and the test of one person is not that of another. The sooner we realize this, the easier it is to accept the differences amongst ourselves, at least when they exist within the guidelines of Torah tradition.

Have a great journey, and a great Shabbat,  
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