

# REINCARNATION

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

**If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself. If he was married, then his wife shall go out with him (Shemos 21:2-3)**

Every time I have given a shiur and the topic of reincarnation has come up, it has hijacked the shiur. While some people do not like to talk about the concept of gilgulim, most people, I have found, do not like to stop talking about it. And, just as souls reincarnate, so too does the discussion about reincarnation, and given that this week's parshah is the basis of much of that discussion in the Zohar, specifically the verses mentioned above, it is a good week to return to the subject once again.

There are two principle works that discuss the Torah idea of reincarnation, both by students of the Arizal based upon the teachings of their rebi. One is called Sefer HaGilgulim—The Book of Reincarnations—and the other is called, Sha'ar HaGilgulim—The Gate of Reincarnations, and as to be expected, there is a lot of overlap between the two. However, for this week's parshah sheet, I am going to use material from the latter, and annotate it.

(Anyone who wants more details can purchase my book on the topic, 'Just Passing Through: The Impact Of Reincarnation On Daily Life' from my online bookstore at [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org). It is also purchasable as an audio book as well.)

It says in Sha'ar HaGilgulim:

When a person is born, his Nefesh (the lowest level of soul) enters him. If he is adequately rectified through his actions [during his first incarnation], his Ruach (the next level of soul) will enter him at the end of his thirteenth year when he becomes a 'complete person'. His Neshamah (the third level of soul) will enter him only when he completes his twentieth year, as it says in the Zohar (Mishpatim 94b). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 2)

This is talking about the ideal situation, when a person successfully completes the rectification of all three levels of soul in a single lifetime. Such a person would not need to reincarnate ever again, at least not for the sake of personal rectification. However, few people ever achieve such perfection in a single lifetime, and are forced to reincarnate.

However, if he does not completely rectify his Ruach, then the Neshamah will not enter him and he

will remain with only his Nefesh and Ruach. Likewise, if he doesn't completely rectify his Nefesh, then he will remain with only his Nefesh, lacking both his Ruach and Neshamah. The Ruach and Neshamah will remain in a place known to The Holy One, Blessed is He, where a place is prepared for each one.

In other words, until a person is able to receive all parts of his soul, the parts he has yet to receive remain hidden away with God until the person is ready for them. Hence, if a person does not perfect himself in a single lifetime, he will not receive the next level until another lifetime. Therefore, a person can go an entire lifetime with even just one level of soul.

If a person does not completely rectify his Nefesh the first time (i.e., in his first incarnation) and dies, then his Nefesh will have to reincarnate, perhaps even many times until it is sufficiently rectified. However, even after complete rectification is achieved a Ruach will not enter him since he only achieved tikun through a gilgul ... Therefore, he will have to die and return in order to receive the Ruach. Furthermore, once the Ruach is sufficiently rectified, then he will also have to reincarnate before receiving a Neshamah, as was the case with the Ruach.

In other words, had he completed his Nefesh during his first gilgul, then he could have received his Ruach while still living in his original body. However, once a person is forced to reincarnate the rules change somewhat, meaning that even should he be ready for the next level of soul during a particular lifetime, he can't receive it, in general, until after he dies and returns in another lifetime, slowing down the process of personal tikun.

If the Ruach is not sufficiently rectified, then the Nefesh and the Ruach will have to come back again, perhaps many times until the Ruach is rectified. Once rectification is achieved, then the person will die and his Nefesh and Ruach will come back with the proper Neshamah until all three are rectified. Once this is done, there is no need for any further gilgulim; he has become a 'complete person'.

This is the general system. Now Rabbi Chaim Vital explains what he learned regarding the impact of sin on the gilgulim process.

If a person rectified his Nefesh and came back to receive and complete his Ruach but sinned, it will not affect his Nefesh. For, this would force the Nefesh to have to come back by itself to become rectified once again. Rather, because he now has a Ruach, the sin will only damage the Ruach, and only this will require rectification.

In other words, once the Nefesh has been completely rectified and he has reincarnated to work on his Ruach, he does not start from Square One once again. Rather, the Nefesh is protected against any further damage for otherwise, the rectification process would go on forever for some people.

Therefore, if an additional reincarnation is necessary to rectify the Ruach, then both the (rectified) Nefesh and the (blemished) Ruach will come back again together. This will continue until the Ruach is rectified, after which time he will have to die in order for the rectified Nefesh and Ruach to reincarnate with the Neshamah. If he has accomplished this and then sins, then it will only damage the Neshamah, just as we explained with respect to the tikun of Ruach.

In other words, only the part of any level of soul that has yet to be rectified is vulnerable to the impact of sin. That which has been rectified in a previous lifetime is closed off in future reincarnations to the impact of sin, so that the rectification process can go further in future lifetimes.

It can also happen that the Nefesh becomes rectified and purified to such an extent that it need not come back again with the Ruach for its rectification. Rather, it remains above in a place fitting for it, "bound up with the Bundle of Life" (Shmuel 1:25:29).

Obviously there are different levels of rectification, one of which is so complete that the level of soul never comes back again but instead remains with God. For example, it could be that someone so completes the rectification of his Nefesh that:

The Ruach would have to come back alone to rectify itself. However, this is not possible and therefore it must reincarnate with the Nefesh of [another person], as it says in Sabba of Mishpatim. They will reincarnate together until the Ruach is rectified. Once that is achieved and the person dies, then the first Nefesh will come back with it (i.e., the Ruach) in order to receive and rectify the Neshamah. Or, the Ruach may come back itself with the Neshamah until the Neshamah is rectified, after which time the three of them no longer need to return and are instead "bound up with the Bundle of Life," as is fitting for them.

The rectified Nefesh and Ruach do not necessarily have to reincarnate together to receive the Neshamah and to rectify it.

There are obviously many more details just in order to understand the standard process of reincarnation and rectification. However, it turns out that there are more than one type of gilgul, as the Arizal explained:

Gilgulim which occur during the lifetime of a person are called by the rabbis, ibur. This is the basic difference between a regular gilgul and ibur, and sometimes it is even possible for the Ruach of a righteous person to come as an ibur, even from the Forefathers, even this late in history. It will all depend upon the level of the mitzvah being performed by the person. For, some mitzvos have the power to draw down the Nefesh of a righteous person whereas others can draw down the Ruach. It is also possible for a person to receive the Nefesh of one righteous person and after that merit another Nefesh from another righteous person, even greater than the first. In such a case, he will

have his own Nefesh, the Nefesh of the first righteous person as his Ruach, and the second, higher Nefesh acting in place of his Neshamah.

In other words, an ibur is a soul that comes to a person who is still alive, on top of the soul that he already has and upon which his body depends. For, as the Arizal explained, a person can have up to four souls in his body at one time. Souls, apparently, do not get claustrophobic.

The question is, why ibur?

Ibur occurs for one of two reasons. To begin with, through the ibur of the righteous soul, 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 mitzvos and holiness to his life. This reason serves the person himself. The second reason is for the sake of the righteous person who is the ibur. For, by helping a person with mitzvos and rectification, the guest soul gains 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.

An ibur, usually a righteous soul, after entering a person acts like a spiritual, internal navigation system for the host person. It helps its host to perform mitzvos, and as a result, it receives reward for doing so. Hence, it is a soul that is able to increase its reward in the World-to-Come even after death!

Thus, ibur benefits both the host body and the guest soul, provided that the person maintains the appropriate level of righteousness to merit keeping the extra soul. And, as the Arizal explained, if such a relationship between person and ibur is maintained the rest of the host person's life, the connection will remain even after death. And, that can help a person to achieve a much higher level of reward in the World-to-Come than he otherwise might have received on his own.

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)