

# A MYSTICAL IDEA MAY HELP US UNDERSTAND THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshios Bamidbar & Shavuot

### A Mystical Idea May Help Us Understand the Incomprehensible

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 814, - Oy, The Eruv is Down, Now What? Good Shabbos & Good Yom Tov!*

At the beginning of the parsha, Moshe is commanded: "Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' house, by number of the names, every male according to their head count (l'gulgalosam)" [Bamidbar 1:2]. The expression l'gulgalosam is a rather peculiar expression. I would like to share with you a Maharam M'Pano from the Sefer - Asarah Ma'amoros. Maharam M'Pano writes that Moshe Rabbeinu looked at every single Jew and saw with Ruach haKodesh [Divine Inspiration] how many times each individual would have to return to this world as a "gilgul" (via the process of transmigration of souls).

Usually, I do not like to delve into such matters because I really do not know what I am talking about and the rule of thumb normally is "we do not delve into hidden matters" (ayn lanu eisek b'Nistaros). But this fascinating comment of the Maharam M'Pano is a very important idea worth being aware of.

According to this mystic ideal of "Gilgul Neshamos", most people in this world have souls that are not visiting this world for the first time. Their souls have been here before in other bodies in previous ages. After they passed on from their previous visits to this world, the souls went to the "World of Souls" and the Almighty for some reason decided that they have to come back a second or third or whatever number of times it may be. Why do souls need to return? It is because each of us has a mission (tachlis) that we have to fulfill in this world. If we come down to this world and do not fulfill our purpose or we damage our souls, then the Master of the World will send the soul back into another body so that we may try to rectify the matter the next time around -- or the time after that -- until we get it "right". This idea is hinted at by the use of the word "l'gilgulosam" - from the root "gilgul". Moshe looked at every individual and saw prophetically how many "gilgul"-iterations the soul would have to endure before it finally fulfilled its mission in this world.

Why do I find it important to talk about this mystical idea involving the soul and the secrets of "Gilgul Neshamos"? The answer is that this concept sometimes can help us understand the incomprehensible. Unfortunately, there are many occasions in life when we do not understand "how such a thing can happen." We do not understand why such a tragedy should befall such and such a person. We do not understand why people should die young or as children, Heaven forbid. Why is this happening? There seems to be no rhyme or reason for it.

Sometimes such events can be easier to understand if we believe in this concept of "Gilgul". That which happens before our eyes is part of a much bigger picture. The Maharam of Pano cites an example. The Talmud states in a portion that many of us study on Tisha B'Av [Gittin 58a]: There was an incident involving the son and daughter of Rav Yishmael ben Elisha, who were taken into captivity (around the time of the Destruction of the Second Temple) and sold to two different masters. The two Gentile masters met and were each raving about the exceptional beauty of their respective slaves. They decided to breed the two slaves together, have them produce beautiful offspring and the two masters would divide up the profits. They put the two young Jews -- brother and sister -- in a room together at night, a room that was pitch black and they told them what they were to do with each other.

Neither had any idea with whom he or she was sharing the room. The Talmud relates that each of them retired to opposite corners of the room, and sat on the ground weeping. The son thought to himself "I am a Kohen the son of High Priests of Israel. How can I have relations with a slave girl?" Likewise his sister said to herself: "I am the daughter of a priest, descended from the High Priests of Israel. Should I become married to a slave?" They each cried the entire night. When the dawn came they recognized each other. They embraced and cried at what had befallen them. They died crying upon one another. The Talmud concludes the narration by saying that the prophet Yirmiyahu referred this when he said "My eye, my eye, sheds tears..." [Eicha 1:16]

How did such a tragedy occur to the children of Rabbi Yishmael? How did it wind up that they were sold as slaves and put into such a situation? The Maharam M'Pano says an unbelievable thing: They were "Gilgulim" of Amnon and Tamar. Dovid HaMeleh fathered two children - Amnon and Tamar who were not halachic siblings. Amnon lusted for Tamar. He arranged a situation where he would be alone with Tamar and he forcibly took her. [Shmuel II Chapter 13] Maharam M'Pano states that as a result of that sin, the two of them had to come back and be placed in a similar situation where they would withstand the temptation and sanctify G-d's Name, rather than participate in the desecration of G-d's Name that took place in the story in the Book of Shmuel.

We read about the situation described in Tractate Gittin and ask how such a thing could happen to the children of Rabbi Yishmael. The answer, says the Maharam M'Pano, is "sod haGilgul" - the secret of the transmigration of souls. We only see half the picture. With the understanding that sometimes we come back to this world to rectify something which went wrong in a previous "cycle," things make a little more sense.

The Chofetz Chaim once gave a parable to explain the expression "tzodku yachdav" in the pasuke "The laws of Hashem are True, together they are just" (tzodku yachdav) [Tehillim 19:10]: There was once a person who came down to this world and was fantastically wealthy. As is many times the case, wealthy people can be terribly arrogant with people not of their means. This person was indeed arrogant and abusive to people of less stature. He offended many poor people in this world. He came up to Heaven and was chastised for never asking for forgiveness from all these poor people he offended. It was therefore decreed that he would have to revisit the world to make amends. The soul pleaded to the Almighty - "Please Hashem send me down the next time as a poor person, as a pauper." The Attribute of Justice responded: "No, that would not be a true test. Send him down again as a wealthy man!" But again the soul pleaded with the Almighty to be sent down the second time as a destitute and broken person. The Almighty in His Compassion granted the soul his wish and it came down as a pauper, a smelly nobody. He lived a miserable existence, but he rectified the sin of his soul and cleansed it.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that this is the interpretation of the pasuk "The laws of Hashem are True, together they are just." We would look at this fellow and ask "Why is he unable to make a living? Why is he so down-trodden? What did he do to deserve it?" We cannot understand it. But ultimately it is "Tzadku Yachdav". If we take into account the entire picture, his earlier existence and sins in that situation, the fact that he was here once before and had abused his privilege of wealth...then the matter becomes clear and sensible. It only makes sense when the two things are taken together.

That is why it is important for us to know this Maharam M'Pano. There are so many things in life that are inexplicable. We cannot begin to understand them. Maybe the answer is that this is a Gilgul. It is a Gilgul that had to come down at a certain time in a certain condition for a certain amount of time. This time, the neshama might be able to do what it was supposed to do originally and then return to the World of the Souls and wait for the Resurrection of the Dead.

The Ramban refers to this secret many times in his commentary to Chumash. Again, we do not understand these things. We should avoid delving into the world of the mystical, but we should at least be aware of the general concept. Gilgul is the great equalizer that can perhaps help give us insight and understanding into matters that appear totally beyond our comprehension.

## **A Thought For Going Into Shavuos**

Everyone is aware that the High Holiday period between Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur is a period of judgment (Din). However, not everyone is aware that the Ari z"l and the Shaloh HaKodesh write that there is judgment on Shavuos as well. The judgment of Shavuos affects each and every one of us. On Shavuos there is Heavenly Judgment that determines the degree of success each of us will have in pursuing our Torah studies during the coming year. Just as the amount of material sustenance each of us will receive for the next 12 months is determined on Rosh HaShannah, the

Day of Judgment, so too the amount of spiritual sustenance each of us will receive from our Torah study during the next twelve months is determined on the Day of the Giving of the Torah.

We know how to prepare for Rosh HaShannah. We know we are to pray, we know we are to do mitzvos. These things determine the nature of the Judgment we receive during the season of the Days of Awe. What are we supposed to do on Shavuos in order that the Almighty will say "if this is how he acts then he deserves to be given a year of success in his learning endeavors?"

The Sefarim say that a person's judgment in this matter is dependent on his desire (cheshek) to learn. The more he wants it, the more he shows the Ribono shel Olam somehow that this is important to him and he wants success in his learning endeavors, the more he will receive it. It is this "cheshek to learn" that determines the extent to which the Almighty will allot him success in learning.

This is what we have to demonstrate over the next few days leading up to Shavuos - our desire to learn! One develops a 'cheshek' if one comes to an appreciation of what Torah is and of how important Torah is to his life. Somehow, in these next few days, we must spend time thinking of the role Torah plays in our lives, the importance that it has. In this way, we can sincerely express to the Ribono shel Olam our desire to grow in learning.

There are different ways to demonstrate 'cheshek'. I recently heard the story of a fellow from Manchester England who was a mohel. He went to the Ukraine to perform circumcisions for Jewish Russian babies who had no other access to ritual circumcision. The mohel was met by a Rav from Monsey who was visiting the Ukraine. The Rav asked him to describe his most memorable experience from the Ukraine.

The mohel related that he once went to perform a milah in some off-the-beaten-track little town in the Ukraine. At one time - many years ago - the Ukraine was a vibrant center of Jewish life and Jewish living. It was a country of Chassidim and men of action. Today, there is very little Jewish life and in this town there was next to nothing. The mohel found out that the Bris was supposed to be in the shul. He located the synagogue and walked into the building, where he saw a number of people gathered. He asked them: What time are you davening here? When is the minyan?

They looked at him curiously and asked "Daven? We do not daven. No one here knows how to daven." The mohel asked "If you do not know how to daven, what are all these people doing in shul?" The person he asked explained. "There are two different things. There is davening and there is coming to shul. We do not know how to daven, but still a Jew must come to shul!"

So morning and evening, these Jews who did not know which way was up in a Siddur, came to shul because that is what Jews are supposed to do. They sit there, they schmooze, they do not daven but they come to shul! They might not achieve "Level B" - davening, but at least they have achieved "Level A" - coming to shul.

I wonder how the Almighty looks at this. People do not know how to daven. They know they are supposed to daven and they feel bad that they are unable to daven, but at least they demonstrate to the Ribono Shel Olam their desire to come to shul. It would seem that such behavior gives much "pleasure" (nachas Ruach) to the Ribono shel Olam.

This is an example of how one demonstrates "cheshek" - the desire to become closer to the Master of the Universe. We have to likewise demonstrate our desire for learning Torah and for having success in our learning. We need to feel and demonstrate that "this is our life and the length of our days".

Therefore, I tried this morning to have special intent in the blessing before Krias Shma of "Ahavah Rabbah". We beseech "instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah. Attach our hearts to Your commandments". Our kavannah in this blessing demonstrates to the Almighty what is important to us.

We are real good at asking "Bestow upon us Hashem our G-d this year all its kinds of crops for the best..." Everybody knows how to sincerely ask for material sustenance. We are real good at asking G-d to heal those of us who are ill and to strengthen those of us who are weak...when we need these blessings. We are good at putting in requests for all of our personal needs of a financial, social, and material nature. We need to focus on improving our Kavanah in blessings that invoke Divine Aid in spiritual matters as well.

The Chazaon Ish says the blessing of "Ata Chonen L'Adam Da'as" [you bestow upon man understanding] is the blessing where a person should pray for Divine aid in his Torah learning. In this blessing, in the blessing Ahava Rabbah in the morning, and in the blessing Ahavas Olam in the evening (a facsimile of Ahava Rabbah) - these are the places where our focus and sincerity will be able to demonstrate how seriously we are asking for Divine Assistance in being able to learn and attach ourselves to G-d's Torah.

"For this is our life and the length of our days" should not merely be lip service. It is the reason for our very existence, the reason for our lives. Let us hope we will all merit Help of Heaven in our learning. May we have an elevation this Shavuot and this coming year, may we merit an increase in our level of Torah, Fear of G-d, and performance of mitzvos.

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