

Judaism and Reincarnation

Parashat Hayye Sarah 5774

ה וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ, לְיִצְחָק.

Gen. 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

ו וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילִגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם, נָתַן אַבְרָהָם מִתְּנֹת; וַיִּשְׁלַחם מִצָּרָתָם בְּגוֹ, בְּעוֹדָו חַי, קִדְמָה, אֶל-אֶרֶץ קְדָם.

6 But unto the sons of the concubines, that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts; **and he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.**

ז וְאֵלֶּה, יְמֵי שְׁנֵי-חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם--אֲשֶׁר-חָי: מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה, וְחֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים.

7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, a hundred threescore and fifteen years.

ח וַיָּגַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה, זָקֵן וְשָׁבַע; וַיֵּאָסֶף, אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ.

8 And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

“Every Jewish soul in history was present at Sinai” - Traditional Jewish belief

As long as a person is unsuccessful in his purpose in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, uproots him and replants him over and over again. (Zohar I 186b)

All souls are subject to reincarnation; and people do not know the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He! They do not know that they are brought before the tribunal both before they enter into this world and after they leave it; they are ignorant of the many reincarnations and secret works which they have to undergo, and of the number of naked souls, and how many naked spirits roam about in the other world without being able to enter within the veil of the King's Palace. Men do not know how the souls revolve like a stone that is thrown from a sling. But the time is at hand when these mysteries will be disclosed. (Zohar II 99b)

Why is there a righteous person to whom good things happen, while [another] righteous person has bad things happen to him? This is because the [latter] righteous person did bad in a previous [life], and is now experiencing the consequences? What is this like? A person planted a vineyard and hoped to grow grapes, but instead, sour grapes grew. He saw that his planting and harvest were not successful so he tore it out. He cleaned out the sour grape vines and planted again. When he saw that his planting was not successful, he tore it up and planted it again. (*Bahir* 195) סֵפֶר הַבְּהִיר ("Book of the Brightness")

the sons of the concubines, that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts;

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to avert quarrels after his death.¹⁴ ⁶**concubines.**

a. The word is written defectively, because there was only one, viz., Hagar, who is identified with Keturah. The only difference between a wife and a concubine was that no marriage-settlement was made upon the latter.¹⁵ **b.** Hagar and Keturah.¹⁶

c. He had no concubines. The reference is to the concubines of the servants of his household: they are called his because both the servants and their

concubines belonged to him. Ishmael and the sons of Keturah are thus not mentioned, but we may assume that he certainly made gifts to them too.¹⁷ **d.** There was no marriage ceremony (*kiddushin*) in the case of a concubine. Further, Hagar and Keturah were not the same person, the former being a concubine, the latter a wife. Hagar was an Egyptian, Keturah a Canaanitish woman. Nevertheless the reference here is to Keturah's sons. She is called a concubine (as in 1 Chron. 1:32), because since Abraham was told, *In Isaac shall seed be called to you* (21:12), he regarded all his other wives as concubines.¹⁸ **gifts.** **a.** That which he had received on account of Sarah (20:14; 16), because he did not wish to benefit from it.¹⁹ **b.** But he carefully

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14. Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines . . . Abraham gave gifts.

We learnt: If a man divides his estate among his sons in his lifetime, gives one more and one less, and places the first-born on the same footing as the rest, his action is valid. That, however, is only if he declares these gifts. If, however, he allots the portions as bequests, we disregard his wishes.¹ That is what Abraham did; he gave one more and another less, but everything as a gift, as it is written, *Abraham gave gifts.*

MbG. T.S. 25, 19.

raham took another wife, and her name was Keturah].³ Said Gebiha b. Pesisa to the Sages: "Allow me to go and argue with them. . . ." Said he to them: "Whence do you bring your proof?" "From the Torah," they replied. "Then I too will argue only from the Torah," he rejoined. "It says, *Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines . . . Abraham gave gifts.* Now, if a father gives some of his sons their portion in his lifetime and then sends them away from each other, has one any claim on the other?"

Sanh. 91a. T.S. 25, 20.

15. TO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES . . . ABRAHAM GAVE GIFTS. The Ishmaelites and the Keturites¹ once came in a lawsuit against the Jews before Alexander of Macedon.² They pleaded: The Land of Canaan (Israel) belongs to us jointly. For it is written, *These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son* (vs. 12); it is also written, *These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son* (verse 19); [further, Ab-

16. GIFTS. Which gifts? Said R. Jeremiah b. Abba: He transmitted to them the name of Defilement.¹

R. Abba said: I once chanced to be in a town where dwelt descendants of the "children of the east,"² and they taught me some of their ancient wisdom and showed me their books of Wisdom. . . . I said to them, "My children, all this is similar to what we have in our Torah;

§ 14 ¹ For then he is bound by the Torah's laws of inheritance, which give the first-born a double portion, whilst the other sons receive equal shares (Deut. 21:17).

§ 15 ¹ Abraham's descendants through Keturah. Probably certain Arab tribes or peoples are meant.

² The famous world conqueror.

³ Since we are all Abraham's descendants, we have equal claims to the land. The parallel passage in Gen. R. 61, 7 quotes, *He shall acknowledge the first-born . . . by giving him a double portion* (Deut. 21:17). Ishmael was Abraham's first-born.

§ 16 ¹ The meaning is obscure. Apparently it refers to the knowledge of the unhallowed arts, such as sorcery and witchcraft.

² See 29:1: *Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east*; cf. our text: *he [Abraham] sent them [the sons of his concubines] eastward, to the east country*. The present assumes that the "children of the east" were these sons and the descendants of those whom Abraham had sent eastward.

and he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country. ⁷And these

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avoided describing these gifts as their inheritance.²⁰ he sent them away from Isaac. Lest they quarrel with him over the estate.²¹ eastward. I.e., to the

east of the land of Israel.²² eastward, unto the east country. a. First the Bible states in general terms that he sent them eastward; it then defines it more specifically, "to [the region known as] the east country," viz., Haran and Ur of the Chaldees. This was his original homeland; there they would find more friendship than elsewhere.²³ b. "The east country" is Aram (Syria); cf. *From Aram Balak bringeth me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the East* (Num. 23:7). He sent them there to take possession of the inheritance which

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nevertheless, shun these books, lest you be led astray after the idolatry mentioned in them . . . for these books mislead mankind. The ancient children of the east possessed a wisdom which they had inherited from Abraham, who had imparted it to the sons of the concubines, as it is written, *But to the sons of the concubines . . . Abraham gave gifts, and he sent them away . . . eastward, to the east country.* In the course of time they followed the track of that wisdom into many false roads."³

What gifts were they? The sides of the lower grades,⁴ and they comprised the names of the powers of the unclean spirit. . . . He sent them eastward, into the east country, because there are the haunts of the unclean practitioners of sorcery and witchcraft.

Sanh. 91b; Zohar 1, 100b. 133b.
T.S. 25, 22 and note.

17. He sent them away from Isaac his son . . . eastward, to the east country.

He advised them, Go as far east as you can, lest you be burnt by Isaac's flaming coal.¹ But Esau received his deserts at Jacob's hands because he came and attacked him.² Thus it is written, *Is this your joyous city* [that has been

so reduced]? . . . *Who has devised this against Tyre, the crowning city* (Isa. 23:7f)? R. Eleazer said: Whenever Tsor (Tyre) is written *plene*, it means the actual province of Tyre; but when it is written defectively,³ it alludes to Rome.

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: Our father Abraham, seeing all these hosts [the descendants of his other sons] and knowing that Isaac had no need of them, for they were but as thorns, sent them away to the east. Said he to them: "My son Isaac is delicate, and every people and tongue that will enslave him and his descendants will be hurled into Gehenna. Therefore go and settle in the east away from him, and remain there as long as Isaac's descendants are enslaved amongst the nations. But when you hear that they live in safety and tranquillity, come and serve them, that you may be privileged to hear the blast of the Messianic *shofar*."

Concerning them it says, *The caravans of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them* (Job 6:19). Now, Sheba alludes to the descendants of Keturah, as it says, *Jokshan begot Sheba*. They dwelt in their homes in the east, until Solomon arose and Israel dwelt in safety, as it says, *Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree,*

³ This softens the strangeness of the statement that Abraham transmitted to them the "name of Defilement," i.e., the knowledge of the unclean arts. In the light of the present we may interpret it as meaning that he transmitted such wisdom to them which through its abuse led them astray into idolatry and unhallowed rites.

⁴ See par. 13, n. 3. "Side" too has a mystic connotation: the "right side" is the source of good, the "left (or, the "other) side" is the source of evil.

§ 17 ¹ He advised them that Isaac was a red-hot coal who could burn them up in his righteousness, should they cross him (Y.T.).

² In Rabbinical literature Esau generally stands for Rome. The Rabbis here were either speaking in anticipation, or after Rome's downfall.

³ צר instead of צור; the former can be read צר, the adversary, and hence was seen as an allusion to Rome, the archenemy of the Jewish people.

"Come and see: *If another woman he takes for him* (Exodus 21:10). How great and supernal the cycles revolving in this verse! For all souls enter a cycle, and human beings do not know the ways of the blessed Holy One: how the scales stand, how humans are judged every day at all times, and how souls stand in judgment both before they enter this world and after leaving this world.¹⁰⁴

"How many revolutions, how many concealed actions does the blessed Holy One perform with souls! How many naked spirits roam that world, not entering the curtain of the King! How overturned by them is the world, overturned by countless sealed wonders! And human beings do not know or notice—and how souls whirl like a stone in a sling, as is said: *The soul of your enemies He will sling from the hollow of a sling* (1 Samuel 25:29).¹⁰⁵

As meaning unfolds, layer by layer, the seeker eventually encounters the face of Torah, experiencing revelation. This seemingly ultimate moment, however, leads back to the initial word: *peshat* reappears, now overflowing with meaning. One emerges from the mystical experience of Torah with a profound appreciation of her form.

On the significance of every element of Torah, see *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 336; *Midrash Tanna'im*, Deuteronomy 32:47; *BT Eruvin* 13a; Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 37–38; *Zohar* 1:54a, 135a, 145b, 163a, 187a, 201a, 234b; 2:12a, 55b–56a, 59b, 65b, 95a, 124a; 3:79b, 149a, 152a, 174b, 202a, 265a; *ZH* 6d (*MhN*). Cf. *BT Menahot* 29b; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:50. On the appreciation of the outer, literal form of Torah, see *Zohar* 3:152a.

104. *If another woman...* The old man returns again to this verse. See above, note 95.

On a person being judged constantly, see *Tosefta Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:13; *JT Rosh ha-Shanah* 1:2, 57a; *BT Rosh ha-Shanah* 16a. On human characteristics (such as strength, intelligence, wealth) being determined before birth, see *BT Niddah* 16b. On the cosmic scale, see above, note 22.

"Cycle" renders גלגולא (*gilgula*), "rolling, revolution, circulation, transmigration." See above, notes 37, 85; below, note 108.

105. naked spirits... If a person dies without having lived virtuously, his spirit lacks a garment of good deeds and is con-

demned to roam the upper worlds aimlessly, barred from entering the divine realm.

On naked spirits, see *Zohar* 1:14b; 2:150a. On being naked of good deeds, see *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:6; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* 14; *Bahir* 141 (200); *Zohar* 1:224a–b. Soon the old man focuses on the lack of a specific good deed, the first commandment of the Torah: procreation. This lack, in particular, bars entrance through the royal curtain. See *Zohar* 1:13a, 48a, 90a, 115a, 186b; *ZH* 37a, 89b (*MhN*, *Rut*).

On nakedness and childlessness, cf. the rare biblical term ערירי (*ariri*), which apparently means "stripped," hence "stripped of children, childless." See Genesis 15:2; Leviticus 20:20–21; Jeremiah 22:30; *Targum Onkelos* and Rashi on Leviticus 20:20. In this section of the *Zohar*, the term for "naked" is ערירא (*artira*), pl. עריראין (*artira'in*), instead of the normal form ערילאי (*artilai*), pl. ערילאין (*artila'in*). Perhaps the strange spelling *artira'in* is influenced by *ariri(n)*.

On the image of the sling, see *BT Shabbat* 152a: "Rabbi Eli'ezer said, '...The souls of the wicked are continually muzzled, while one angel stands at one end of the world and another stands at the other end, and they sling their souls [the souls of the wicked] to each other, as is said: *The soul of your enemies He will sling from the hollow of a sling.*'"

See Radak on the verse in Samuel; *Zohar* 1:77b, 128a, 217b; 2:59a, 103a, 106a, 142b;

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"Since we have begun to reveal, now is the time to reveal that all נשמותין (*nishmatin*), souls, issue from a grand and mighty tree of that river issuing from Eden, and all רוחין (*ruh'in*), spirits, issue from another, small tree. *Neshamah*, soul, from above; *ruah*, spirit, from below—joining as one, like male and female. When joining as one, they shine supernal radiance, and in the joining of the two of them, they are called נר (*ner*), lamp, *lamp of YHVH*. What is *ner*? *Neshamah*, *ruah*. By virtue of these two joining together as one, they are called *ner*, as is written: נשמת (*Nishmat*), *The neshamah of, a human is נר (ner), the lamp of, YHVH* (Proverbs 20:27). *Neshamah*, *ruah*—male and female, illumining as one. Without one another they do not shine, are not called *ner*; joining as one, all is called *ner*.¹⁰⁶ Then *neshamah* wraps herself in *ruah* to abide there above in the hidden palace, as is written: for *ruah* יעטוף (*ya'atof*), *envelops, before Me*. It is not written יתעטף (*yit'attef*), *is enveloped*, but rather *ya'atof, envelops*. Why so? Because of נשמות (*neshamot*), *souls, that I have made* (Isaiah 57:16). There, above, in the hidden garden, *neshamah* wraps and clothes herself in *ruah*, fittingly. For since only *ruah* appears or serves in that palace, *neshamah* does not come there but rather clothes herself in that *ruah* there. And when she descends into the Garden of Eden below, of this world, she clothes herself in that other *ruah* that I mentioned—the one issuing, deriving from there. In all of them she dwells in this world, encloded in them.¹⁰⁷

3:25a, 185b–186a, 213b; Moses de León, *Shushan Edut*, 351–53 (and n. 171, where Scholem cites De León's likely source in Jacob ha-Kohen's *Sefer ha-Orah*); idem, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 373 (and n. 6), 399; idem, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 67–68; Liebes, *Peraqim*, 345–48 (who discusses the Zoharic neologism קוספּטא [*quspeta*], "hollow of a sling").

Cordovero (OY) remarks that the spirit's wandering explains a phrase in the old man's riddle (above at note 5): "moving in separation."

106. all נשמותין (*nishmatin*), souls, issue... The *neshamah* (the highest level of soul) issues through *Tiferet* or *Yesod*, identified with the cosmic tree (or Tree of Life), rooted in the river of *Binah*, who *Herself* issues from *Hokhmah* (identified with Eden). The *ruah* (the next level of soul) issues from *Shekhinah*, identified with "another, small tree," corresponding to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Just as *Tiferet* (who is masculine) and *She-*

khinah (who is feminine) join together, so do *neshamah* and *ruah*. Their union is symbolized by the word נר (*ner*), whose letters are the initials of נשמות (*neshamah*) and רוח (*ruah*).

On the various levels of soul, see above, note 18; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:684–722 (esp. 696). On *neshamah* issuing from *Tiferet*, and *ruah* from *Shekhinah*, see *Zohar* 1:81a–b (ST); 3:170a. On *Shekhinah* as the small tree, see *Zohar* 1:7a. Cf. below, note 133. For various interpretations of the tree(s), see OY; Vital; Liebes, *Peraqim*, 113–14; Oron, "Simeni kha-Ḥotam al Libbekha," 20.

On the river issuing from Eden, see Genesis 2:10: *A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four riverheads*. The full verse in Proverbs reads: *The breath (or: spirit) of a human is the lamp of YHVH, searching all the innermost chambers*.

107. Then *neshamah* wraps herself in *ruah*... In the celestial, palatial Garden of Eden, the *ruah* *envelops* the *neshamah*. As the

"A spirit leaving this world who has not grown or spread in this world undergoes rolling and finds no rest, comes revolving into the world like a stone in a sling, until it finds a redeemer to redeem it—by that very vessel that he used, to which he clung with his spirit and soul, and who was his mate, spirit with spirit—and that redeemer builds it as before.¹⁰⁸

neshamah descends to the earthly Garden of Eden, "she clothes herself in that other *ruah*," namely, in the soul-garment of a convert, which issues from the Garden of Eden. See above, note 87.

The clause "*neshamah* does not come there" apparently means "... does not appear there without a garment." In the closing sentence, the phrase "in all of them" refers to both *ruhōt*.

The verse in Isaiah reads: *For ruah, spirit, יעטף (ya'atof), would grow faint, before Me, ונשמות (u-nshamot), and the souls, that I have made.* The old man understands *ya'atof* as a transitive verb and according to a different meaning of the root עטף ('*tf*), "to wrap, envelop."

108. A spirit leaving this world... If a man dies childless (without his spirit having "grown or spread"), his spirit rolls restlessly through the world—unless his brother redeems his spirit through performing levirate marriage: marrying the widowed wife, impregnating her, and consciously drawing that homeless spirit into the embryo. This process of reincarnation provides the spirit with another opportunity to fulfill itself on earth.

According to the biblical custom of levirate marriage, if a married man dies childless, his brother should marry the widow and then father a child who will be considered the son of the deceased. Posthumously providing the dead man with a son prevents his name from being blotted out. In Kabbalah, levirate marriage is understood in terms of reincarnation: not just the name, but the soul of the deceased husband is preserved, transmigrating into the embryo generated by the union of his widow and his brother.

On levirate marriage, see Genesis 38; Deuteronomy 25:5–10; Ruth 3–4; Tigay, *Deuter-*

onomy, 231, 482–83. On the medieval context, see Katz, *Halakhah ve-Qabbalah*, 127–74; Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 90–101. The term "levirate" derives from Latin *levir*, "husband's brother." The Hebrew term יבום (*yibbum*), "levirate marriage," similarly derives from יבם (*yabbam*), "husband's brother."

On reincarnation in Kabbalah, see *Bahir* 86 (121–22), 104 (155–56), 126–27 (184), 135 (195); Nahmanides on Genesis 38:8; Deuteronomy 25:6; Job 33:30; *Zohar* 1:48a, 131a, 186b–188a, 239a; 2:75a, 91b; 3:7a, 88b, 182b; *ZH* 59a–c (*MhN*), 89b–90a (*MhN*, *Rut*); Todros Abulafia, *Otsar ha-Kavod*, *Yevamot* 62a, p. 25c–d; *Ketubbot* 111a, p. 27c; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 242–43; idem, *Kabbalah*, 344–50; idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 188–94, 237–38 (on the Catharist theory of reincarnation), 456–60; idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 197–250 (on the Catharists, 199–200); idem, *Shedim Ruhot u-Nshamot*, 186–214, 298; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:1362–63; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 234–56; Gottlieb, *Mehqarim*, 370–96; Liebes, *Peraqim*, 291–327; Elijior, "Torat ha-Gilgul be-Sefer Gal-ya Raza"; Oron, "Qavvim le-Torat ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Gilgul," 283–89; Schwartz, "Ha-Biq-qoret al Torat Gilgul ha-Neshamot"; Yisra'eli, *Parshanut ha-Sod*, 113–29. This section (*Sava de-Mishpatim*) constitutes the first extensive kabbalistic discussion of reincarnation.

On levirate marriage and reincarnation, see Ezra of Gerona, *Peirush le-Shir ha-Shirim*, 537; Nahmanides on Genesis 38:8; *Zohar* 1:155b (*ST*), 186b–188a; 3:167a, 177a; *ZH* 59a–c (*MhN*), 89d–90a (*MhN*, *Rut*); Moses de León, *Shushan Edut*, 353–60; idem, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 240–52; idem, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 136–46; idem, *She'elot u-Tshuvot*, 33–35; Katz, *Halakhah ve-Qabbalah*, 62–65; 167–71.

On the term גלגול (*gilgula*)—Hebrew

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fer ha-Mishqal,
ivot, 33–35; Katz,
55; 167–71.
gilgula)—Hebrew

"The spirit that he left, adhering to that vessel, is not lost—for nothing in the world, be it ever so small, lacks a place in which to be hidden and absorbed; it is never lost. Consequently, the spirit that he left in that vessel is there, and this pursues the root and basis from which it issued. It brings it and builds it in its place, in the abode of the spirit of his mate who emerged with him, and it is built there as before. This is a new creature now in the world, a new spirit and a new body.¹⁰⁹

"Now, you might say, 'This spirit is the same as it was.' This is so, but it is built only by virtue of the other spirit that he left in that vessel.¹¹⁰ [100a]

"Here is a mystery of mysteries. In the Book of Enoch:¹¹¹ 'This structure that is built, is built only by that spirit that he left there in that vessel. Beginning to

גלגול (*gilgul*)—"rolling, revolving, circula-
tion, transmigration, reincarnation," see
Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the God-
head*, 302–3, n. 23; idem, *Shedim Ruhot*
u-Nshamot, 186–93; Liebes, *Peraqim*, 294–96.
Cf. above, notes 37, 85, 104.

On "vessel" as a metaphor for wife, see
BT *Sanhedrin* 22b; *Zohar* 3:167a. Moses de
León employs the same image in *Shushan*
Edut, 355; *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 244; *She'elot*
u-Tshuvot, 34. The image of building ("that
redeemer builds it as before") derives from
Deuteronomy 25:9. Cf. Genesis 16:2; 30:3. On
levirate marriage as redemption, see *Ruth* 3–4.

109. The spirit that he left... During
his lifetime, through uniting sexually with
his wife, the deceased husband had infused
some of his spirit into her, and this remained
in her even after he died. Now this spirit
pursues its origin—the husband's wandering
spirit—and brings it to his widow's womb,
where it is implanted in the embryo gener-
ated by the widow and her brother-in-law.

See the fragment by Nahmanides pub-
lished by Scholem in "Peraqim Mi-Toledot
Sifrut ha-Qabbalah (8)," 417–18. On every-
thing having its place, see *M Avot* 4:3; below
at note 120.

The phrase "the spirit of his mate who
emerged with him" refers to the idea that a
human couple is predestined for one an-
other: their souls were originally one, then
split into male and female, and entered the
world in order to reunite.

See Plato, *Symposium* 189d–191d; *Zohar*
1:85b, 91b; 2:246a (*Heikh*); 3:43b, 167a, 283b;
Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:1355–56. Cf.
the rabbinic tradition on the original an-
drogynous nature of Adam in *Bereshit Rab-*
bah 8:1: "Rabbi Yirmeyah son of El'azar said,
'When the blessed Holy One created Adam,
He created him androgynous, as is said:
Male and female He created them (Genesis
1:27).' Rabbi Shemu'el son of Nahmani said,
'When the blessed Holy One created Adam,
He created him with two faces. Then He
sawed him and gave him two backs, one on
this side and one on that.'"

110. 'This spirit is the same as it was'...
Since it is built out of the deceased hus-
band's spirit, why is it considered new? Be-
cause, the old man implies, it is transformed
by joining with the remnant of the hus-
band's spirit found in his wife.

111. the Book of Enoch... A volume of
esoteric knowledge housed in the real or imag-
inary Zoharic library. Concerning Enoch,
Genesis 5:24 states: *He was no more, for God*
took him. In postbiblical literature this verse
is taken to mean that God transported Enoch
through the heavens, a journey recorded ex-
tensively in the Enoch literature. The *Zohar*'s
Book of Enoch, though influenced by this
literature, is not identical with any of its par-
ticular volumes.

On this book, see *Zohar* 1:13a, 37b, 58b, 72b;
2:55a, 103b, 105b, 180b, 192b, 217a, 277a–b;
3:10b, 236b, 240a, 248b, 253b; *ZH* 2c (SO).

be built, it attracts the spirit that roams naked, drawing it. There, two spirits that are one. Afterward this is spirit and that is soul, and the two of them are one. If he succeeds in increasing fittingly, the two become one, in which will be clothed another supernal soul. Just as other inhabitants of the world have a spirit—attained by those souls who were first to seize them—and another spirit from above, and a holy soul clothes herself in them; so too, he himself has two spirits, in which a supernal soul will clothe herself.¹¹²

“Look! This one has another body, constructed now anew. The first body, what becomes of it? Either one or the other is in vain. According to human understanding, it follows that the earlier one, who did not complete himself at first, vanishes, since he did not prove himself worthy. If so, it was for nothing that he engaged in the commandments of Torah, even if just one of them! And we know that even the emptiest in Israel are all as full of *mitsvot* as a pomegranate. This body, although not consummated by growing and increasing in the world, still kept other commandments of Torah, which he did not lose—and was that for nothing?”¹¹³

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See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:158, 163, nn. 60, 61; Margaliot, *Mal'akhei Elyon*, 80–83; Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 25; and Lavi, *Ketem Paz*, 1:22d: “All such books mentioned in the *Zohar*... have been lost in the wanderings of exile.... Nothing is left of them except what is mentioned in the *Zohar*.”

112. This structure that is built... The new spirit in the embryo is formed by the remnant of the deceased husband's spirit left in his wife, which draws the wandering spirit, joining with it as one. When the child is born, the remnant of spirit becomes his *ruah* (spirit) and the formerly wandering spirit becomes his *neshamah* (soul). If the son eventually “increases” by engendering new life, these two spiritual elements become a single *ruah*, which clothes a new *neshamah* from above.

Other Jews (called here “inhabitants of the world”) possess a convert's soul-garment (see above, note 87), as well as their own *ruah*, which together clothe the *neshamah*. Correspondingly this new child possesses two *ruhot* (spirits)—the remnant of the deceased husband's spirit (which takes the place of the convert's soul) and the wandering spirit.

The old man's description of the “two spirits that are one” solves his riddle of “two who are one” (above at note 5).

113. Look! This one has another body... Having quoted from the Book of Enoch, the old man poses a challenging question: Since the infant has a new body containing the soul of the deceased, what will happen at the end of days? Which body will be resurrected and reunited with the soul—the original husband's body or this new body? In either case, one or the other is בריקניא (*be-reiqanya*), “in vain, in emptiness,” emptied of soul. One might assume that the first body vanishes, because it failed to complete itself by engendering new life. But if so, whatever commandments the original husband did manage to fulfill were fruitless, earning no reward. How can this be?

On the problem of a single soul and the resurrection of multiple bodies, see *Zohar* 1:131a; 3:308a–b; Scholem, *Shedim Ruhot u-Nshamot*, 191, 197. Cf. Matthew 22:23–33.

On the image of the pomegranate, see BT *Berakhot* 57a: “Like a slice of pomegranate is ריקתך (*raqatekh*), your forehead (Song of Songs 4:3). . . . Even ריקנין (*reiqanin*), the empty ones, among you [i.e., among Israel] are as full of

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Reincarnation in Judaism Rabbi Adam Jacobs

It is widely recognized that Abraham was the progenitor of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. What is less known is that the Torah also suggests that he sowed the seeds of what would eventually become the eastern religions as well. Late in his life (and after his wife Sara's death) he married another woman named Keturah and had several children with her as is outlined in Genesis 25. In that chapter there are some interesting nominal correspondences between the children's names and deities of the Hindu pantheon. For instance, one child is named Yokshan which shares the same roots (KSHN) as Krishna and a grandchild is called Shiva. Beyond that, Abraham's name itself shares roots (BRM) with the name Brahma, the Hindu god of creation and the "great grandsire of all human beings." Abraham's wife was Sara and Brahma's is called Sarasvati. While this is obviously not conclusive, it is intriguing grist for the mill.

The text in 25:5 tells us that "Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the concubine-children who were Abraham's, Abraham gave gifts; then he sent them away from Isaac his son, while he was still alive, eastward to the land of the east." The classical commentators wonder at this; if he had already given "all that he had" to Isaac, what were these gifts that he gave the (soon to be) eastbound children? The indispensable 11th Century elucidator Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) explained that he gave them spiritual gifts -- knowledge that they would need for their journey. It's possible that this is the common origin of Judaism and the East's shared belief in reincarnation.

The great Italian Kabbalist Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal) explained in his classic work *The Way of God* that "a single soul can be reincarnated a number of times in different bodies, and in this manner, it can rectify damage done in previous incarnations. Similarly, it can also achieve perfection that was not attained in its previous incarnations." Though a full treatment of the logical implications of this idea is not possible in a blog post, this would help to explain the classical existential question of why bad things happen to good people (and vice versa). Jews believe that a human being at his or her core essence is a consciousness, one that transcends the corporeal self. In this light, the human experience is painted on a vastly larger canvas than we currently imagine and has a critical bearing on who we are. One way of exploring this idea is through the following metaphor: You have an axe. It gets a nick in the head so you have it replaced. Then, the handle breaks, and you replace that. Is it the same axe? I once saw a Hare Krishna display in Central Park that illustrated the same idea. It was a small model of a single human life cycle from infancy to old age. "Look at these bodies" the guy explained to me, "do they look related?" "What maintains their continuity?" Biologically speaking we don't inhabit the same container for the duration of our lives as most of our cells fully replicate about every 10 years. If our consciousness can endure a series of shifting bodies then perhaps it can leap from one to another.

Rabbi Isaac Luria's *Book of Incarnations* is a fascinating exploration of the soul roots of many of the key figures of the Torah. It demonstrates how seemingly unrelated events and people in classic Biblical accounts are actually the same (albeit) reincarnated souls back to take a second crack at achieving their potential or to rectify their poor choices and the negative consequences from previous incarnations. For example, though Noah was considered a righteous man, he is faulted for failing to take responsibility for his generation and allowing them to be destroyed by the flood. The Hebrew word for the boat he built (and that saved humanity) is "teyva." This word is only used one more time in the Torah and it also involves being saved from the water. It's the name given to the little raft that Moses' mother made to hide him from the Egyptians. According to Rabbi Luria, Moses is the soul of Noah who's been offered a second chance to take responsibility for his people and the unusual word is the hint that links the accounts. (This particular soul succeeds with flying colors in round two).

The concept of reincarnation also motivates various aspects of Jewish law, prayer and ethics. Ultimately we believe that good deeds should be performed with no ulterior motive. Nonetheless, it's understood, for instance, that if we transgress the Torah's prohibition against bearing a grudge, (Leviticus 19:18) we might be dragged into someone else's next

incarnation to give *them* the chance to do right by us. To prevent that need there is a wonderful nightly meditation that guides us towards forgiveness of all who may have wronged us that day. It reads (in part) "Master of the Universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or antagonized or sinned against me -- whether against my body, my property, my honor or against anything of mine...whether through speech, deed, thought or notion; *whether in this transmigration or another transmigration.*"

Just as Israel geographically stands at the threshold of Europe and Asia, so do its tenets. There is a surprising amount of similarities between Judaism and the spiritual disciplines of the east, including a "shakra" system, a meditative tradition and the aforementioned belief in reincarnation. Through the study of the more esoteric elements of the Jewish tradition, more and more people are discovering the overlap, finding meaning in it and embracing a crucial part of their heritage that has been deemphasized for far too long.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-adam-jacobs/reincarnation-in-judaism_b_811379.html

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Reincarnation: The Transmigration of a Jewish Idea

Though some Jewish thinkers vigorously rejected the notion of reincarnation, kabbalists embraced it enthusiastically.

By Rabbi Louis Jacobs

The reincarnation of souls into other people or animals--known as gilgul hanefesh (lit. the rolling of the soul) in Hebrew--is an outgrowth of the idea of the soul's immortality. It has seized the imagination of many Jews and remains a popular literary subject. Numerous stories of demonic possession and exorcism by wonder rabbis are based on the idea of lonely souls, sinners in previous lives, entering into other bodies. Reprinted with permission from The Jewish Religion: A Companion, published by Oxford University Press.

Reincarnation is the idea that a soul now residing in a particular body may have resided in the body of another person in an earlier period of time. Theories of reincarnation or metempsychosis are found in many religions and cultures, ancient and modern, but there are no references to the idea in the Bible or the Talmud and it was unknown in Judaism until the eighth century CE, when it began to be adopted by the Karaites [a sectarian Jewish group] (possibly, it has been suggested, under the influence of Islamic mysticism).

The Philosophers Were Scornful

The usual Hebrew term for reincarnation is *gilgul*, "rolling," that is, the soul "rolls" through time from one body to a different body. The earliest [non-Karaite] reference to the doctrine is that of Saadiah [882-942] (*Beliefs and Opinions*, vi. 8). Saadiah writes:

"Yet I must say that I have found certain people, who call themselves Jews, professing the doctrine of metempsychosis, which is designated by them as the theory of the 'transmigration' of souls. What they mean thereby is that the spirit of Reuben is transferred to Simeon and afterwards to Levi and after that to Judah. [These names are generic, like Tom, Dick and Harry; no reference to the sons of Jacob is intended. Ed.] Many of them would even go so far as to assert that the spirit of a human being might enter into the body of a beast or

that of a beast into the body of a human being, and other such nonsense and stupidities."

We learn incidentally from Saadiah's discussion that one of the reasons these people believed in reincarnation (this reason resurfaces in the Kabbalah) was because of the theological difficulties in God allowing little children to suffer. That they do, it was argued, is because of sins they had committed in a previous existence.

Among the other medieval thinkers, neither Judah Halevi [died 1141] nor Maimonides [1135-1204] makes any mention of the doctrine. Albo [15th century] (*Ikkarim*, vi. 20) refers to the doctrine only to refute it. He argues that the whole purpose for which the soul enters the body is to become a free agent, but once a soul has become a free agent why should it return to occupy another body? It is even more unlikely, says Albo, that human souls transmigrate into the bodies of animals.

The Mystics Were Believers

The kabbalists, on the other hand, do believe in reincarnation. The *Zohar* [the great 13th century kabbalistic text] refers to the doctrine in a number of passages (e.g. ii. 94a, 99b). Nahmanides [1194-1270], in his commentary to the book of Job (to Job 33:30), speaks of reincarnation as a great mystery and the key to an understanding of many biblical passages. The later Kabbalah is full of the belief in the transmigration of souls.

Various sins are punished by particular transmigrations; for example, the soul of an excessively proud man enters the body of a bee or a worm until atonement is attained. The heroes of the Bible and later Jewish histories are said to be the reincarnation of earlier heroes. Thus the soul of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) entered the body of Jethro and the soul of Abel the body of Moses. When Moses and Jethro met in friendship they rectified the sin caused by the estrangement of the two brothers (Exodus 18:1-12).

Manasseh ben Israel (died 1657) devotes a large portion of his *Nishmat Hayyim* ("The Soul of Life") to a defense of reincarnation. In chapter 21 Manasseh observes that the doctrine was originally taught to Adam but was later forgotten. It was revived by Pythagoras [the 6th-century BCE Greek mathematician and philosopher], who was a Jew (!), and he was taught the doctrine by the prophet Ezekiel.

The Hasidim believe explicitly in the doctrine, and tales are told of Hasidic masters who remembered their activities in a previous incarnation.

Three Kinds of Reincarnation

In the kabbalistic literature three types of reincarnation are mentioned:

1. *gilgul*, transmigration proper, in which a soul that had previously inhabited one body is sent back to earth to inhabit another body.
2. *ibbur*, "impregnation," in which a soul descends from heaven in order to assist another soul in the body.
3. *dybbuk*, a generally late concept, in which a guilt-laden soul pursued by devils enters a human body in order to find rest and has to be exorcised.

The philosophical difficulty in the whole doctrine of reincarnation lies in the problem of what possible meaning can be given to the identity of the soul that has been reincarnated, since the experiences of the body determine the character of the soul. How can the soul that has been in two or more bodies be the "same" soul?

[Gershom] Scholem has suggested that it was this difficulty which led the *Zohar* to postulate the existence of

the *tzelem* ("image"), a kind of "astral body" which does not migrate from body to body and which therefore preserves individual identity. We are here in the realm of the occult, as, indeed, we are in the whole area of reincarnation.

Some modern Jews are attracted to the occult and believe in reincarnation. Otherwise the doctrine has had its day, and is believed in by very few modern Jews, although hardly any Orthodox Jew today will positively denounce the doctrine. This doctrine of reincarnation shows how precarious it is to attempt to see Judaism in monolithic terms. Here is a doctrine rejected as a foreign importation by a notable thinker such as Saadiah, and upon which other thinkers, including Maimonides, are silent, and yet, for the kabbalists, it is revealed truth.

Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs (1920-2006) was a Masorti rabbi, the first leader of Masorti Judaism (also known as Conservative Judaism) in the United Kingdom, and a leading writer and thinker on Judaism.

Hasidic stories about reincarnation

<http://www.pinenet.com/~rooster/stories.html>

Rich Man, Poor Man

(This old story comes from the Karliner Hasidim, and is cited by Martin Buber in *Tales of the Hasidim*. It is remarkable similar to modern documented accounts by para-psychologists, where children clearly remember details from their past lives.)

Rabbi Aharon, who was known as the Karliner Rebbe, died young. Reb Shlomo, who was his closest disciple and destined to become his successor, did not want the position of Rebbe. Why not? Because Reb Shlomo and Rabbi Aharon had once been fellow students who sat together as equals at the house of their teacher, the Great Maggid of Mezeritch. So it did not seem right to Shlomo now, that he should take his elder friend's place as Rebbe of Karlin. Besides, Reb Shlomo had seen how the people flocked to a Rebbe day and night, so that he had no privacy or peace.

"I don't want such fame and responsibility," Shlomo said. "I just want to lead a private life as an ordinary Jew."

So the Karliner Hasidim were left without a Rebbe. That is, until the night when Rabbi Aharon himself appeared to Reb Shlomo in a dream and said, "Shlomo, my friend and dearest student, if you will take on the yoke of leadership, you will be granted the power of seeing all the wanderings of souls in their various incarnations."

Reb Shlomo could not resist the great temptation of this offer. To be able to read the past lives of all souls! Still in the dream, he gave Rabbi Aharon his word that he would assume the succession and become the next Karliner Rebbe.

As it was promised in the dream, so it became in the waking world. The next morning when Reb Shlomo awoke, he was able to see the destinies of all human beings on earth. He knew their past lives, their present accomplishments, and all the repairs they needed to make for their souls. It was indeed an awesome spiritual gift!

That very same day, a messenger brought Reb Sholom a *kvittel* -- a written prayer request -- along with a great sum of money as a donation. The sender was a prosperous merchant, whom we shall call Mr. Geltman. He lay dying and wanted the Rebbe to make a miracle and save his life.

No sooner had Reb Shlomo read the kvittel from Mr. Geltman, than a second messenger arrived with another prayer request, this time from the woman who supervised the homeless shelter near the edge of town. She had come on behalf of a pregnant woman, whom we shall call Mrs. Bettler, who was staying at the shelter. Mrs. Bettler had been laboring in childbirth for several days, but was unable to deliver her child. The midwife could do nothing for her. Could the Rebbe help?

With his newly-acquired mystical insight, Reb Shlomo immediately saw that the soul of the dying Mr. Geltman was destined to be re-born into the body of Mrs. Bettler's unborn child. Alas, the poor child could not be born until the rich man had died!

"So be it," sighed the new Rebbe. "May the will of God be done." Within moments, word of the rich man's death and the beggar child's birth arrived, one upon the heels of the other.

The next day, Reb Shlomo also heard through the grapevine that there was no firewood left at the homeless shelter, and the young mother and her newborn son were in danger of freezing to death. So Reb Shlomo took some of the donation money that Mr. Geltman had sent and used it to buy more firewood. "It really is the boy's own money after all," he said to himself. "So he deserves to benefit from it." Not long after that, he gave the rest of the money to Mrs. Bettler, to be used for the boy's care.

When the boy and his mother were strong enough to travel, they went on their way with the other beggars, going from town to town. Six years later, the Bettlers happened to be passing through Karlin again. At the homeless shelter they heard that one of the sons of the deceased Mr. Geltman would be celebrating his son's bar mitzvah. As was the custom, the poor were all invited to the feast. So Mrs. Bettler and her son went along with the others.

As soon as they arrived at the Geltman house, the six-year-old boy's whole manner began to change completely. He took on an air of importance, and refused to sit at the pauper's table with the rest of the beggars. In a loud, arrogant voice, he demanded to be seated at the head of the guest table in a place of honor. The child made such a great disturbance that Reb Shlomo stepped in and said, "Let's just humor the boy, so we can continue the celebration in peace."

But the rabbi knew there was more to it, because he had recognized the boy as the reincarnated soul of Mr. Geltman. "He is really the master of the house, and those are his sons," thought Reb Shlomo to himself. "All he is doing is asking for his due."

When the meal was served, the same thing happened; the Bettler boy refused to take the plain foods offered to the poor, and insisted upon getting the best cuts of meat and the choicest morsels from the head table. Once again, Reb Shlomo said, "Let him have his way, so he doesn't disturb the feast."

But the other guests were getting upset with the boy. How dare he, a mere beggar's son, insult the Geltman brothers like that? So they asked his mother, "Does your son always behave like this?"

"Why no," replied Mrs. Bettler, as puzzled as they were. "He's always been such a good boy, very quiet and well-mannered. He's never done anything like this before -- I just don't know what's gotten into him!"

At the end of the feast, after Reb Shlomo had already gone home, the Geltman brothers distributed money among the poor, as was the custom. When the Bettler boy's turn came, he looked disdainfully at the small coins and shouted, "How dare you offer me coppers!? Bring me gold from the treasure chest!"

By now, the Geltman brothers had had enough of his insolence, and Reb Shlomo was not there to intervene. So the Geltmans told their servants to throw him out of the house. And they did.

When Rabbi Shlomo later learned how the Geltman brothers had unknowingly mistreated their reincarnated father, he was deeply saddened. He could not bear the thought of spending his life watching such tragic scenes, so he begged heaven to take away his miraculous powers.

The Rabbi's Son

(This story is also cited by Buber and still told in many Hasidic circles. Rosh Hashanah is both the Jewish New Year and Judgement Day. The idea that our fate is decided on Rosh Hashanah is standard Judaism -- on that day, God opens the Book of Life and judges the "karma" of the world. In this tale, not only the living but also the dead are judged on that day...)

The saintly Rabbi Yekhiel-Mikhel, who was known far and wide as the Preacher of Zolochov, once traveled to a city where he had never been before. He didn't know any of the people there, but his fame had gone ahead of him, so the prominent members of the congregation began coming to him for advice. One by one, Reb Yekhiel fixed his gaze upon their foreheads, meditated long and hard, then told each person the flaw in their soul, and how to heal it.

Word soon got around that there was a true saint in town, who could accurately read the whole history of a person's soul in all its incarnations -- just by looking at the forehead. So the next group of visitors pulled their hats all the way down to their noses, so the rabbi could not see their foreheads. But he read their souls anyway.

"Did you really think that pulling your hats down that way could hide your deeds from me?" the rabbi asked with a grin. "Surely an eye which can see through the flesh to the depths of the soul can easily see through a hat!"

Such was the spiritual insight of Reb Yekhiel. It is said that he turned every day into Yom Kippur --the Day of Atonement - but in a good way, because he was able to see into the depths of everyone's souls, and help the people to grow spiritually. He accurately described their past sins, told them how to correct them, and prayed for their forgiveness. If this was true on an ordinary weekday, how much more must it have been true when it really was the time of the High Holy Days.

Once, on Rosh Hashanah night, the soul of a dead man came to Reb Yekhiel. The apparition appeared exactly as the man had been on earth, and Reb Yekhiel immediately recognized him. He was the soul of the cantor who used to chant so beautifully from the Torah scroll during the Sabbath services in Reb Yekhiel's town.

"What are you doing here on this most holy of nights?" the rabbi asked the dead man.

"Surely the holy rabbi already knows," the soul replied. "On Rosh Hashanah, God himself opens the Book of Life, and judges the whole world. All of the deeds of everyone on earth are clearly written in that Book, in every tiny detail. God looks at our sins and our good deeds, and weighs them both in the balance. Who shall live and who shall die? Who shall be born -- and to which family? During this night, souls are also judged to be reincarnated once again. I am just such a soul, about to be reborn."

"So tell me," the rabbi asked, "why are you being sent down into the physical world again?"

"It is written in the Zohar, that when God desires to take back a person's spirit, then all the days that he has lived in this world pass in review before him," the soul replied, "and this is exactly what happened to me. Just before my death, I recited the confessional, as every Jew is supposed to do, and I thought over everything which I had done. Then my entire life passed before me -- and I saw that in every instance, I had acted in exactly the right way. My whole life had been totally kosher and totally good. When I realized this, a great feeling of egotistical pride came over me. As luck would have it, right in the middle of this feeling, I died, with no time to repent of that sinful pride.

"When I arrived at the Heavenly Court, that sin of pride was still clinging to me like a soiled coat. And because of that sin, the Heavenly Court decreed that I must return to earth once more, in order to atone for my pride." With that, the apparition vanished.

That same year, a son was born to Reb Yekhiel and his wife. They named him Zev-Wolf. Little Zev soon grew to be a wild and willful child, whom nobody could control. But Reb Yekhiel knew that this was the very same soul which had come to him on Rosh Hashanah night. He also saw that his son's rebellious ways were connected to the sin of pride which had caused him to reincarnate in the first place. However, the child himself did not remember this, and the boy was not about to listen to lectures about humility from his father! So Reb Yekhiel held his peace.

Time passed, and Zev-Wolf was nearing his thirteenth birthday, the age of bar mitzvah, when he would take on responsibility for his own actions. As is the usual custom, his father commissioned a set of tefillin to be made for him, because a boy must begin to wear them at prayer when he becomes a son of the commandments.

So Reb Yekhiel ordered the local scribe to write parchments with the proper verses from the Torah, which were to go into the little black rawhide boxes. Then he asked the scribe to bring him the boxes before putting in the parchments. Reb Yekhiel took the empty boxes into his hands and looked at them for a long, long time. As he thought about his son who would wear them, and the sin of that soul in its previous life, his tears began to flow, falling into the empty tefillin boxes. Then Reb Yekhiel carefully dried the boxes and put in the parchments with the verses of Scripture.

From the moment that Zev-Wolf put on those holy tefillin, a spiritual transformation came over him. His rebelliousness left him, and he was filled with tranquility and love. Eventually he became a Hasidic Rebbe -- Zev-Wolf of Zbarash -- and to this day he is remembered for his deep humility.

Josephus on Reincarnation

"The Pharisees believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them and that the virtuous shall have power to revive and live again: on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of people." Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 1, No. 3.

Josephus himself, who served as a soldier, once rallied his men to fight by citing the doctrine of reincarnation. Josephus said to his men:

"Do ye not remember that all pure Spirits when they depart out of this life obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolutions of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies."

Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 3, Chapter 8, No. 5.

Gen. 23:1-25:18

Parshat Chayei Sarah: Reincarnation, A Recondite Jewish Doctrine

By Moshe Katan

"Now these were the lives of Sarah. She once lived to be one hundred years old, and once to be twenty years old, and once to be seven years old."

We might well translate the opening sentence of this week's parsha in such a fashion, instead of: "Sarah's lifetime — the span of Sarah's life — came to one hundred and twenty-seven years," as we find in the new Jewish version published by JPS.

But that's not what the rabbis do with this Torah. Not that there is no notion of reincarnation within Judaism — there most certainly is. But the Zohar, the great compendium of mystical commentaries to Torah, hangs most of its treatment of reincarnation on the opening sentences of parshat Mishpatim (Exodus 21): "When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall be freed . . ."

I leave you to find that Zohar text and wrestle with it. The question here is, why does the Zohar not choose the much more obvious text of our parsha?

I suggest that the answer is that reincarnation in Judaism is such a recondite doctrine that it is removed to the far reaches of biblical interpretation, where ordinary folk will not be troubled by it. Most of those who read this Devar Torah will be blissfully unaware that reincarnation has any place at all in our tradition.

So why do I write of it now? Because so many of us have developed an interest in reincarnation as a result of exposure to other mystical disciplines and are attracted to a theology of reincarnation, most often for inappropriate reasons, and lives are being damaged as a result.

As it has become known in recent years that I study Kabbalah, and as Jewish mysticism has become more and more popular, I am asked questions. Some years ago the questions most often were of the purpose of creation and relationship with God. Now the questions tend to be about reincarnation and what happens to "me."

I have found that there are four reasons to study the doctrine of reincarnation. The first is indeed the concern

with what happens to "me." The questioner is reluctant to limit his or her individuation as a person to this lifetime. "There is something about me so precious," I hear in the question, "that surely it will remain intact after I die to be recycled again and again."

Such egocentrism is anathema to any kabbalistic discipline. A subset of these questioners claim that the doctrine of reincarnation reduces fear of death. There are morbid fears which are inappropriate, but to dance fearlessly in the face of death is also inappropriate.

The second questioner wants to know if a loved one remains intact in the next world so that a lost relationship can be resumed. If one develops strong faith in such a doctrine, then it becomes unnecessary to risk new relationships in this world, and growth in this world is impaired.

The third questioner has read of the adventures of those who have experienced past life regressions, and is eager to experience the joy ride. Joy riders are fools who have no understanding that the dangers of such a ride truly apply to them. We have a history in the Kabbalah of those who have experienced fatal trauma during such deep rides. Only fools venture carelessly along that path.

The fourth questioner desires knowledge of past life experience to learn of the "tikkun," the correction, necessary to be made in the development of his soul during his present life experience, so that when this life is done, his soul need never be recycled again, but assume its place in the adjacent world.

The Kabbalah speaks only to this last questioner. This one studies to enhance life. All the others ask in such a way as to limit life. And this last questioner is encountered so rarely that the doctrine of reincarnation, appropriately, sits in the recesses of Jewish theology. It is there. But there is much to be worked through before it should be examined.

Moshe Katan is an East Coast kabbalist who contributes frequently to this column.

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Why? Because

By Rabbi Samuel J. Fox

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