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Gilgul – Reincarnation

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# Introduction

The soul is eternal, a spark of the Divine, or as the prophet Job calls it “a part of HaShem above”. The soul exists before it enters the body and it lives after the body is laid to rest. Though the soul’s place of origin is in the higher worlds, there is something that the soul can achieve in a body that it cannot achieve in the heavenly realms. The purpose of creation is to make an abode for the HaShem in this world. Although higher worlds are glorious in terms of revelation and offer the best reward for a soul after it has achieved its earthly mission, the heavenly realms are not the purpose of creation. It was HaShem’s desire to create a world where His presence would be acutely concealed and darkness and evil would prevail. He charged his children with the task of creating a home in this world, and the soul fulfills that mission by its adherence to Torah and Mitzvot.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Kabbalah explains that the soul is comprised of 613 channels, which parallel the 248 limbs and 365 blood vessels of the body. These 613 channels attain eternal elevation when all 613 Mitzvot are fulfilled by a soul in its earthly descent.

Usually a soul does not manage to fulfill all the commandments in one descent, and the Arizal writes that every soul must be repeatedly reincarnated until it has fulfilled all 613 Mitzvot in thought, speech, and action. In Gehinnom the soul is cleansed in order to be elevated to the Garden of Eden. How is this concept reconciled with the possibility of reincarnation and a return to our world? The Kabbalists explain that when a soul returns to this world, the part of the soul that was elevated by its Torah learning and Mitzva performance is not reincarnated, rather it is only the other parts of the soul that were not affected by the first incarnation that return. The possibility of a soul being divided and part of a soul being reincarnated is discussed at length in Kabbalah. The original idea stems from the fact that the soul of Adam was composed of all future souls, and the soul of Jacob was comprised of 70 parts which were then further subdivided into the 600,000 souls of Israel. These 600,000 were then subdivided further into another 600,000. Through various reincarnations all parts of the soul are elevated and once the entire soul has been elevated the soul is no longer reincarnated. **This explains the strange phenomena of why certain people engage in a specific Mitzva in which they excel. It could be that the person’s soul descended again for sake of that specific Mitzva**.

# In the Tanach

Gilgulim,[[2]](#footnote-2) *reincarnation* is mentioned explicitly in the Tanach:

**Iyov (Job) 33:29-30** Behold, all these things does God do—twice, even three times with a man—to **bring his soul back from the pit** that he may be enlightened with the light of the living.

Iyov speaks clearly about gilgulim.

Ezekiel makes a categorical statement that sins are not visited upon one’s children, nor in the opposite direction upon one’s parents.

**Yehezchel (Ezekiel) 18:20** Only the person who sins shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to them alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to them alone.

However, there seems to be a contradiction to Ezekiel’s statement in the following pasuk:

**Shemot (Exodus) 34:6-7** HaShem passed before him and proclaimed: “HaShem! HaShem! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin—yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

The above is a hint to gilgulim, reincarnation in the Torah; as a way of addressing the contradiction found in Ezekiel. Consider that the above pasuk is NOT speaking about normal children; as we can see from the following contradictory passage:

**Debarim (Deuteronomy) 24:16** Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; each person shall die for their own sins.

The idea is that I was born once and I sinned. Therefore HaShem brought me back, He reincarnated me up to three times so that He could visit my sins on me and give me three additional chances to correct my sins. This is what the Arizal explains as the meaning of Debarim 24:16.

***Shaar HaGilgulim[[3]](#footnote-3) (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 4*** *We shall now explain the difference in reincarnation between a righteous and wicked person... Sometimes we find that reincarnation only happens three times, in the secret of “two or three times with a man”,[[4]](#footnote-4) and in the secret of “for three transgressions of Israel [I will bring back] but for four I will not bring back”,[[5]](#footnote-5) and in the secret of “visiting the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”[[6]](#footnote-6) ... But we find that a righteous person might reincarnate even a thousand times. And the verse itself explains this, because the notion of “four generations” is for the wicked, as it says “carrying over the sins of the parents [onto the children to the third and fourth generations] to those who hate Me”[[7]](#footnote-7) but for whom is it said “acts kindly to thousands”? To thousands of reincarnations for “those who love Me and keep My commandments.”[[8]](#footnote-8)*

A wicked man, therefore can get three or four reincarnations before they run out of chances, yet a righteous man can get reincarnated up to a thousand times as long as he keeps improving. This is consistent with what HaShem taught Moshe:

**Shemot (Exodus) 20:5-6** ... For I, HaShem, your God, am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations for those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 4*** *... [the righteous] does not get judged in Gehinnom, so he needs to have his sins cleansed in order to enter the Garden of Eden, therefore he has no rectification other than through reincarnation, where he will suffer afflictions throughout this life in order to atone for his sins [of his past life]. He does not enter Gehinnom to receive his punishment, but needs to reincarnate for every sin to be rectified, and therefore will reincarnate many times to atone and rectify his sins. This is not the case with the wicked, who do enter Gehinnom,[[9]](#footnote-9) where all the sins can be cleansed, and there is no need to reincarnate.*



Valley of Gehinnom 1

## Kaf ha-Kela - כַּף הַקָּלַע, the giant slingshot

Kaf HaKela is the Biblical term for reincarnation, which our Sages have termed ‘gilgulim’.

The Arizal taught, based on the Zohar, that when the Tanakh spoke of kaf HaKela, the cosmic “slingshot”, it was secretly referring to reincarnation. This term comes from I Samuel 25:29, when the prophetess Abigail blessed her future husband David: “And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the life of my lord will be bound up in the bounds of life with Hashem, your God; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.” Some saw within this “sling” a type of punishment in Hell where one’s soul is “flung” back and forth across the universe. The Arizal said this “flinging” is simply referring to reincarnation, where the soul is “flung” from one body to another.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Zohar II, 99b (Saba d’Mishpatini)** How do souls reincarnate? Like a stone in a sling, as it is written, “He will fling away the souls of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29** And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your soul, let the soul of my lord be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of HaShem, your God; and let Him fling away the souls of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling - כַּף הַקָּלַע.

The punishment of "the hollow of the sling" (*kaf ha-kela*) is here defined as reincarnation. Sefer HaIkkarim 4:33 explains it as follows:

A person who spends his whole life pursuing mitzvot and righteousness will find in the next world that all he knew in this life (i.e. the truth of Torah, the character gained from doing mitzvot) will be true, and now he will experience that truth as real. He describes it as a dream compared to reality. This world, we dream about truth, but...

...when he gets to the Spiritual Plane, if he had pure thoughts and intentions, he will enjoy the radiance of intellectual light, which will reach him in actual reality [rather than as just an idea], and this is called the splendor of the Shechinah.

If a person didn't do this, however, then they will desire the delights of the splendor of the Shechinah, because they are now able to appreciate and long for. Yet, it is too late. They try to climb up to the Shechinah, but are unable to because they never learned (the truths, as ideas in the material plane) and therefore don't know how. On the other hand, they will still long for the physical activities and pleasures they habituated themselves to, and will experience the unimaginable pain of not having a means to do that.

This is the Kaf HaKela. The person is simultaneously drawn upwards but can't go, and drawn downwards and can't go, like a sling or a yo-yo.

***Shabbat152b With regard to the bodies of the righteous,*** *which are likened to the royal garments that are well kept,* ***it states: “He enters into peace, they rest on their beds*** *each one that walks in his uprightness”.[[12]](#footnote-12)* ***And with regard to their souls, it states: “And the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life*** *with the Lord your God”.[[13]](#footnote-13) And conversely,* ***with regard to the bodies of the wicked, it states: “There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked”****,[[14]](#footnote-14)* ***and with regard to their souls, it states: “And the souls of your enemies He shall sling out in the hollow of a sling”****.[[15]](#footnote-15)* ***It was taught*** *in a baraita that* ***Rabbi Eliezer says: The souls of the righteous are stored beneath the Throne of Glory, as it is stated: “And the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life”****.[[16]](#footnote-16)* ***And*** *the souls* ***of the wicked are continuously tied up, and one angel stands at*** *one* ***end of the world and another angel stands at*** *the other* ***end of the world and they sling the souls*** *of the wicked back and forth* ***to one another, as it is stated: “And the souls of your enemies He shall sling out in the hollow of a sling”****.[[17]](#footnote-17)* ***Rabba said to Rav Naḥman: What*** *happens to the souls* ***of middling people,*** *who are neither righteous nor wicked? Rav Naḥman* ***said to him:*** *It is good that you asked me this question, for even* ***if I were dead I would not*** *have been able* ***to tell you*** *that. As* ***Shmuel said as follows: These and those,*** *the souls of the wicked and of the middling people,* ***are handed over to Duma,*** *the angel in charge of spirits. But* ***these,*** *the souls of the middling people,* ***have rest, and these,*** *the souls of the wicked,* ***do not have rest.***

There are some who see gilgulim as the meaning of kaf HaKela:

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”)\* Ch. 22*** *Know that the wicked, after their deaths, enter Gehinnom and receive their punishment there for atonement. And their judgement [in Gehinnom] is 12 months. And there are other wicked people of whom is written “and let Him fling away the souls of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling” and they do not merit to enter Gehinnom after their passing to cleanse their souls. Rather, their souls go from place to place in various reincarnations until their sins are mitigated a little bit and they will be able to enter Gehinnom for 12 months to be atoned for completely.*

Thus we understand that the Torah’s words for ‘reincarnations’ is kaf ha-kela.[[18]](#footnote-18)

## Gehinnom

Gehinom is a short way of referring to the Valley of Hinnom - גֵּי הִנֹּם.[[19]](#footnote-19) Gehinom, means crying.

**Melachim bet (II Kings) 23:10** He also defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so that no one might consign their son or daughter to the fire of Molech.

**Matityahu (Matthew) 10:28** And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in **hell** (Gehenna).

**Mordechai (Mark) 9:43**And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **hell** (Gehenna), into the fire that never shall be quenched:

**Rosh Hashanah 17a** But the heretics; and the informers; and the apostates, and those who denied the Torah; and those who denied the resurrection of the dead; and those who separated from the ways of the Jewish community; and those who cast their fear over the land of the living; and those who sinned and caused the masses to sin, for example, Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and his company; all of these people descend to **Gehinnom** and are judged there for generations and generations, as it is stated: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have rebelled against Me...”[[20]](#footnote-20) **Gehinnom will ultimately be terminated**, but they will not be terminated...

Torah is teaching that there is no Gehinnom for the righteous because they will have multiple gilgulim in order to fix themselves in this world. The fire of Gehinnom does not singe the souls of the righteous and Torah scholars…. Therefore, they must be reincarnated into this world in order to scour them from whatever sins they may have done, for there is no one that has not committed some sin. Thus, for the righteous, reincarnation is the lighter purification process, after which they enter the World to Come directly.

**Rosh HaShana l6b-17a** Wicked people will be written and sealed for Gehinnom... Average people will descend to Gehinnom and they will cry out and ascend from there, as it is stated: “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on My name, and I will answer them”.[[21]](#footnote-21) And about them, Hannah said: “The Lord kills, and gives life; he brings down to the grave, and brings up”.[[22]](#footnote-22) Beit Hillel say: [God is] **“abundant in kindness”[[23]](#footnote-23) tilting the scales in favor of kindness [to save people from Gehinnom],** and about them David said: “I love the Lord, Who hears my voice and my supplications”.[[24]](#footnote-24) And about them, David said the entire passage: “I was brought low and He saved me”.[[25]](#footnote-25)

For the wicked, however, reincarnation entails more suffering, and only after finishing the reincarnation process can they proceed to *Gehinom*. There is Gehinnom[[26]](#footnote-26) for the wicked because they did not fix themselves in this world, during their three reincarnations. The purpose of Gehinnom is to cleanse the sins that were not atoned for in this world.

Aron Moss’ explanation:

Jews *do* believe in a type of Hell, but not the one found in cartoons, Christian literature, and joke books. Hell is not a punishment in the conventional sense; it is, in fact, the **expression of a great kindness**. The Jewish mystics described a spiritual place called “Gehinnom”. This is usually translated as “Hell”, but a better translation would be “the Supernal Washing Machine”. Because that’s exactly how it works. The way our soul is cleansed in Gehinnom is similar to the way our clothes are cleansed in a washing machine.

Put yourself in your socks’ shoes, so to speak. If you were to be thrown into boiling hot water and flung around for half an hour, you might start to feel that someone doesn’t like you. However, the fact is that it is only after going through a wash cycle that the socks can be worn again.

We don’t put our socks in the washing machine to punish them. We put them through what seems like a rough and painful procedure only to make them clean and wearable again. The intense heat of the water loosens the dirt, and the force of being swirled around shakes it off completely. Far from hurting your socks, you are doing them a favor by putting them through this process.

So too with the soul. Every act we do in our lifetime leaves an imprint on our soul. The good we do brightens and elevates our soul, and every wrongdoing leaves a stain that needs to be cleansed. If, at the end of our life, we leave this world without fixing the wrongs we have done, our soul is unable to reach its place of rest on high. We must go through a cycle of deep cleansing. Our soul is flung around at an intense spiritual heat to rid it of any residue it may have gathered, and to prepare it for entry into Heaven.

Of course, this whole process can be avoided. If we truly regret the wrong we have done and make amends with the people we have hurt, we can leave this world with “clean socks”.

That’s why our Sages said, “Repent one day before you die.” And what should you do if you don’t know which day that will be? Repent today.

How long does a ‘wicked person’ spend in Gehinnom?

**Mishnah, Eduyoth 2:10** Five things last twelve months: The judgment of the generation of the flood was twelve months; The judgment of Job lasted twelve months; The judgment of the Egyptians was twelve months; The judgment of Gog and Magog in the time to come will last twelve months; **The judgment of the wicked in Gehinnom lasts twelve months**, for it is said, and “It will be from one month until its month”.[[27]](#footnote-27) Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri says: [As long as] from Passover to Shavuot, for it is said, “And from one Sabbath until its [next] Sabbath”.[[28]](#footnote-28)

**Zohar I, 62b** Come and see: Noah the righteous warned the people of his generation, but they did not heed him until the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the punishment of **Gehinnom** upon them. What is the punishment **Gehinnom**? It is fire and snow, water and fire; the first is cold, the other boiling. And all of that generation were sentenced to the punishment of **Gehinnom** and lost from the world.

***Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 376:4*** *Nowadays it is customary that after the closing of the grave with earth has been completed, or after the mourner turned his face from the corpse, they [the mourners] remove [their] shoes and sandals, and keep away a short [distance] from the burial grounds and say Kaddish, after which they detach earth and pluck grass and cast it behind their back and wash their hands with water.*

In the Midrash it is found that one should recite Kaddish for a father. Therefore, it is customary to recite the last Kaddish [concluding the services] twelve months for a father and mother.[[29]](#footnote-29)

**Sotah 2:10** In the same “measure” that a person acts, he is [in turn] measured... Samson followed his eyes, therefore he was punished with the Philistines gouging out his eyes, as it is stated: “And the Philistines laid hold on him, and put out his eyes”.[[30]](#footnote-30) Absalom was excessively proud of his hair, and therefore he was hanged by his hair. And furthermore, because he engaged in intercourse with ten of his father’s concubines,[[31]](#footnote-31) therefore ten spears were put thrust into him, as it is stated: “And ten young men that bore Joab’s armor compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

The Gemara give us some understanding of Gehinnom:

**Berachot 57b** Five things are a sixtieth part of something else: namely, fire, honey, Sabbath, sleep and a dream. **Fire is one-sixtieth part of Gehinnom**. Honey is one-sixtieth part of manna. Sabbath is one-sixtieth part of the world to come. Sleep is one-sixtieth part of death. A dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy.

Jewish texts speak of seven levels to Gehinnom,[[33]](#footnote-33) and the Zohar explains that Sheol is just one of the seven levels (as explored in the past here). The levels of Gehinnom are called, in order:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Pit | בּוֹר |
| Grave | שָׁחַת |
| Silence | דּוּמָה |
| Filthy Mud | טִיט הַיָּוֵן |
| Sheol | שְׁאוֹל |
| Shadow of Death | צַלְמָוֶת |
| Underworld | אֶרֶץ תַּחְתִּית |

**Sotah 10b** And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said: O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.[[34]](#footnote-34) And the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom my son, my son.[[35]](#footnote-35) Why is ‘my son’ repeated eight times? Seven to raise him from the seven divisions of Gehinnom; and as for the last, some say to unite his [severed] head to his body and others say to bring him into the World to Come.

# Why have Gilgulim? Why Reincarnate?

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 8*** *Why reincarnate? Know that souls reincarnate for several reasons.*

*The* ***first*** *is for transgressing some sin in the Torah, and one needs to return to rectify it.*

***Second****, to fulfil a [positive] mitzvah that he failed to fulfil [in a past life].*

***Third****, one comes back for the benefit of others, to guide them and rectify them...*

*And there are* ***other reasons*** *such as:*

***Fourth*** *sometimes a person will reincarnate to marry their soulmate, for they did not merit to marry them previously [in their past life].*

***Fifth*** *And sometimes they did marry their soulmate, but sinned with some transgression, and need to come back to rectify it...*

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 16*** *You should also know that a person needs to fulfil all 613 mitzvot in action, speech, and thought, as stated by our Sages of blessed memory on the verse “This is the Torah for the olah offering, and the Mincha offering...” meaning anyone who engages in the Torah study of olah is as if he actually brought an olah offering, etc. They meant by this that a person is obligated to fulfil all 613 mitzvot in speech and in the same way in thought.*

*And if one did not fulfil all 613 mitzvot in these three ways, he is obligated to reincarnate until he does so.* ***Also know that a person is obligated to study Torah on all four levels of Pardes, meaning: pshat [simple], remez [allusions], Drush] [allegories], and sod [secrets],*** *and one will reincarnate until he has fulfilled all four levels.*

One of Luria’s followers, Rabbi Hayyim Vital, in his book Shaar HaGilgulim (“The Gate of Reincarnations”), explicates in great detail how these dynamics can play out over the many generations. According to Vital, souls are reborn specifically to perfect certain aspects of themselves or to complete unfinished tasks. Ideally each subsequent gilgul marks an ascent to a higher rung of spiritual attainment, however progress is not a given. In fact, a sinful life can lead to a diminished form of reincarnation, including reincarnations as animals, plants, or even inanimate objects.

One particularly colorful example is the possibility of being reborn as water, which is the consequence of committing murder. The idea is that the soul will always be flowing, forever deprived of a home, just as it caused the blood of another to flow in a past life. In a similar vein, though unrelated to punishment, some Hasidic traditions suggest that it is often the case that the sparks of a person’s soul are incarnated not only in a person’s body, but are also bound up with their personal belongings.

While the goal of life is ultimately to transcend the cycles of gilgul altogether, the Kabbalah likewise identifies certain great souls that reincarnate in each generation specifically to assist other souls on their journey or to rectify some past wrong. According to Lurianic tradition, for example, the soul of Abel was reborn as Moses while the soul of Cain was reborn as Jethro. The positive relationship between Moses and Jethro in the Exodus narrative thus rectifies their violent past, bringing about a repair, or *tikkun*, in their relationship and in the world at large.

These helpful transmigrations can happen both when a great soul is reincarnated into a new body—for instance the soul of Moses, which is reborn in every generation according to some traditions. Or when a soul “impregnates” the body of a living person (a phenomenon known as *ibur*) in order to help that person with a certain religious task with which they struggle. This, then, forms the basis of a positive conception of spirit possession.

Souls may also be reincarnated to complete a certain task, repay a debt, or rectify a sin. In fact the concept of reincarnation as rectification for sin is well documented by the Kabbalists.

For those mitzvot that we cannot perform through no fault of our own; the Prophet has revealed another way to fulfill those mitzvot:

**Hoshea (Hosea) 14:3** Take words with you and return to God, say to Him: “Forgive all guilt and accept what is good”. Instead of bulls we will pay [the offerings] with our lips!

# Soul Migration

Most fascinating is the study of soul migration, which is how a soul from a previous generation is reincarnated in a later generation into a specific set of circumstances which are tailored to engineer a rectification of a previous sin. Of the hundreds of examples, we shall quote one here which is documented in the book Shaarei Teshuvah (Gates of Repentance), written by Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, a foremost Kabbalist and Chassidic Rebbe. When we take a look at the period in history of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, we stand perplexed as to why that generation had the awesome task of deciding between apostasy and burning at the stake. Why was it at this particular junction of Jewish history, Jews had to endure such horrible torture and exile at the hands of the Inquisition?

Rabbi Dovber writes the following:

In the times of the first Temple, they served G‑d and did not cast from themselves the yoke of heaven, except in certain idolatrous practices for which they had tremendous desire, so much so that there were only left 7,000 people that had not succumbed to Baal worship in the days of Ahab. All the Kings who served these idols were great men, and they were tainted with this heinous sin of idolatry. All these generations, who were most elevated souls, did not receive their rectification and elevation until the times of the philosophers in the time of Rashi and the Rambam until the time of the Arizal, which was from the year 4856 (1096) in the days of Rashi until the expulsion of Jews from Portugal in the year 5252 (1492), and until the time of the Arizal in 5333 (1573). The Arizal explicitly stated that in his time, the period of destruction that had swept the Jewish world for the last nearly 500 years had ended. All those who had sacrificed their lives in sanctification of G‑d’s name in their thousands, and tens of thousands in each generation, all of them were souls of the first Temple. Their sin was that they had previously served idols and had nourished the Klipot and therefore their rectification was to give up their lives in sanctification of G‑d’s name with simple faith which transcended any logic or philosophy.

Imagine a soul that entered the heavenly realms in the days of the first Temple that had been tainted by the grave sin of idolatry. The soul would greatly anticipate and appreciate an opportunity to descend once again to rectify its mistake. Any momentary pain involved, including the murderous moment of being burned alive is worth it to gain eternal elevation. Hence the soul descended to a body in a later generation for rectification.

Although the body of the Spanish Jew could not comprehend why he was being hauled through this torture, what was happening was essentially a kindness for it was the key to eternal elevation. In fact, the Kabbalists point out that the Hebrew word for “reincarnation”—Gilgul—has the same “numerical value” (gematria) as the word Chessed—“kindness.” Such presentations however have their limitations.

A soul cannot experience pain:

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”) Ch. 22*** *Behold, after the passing of a person, he is held accountable for all of his sins before going to Gehinnom, with many kinds of punishment, all of which are reincarnations, meaning a person might reincarnate in inanimate matter, or in plant life, or in animal life, or in another human form. Essentially all humans reincarnate and will not be spared from such reincarnations. The reason is, a person is unable to receive their punishment until the body and soul are together, and* ***only when reincarnated into a body can he feel the pain*** *through which he will atone for his sins.*

***Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 22****... and the notion of a person reincarnating in inanimate matter, we can explain this through the example of Nabal the Carmelite, of whom it is written “and his heart died in his body and he became a stone”.[[36]](#footnote-36) The secret of this is as explained previously that [Abel reincarnated in Laban, and] Laban reincarnated in Bilaam, and then in Nabal the Carmelite [who then reincarnated in a stone]...*

**Arizal, Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch.5** - And this is the case with each and every soul, that when the time for resurrection comes, each and every body will take its own portion of the soul, according to the particular portion and level it had in its time.

**Zohar II, 98b** “The candle of HaShem is the soul of man...”[[37]](#footnote-37) What is “candle” [ner]? It is the **n**eshamah and the **r**uach, which are together called ner (candle), as it is written “The candle of HaShem is the soul of man...”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Levels of the soul** | |
| *Nefesh* | The awareness that comes to the body. Not the body itself, but the vitality of the body, the power, the ID. Blood |
| *Ruach* | Associated with the heart, with feeling, with emotions, with love. Liver heart |
| *Neshama* | Higher consciousness, associated with the mind. The higher awareness. Brain |
| *Chaya* | living vitality that surrounds the body, the aura... it's not even part of the body because it can't be a part of the body. A level of spirituality that cannot be contained within the body. Aura |
| *Yechida* | the imponderable. The highest level, it surrounds what surrounds us. |

**Vayikra (Leviticus) 17:10-11** And if anyone of the house of Israel or of the strangers who reside among them partakes of any blood, I will set My face against the person who partakes of the blood; I will cut that person off from among kin, for the nefesh of the flesh is in the blood...

**Arizal, Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 14** - Know that, although it is written in many places in our writings that a certain person was the reincarnation of a certain person, and then another person, and so on, do not err to say that it is the same initial soul itself that keeps reincarnating. The truth is that each human soul is divided up into many roots without end, and each root has multiple sparks without end. In each reincarnation, only a few sparks are rectified, and those that are not return in future reincarnations. And those that were already rectified do not return in further reincarnations, but rather rise to their particular level.

## An Example

**Arizal, Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”), Ch. 29** - And the two aspects, the good and the bad of the soul, that were within **Abel**, were alluded to in his name. The good part of it was the letter Hei of **Abel** (ban) and it went to **Seth** [and then to **Moses**]... and the bad part of the soul of **Abel** were the letters Beit-Lamed (ban), and this is the secret of “and they do not know [bal yeda’um] the laws”,[[38]](#footnote-38) the two letters alluding to klipot, and these two letters went to [Lavan and to] **Bilaam** (nvba), who had the same two letters in his name.

Your shem (name) and your neshama (soul) are intertwined.

Kaf HaKela comes from the following reincarnations:

**Arizal, Shaar HaGilgulim (“Gate of Reincarnations”).Ch. 22** - ... and the notion of a person reincarnating in inanimate matter, we can explain this through the example of Nabal the Carmelite, of whom it is written “and his heart died in his body and he became a stone”.[[39]](#footnote-39) The secret of this is as explained previously that [Abel reincarnated in Laban, and] Laban reincarnated in Bilaam, and then in Nabal the Carmelite [who then reincarnated in a stone]...

# The Final Destination

We have spoken at length about reincarnation, yet we still need to discuss the end-point for these gilgulim.

Reading the Tanach, one cannot find any mention of the reward for the righteous. Why?

If the Tanach were to describe a reward for the righteous; the righteous would be obligated to serve HaShem FOR THE REWARD – it would be a mitzva! HaShem does not desire that we serve Him in order to obtain a reward. His desire is that we serve Him because we love Him. To accomplish this goal, there is no mention of a future reward.

However, there is mention of a ‘reward’ in the here and now. For example:

**Shemot (Exodus) 20:11** Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which HaShem thy God giveth thee.

The ‘reward’ is like an expense account given to a salesman. The idea is that you can stay at great locations, in great accommodations, eating great food, and enjoying life – as long as you bring home the deals. The ‘reward’ of “the good life” has nothing to do with your paycheck. The expense account is over and above any pay or commission that you earn from these deals. So it is with the ‘reward’ we receive in this world. The ‘reward’ is simply an expense account which enables us to do the will of HaShem. The ’reward’ is to enable us to perform HaShem’s will. This ‘reward’ has nothing to do with our actual reward which is waiting for us in the Olam HaBa. The reward in the Olam HaBa is like our paycheck; it is the reward for our labor. Our reward is over and above our ‘expense account’, the provisions that we need to carry out HaShem’s will.

## Heaven?

Do the righteous go to heaven when they die?

Heaven is the abode of HaShem and people have no place in Heaven. Yeshua made this quite clear:

**Yochanan (John) 3:13** And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

So, if the righteous do NOT go to heaven for their final reward, where do they go?

Solomon provided us with the understanding of the final place of the righteous:

**Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:9** That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.

We can understand from Solomon’s words that just as Adam and Eve began their life in the Garden of Eden, walking with HaShem; so, too, will the end of the righteous be to dwell in the Garden of Eden, walking with HaShem.

God created the perfect place for sinless man. God called that place, “the Garden of Eden”.

## Eternal Punishment?

**The Tanach has no concept of an eternal hell. Gehinnom is a place on earth. It is a valley outside of Jerusalem.**

The idea of ‘eternal punishment’ does not square with how HaShem runs His world midda-kneged-midda, measure for measure.

**Avot 4:22** ... And let not your impulse assure you that the grave is a place of refuge for you; for against your will were you formed, against your will were you born, against your will you live, against your will you will die, and against your will you will give an account and reckoning before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

*Abadon is a place where souls are sent to be extinguished*. It is not a place of eternal torment.

**Iyov (Job) 28:20-24** From where does wisdom come? And where is the source of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, concealed from the birds of the sky. **Abadon** and Death say, “We have heard of it.” Only God understands its way; He knows its source; for He sees to the ends of the earth, observes all that is beneath the skies.

**Zohar I, 62b** And there are two compartments close to each other that are called **Sheol** and **Abadon**. Whoever reaches **Sheol** is judged and punished there and is then raised to a different, but higher, compartment. This continues until he is released from there. But those who go down and reach **Abadon** are never raised from there again. That is why it is called **Abadon**, because they are lost [avid] forever.

**Tehillim (Psalms) 88:11-13** Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the ghosts rise to praise You? Selah! Is Your kindness recounted in the grave, your faith in **Abadon**? Are Your wonders made known in the darkness, and Your righteousness in the land of oblivion?

So the punishment for the incorrigible might look like this:

1. Three reincarnations, followed by
2. A time in Gehinnom, followed by
3. Going to Abadon to be extinguished.

**Mishle (Proverbs) 15:11** **Sheol** and Abadon are exposed to God, how much more so the hearts of men!

The reward for the righteous would be like:

1. Thousands of reincarnations with each lifetime an improvement on the previous lifetime. The goal is to perform all of the mitzvot.
2. A final resurrection, Techiyat HaMeitim, to enjoy your reward for a thousand years in Gan Eden.

**Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin, Ch. 10** - You should know that masters of Torah have differences of opinion regarding the good that comes to a person when he does the commandments that God commanded us through Moshe, our teacher - peace be upon him - and regarding the bad that will find him if he transgresses them - very many disagreements according to the difference in their intellects. And the reasonings about them have become greatly confused to the point that you will almost not find anywhere a man for whom this matter is clear. And you will not find a definitive thing about it with any person, excepting with much confusion...

**Rambam commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin, Ch. 10** - And the fifth group - and they are many - join all of these matters together and say that that which is anticipated is that the Messiah will come and bring the dead back to life, and they will enter the Garden of Eden, and they will eat there and drink and be healthy all the days of the world.

**Sanhedrin 98b** Ulla says: Let the Messiah come, but let me not see him [as I fear the suffering that will precede his coming]. Likewise, Rabba says: Let the Messiah come, but let me not see him. Rav Yosef says: Let the Messiah come, and let me have the merit to even sit in the shadow of his donkey’s excrement!

Gog U’Magog is judgement day and will last 12 months. This will literally be hell on earth.

**Rosh Hashanah l6b-l7a** Beit Shammai taught: There will be three groups of people on the great Day of Judgment [at the End of Days]: One of wholly righteous people, one of wholly wicked people, and one of average people. The righteous will be written and sealed for life. The wicked will be written and sealed for **Gehinnom**, as it is stated: “And many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall rise to the life of the world, and others [will rise] to shame and abhorrence of the world”.[[40]](#footnote-40) Average people will descend to **Gehinnom** and they will cry out and ascend from there, as it is stated: “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on My name, and I will answer them”.[[41]](#footnote-41) ... Beit Hillel say: [God is] “abundant in kindness”[[42]](#footnote-42) tilting the scales in favor of kindness [to save people from Gehinnom]...

**Zohar II, 58b** ... The Holy One, blessed be He, shall **bring back to life** those kings that distressed Israel and Jerusalem, “Adrianus” [Vespasian] and “Lupinus” [Titus], Nebuchadnezzar and Sancheriv, and all the other kings of the world that took part in the destruction of His House. Then He will provide them with a governing dominion as before, and the rest of the nations will gather with them. The Holy One, blessed be He, will take revenge on them openly for Jerusalem... This will happen in the time of Mashiach’s coming...



**Machzor Vitry, 144** It once happened that Rabbi Akiva was walking in a cemetery and came across a naked man who was dark as coal and carrying a huge load of sticks on his head. Thinking that he was alive, Rabbi Akiva ran to him quickly and asked how he had gotten into the situation of needing to do such difficult work, and offering to go to any means necessary to redeem him. The man asked Rabbi Akiva not to impede him. Rabbi Akiva asked the man his story. "I'm actually dead," the man replied, "and every day they send me to cut down trees." "What was your job when you were alive?" Rabbi Akiva asked. "I was a tax collector," the man replied, "and I would favour the wealthy and oppress the poor …

**Rama[[43]](#footnote-43) in his gloss for Ashkenazim on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 376:4** - In the Midrash it is found that one should recite Kaddish for a father. Therefore, it is customary to recite the last Kaddish [concluding the services] **twelve months** for a father and mother.

**Daniel 12:2** And many who sleep in the dust of the earth shall rise life of the world, and others [will rise] to shame and abhorrence of the world.

**Rabbenu Bechaye (1255-1340) on Leviticus 25:2** - According to Kabbalah, the words “And the earth shall rest a Sabbath to God” refer to the Earth as a whole and are an allusion to the **seventh millennium of Sabbath rest**, which is the “World to Come” [**olam haba**] after the Resurrection...

**Daniel 4:13-14** Let his mind be altered from that of a man, and let him be given the mind of a beast, and let seven seasons pass over him. This sentence is decreed by the **Watchers**; this verdict is commanded by the Holy Ones so that all creatures may know that the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man, and He gives it to whom He wishes and He may set over it even the lowest of men.

**Zohar III, 257b, Ra’aya Meiiemna** So too HaShem, on which all existences depend, and He and all His existences testify about the Master of the Universe that He pre-existed all existences, that He is within every existence, and that He will be after all existences. And this is the secret that the beings testify about Him, that He is past (haya), present (hov’e), and future (ihyeh).

**Mishnah, Uktzin 3:12** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: In the world to come the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make each righteous person inherit three hundred and ten worlds, for it is written: “That I may cause those that love me to inherit yesh [310] and that I may fill their treasuries”.[[44]](#footnote-44)

# A Final Word

**Sanhedrin 9la-b** Antoninus said to Rabbi: “The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment. Thus, the body can plead: ‘The soul has sinned, since from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave/ While the soul can say: ‘The body has sinned, since from the day I departed from it I fly freely in the air like a bird/” He replied: “I will tell you a parable. To what may this be compared? To a human king who owned a beautiful orchard which contained splendid figs. Now, he appointed two watchmen, one lame and the other blind. [One day] the lame man said to the blind, ‘I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come and take me upon your shoulders, that we may procure and eat them’. So the lame strode the blind, procured and ate them.

Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and inquired of them, ‘Where are those beautiful figs?’ The lame man replied, ‘Do I have feet to walk with?’ The blind man replied, ‘Do I have eyes to see with?’ What did he do? He placed the lame upon the blind and judged them together. So will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, place it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, ‘He calls to the Heavens above and to the earth that He may judge His people’ (Psalms 50:4). ‘He calls to the Heavens above’—this is the soul—‘and to the earth that He may judge’—this is the earthly body.

There is a verse in the book of Samuel: “For die we must, like water flows on the ground and that cannot be gathered up again; and God favors not a soul, but He devises means that he that is banished be not cast away from Him”.[[45]](#footnote-45) Citing the closing phrase of this verse as an assurance that no one banished from God by his sins will remain banished, Rabbi Schneur Zalman writes that every Jew will eventually return to God, either in this incarnation or another.

All people must be soul and body together for their punishment and also for their reward. As Solomon wrote:

**Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 1:9** The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

**Taanit 25a** [Rabbi Hanina’s] wife said to him: Until when will we continue to suffer this poverty? He said to her: What can we do? She said: Pray that something will be given to you! He prayed and something like the palm of a hand emerged and gave him one leg of a golden table. That night, his wife saw in a dream that in the future [the World-to-Come], the righteous will eat at a golden table that has three legs, but she will be eating on a table that has two legs. When she told her husband, he said to her: Are you content that everyone will eat at a complete table and we will eat at a defective table? She said to him: What can we do? Pray that the golden leg be taken from you. He prayed, and it was taken back from him. It was taught: The latter miracle was greater than the first, since Heaven generally gives but does not take back.

\* \* \*

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1. Mitzvot = commands [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gilgulim the plural of gilgul. Gilgul comes from the Hebrew root meaning “to spin”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arizal (Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, 1534-1572) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Iyov (Job) 33:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Amos 2:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Shemot (Exodus) 34:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Shemot (Exodus) 20:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Shemot (Exodus) 20:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gehinnom, aka hell, is like a spiritual washing machine. Every act we do in our lifetime leaves an imprint on our soul. The good we do brightens and elevates our soul, and every wrongdoing leaves a stain that needs to be cleansed. If, at the end of our life, we leave this world without fixing the wrongs we have done, our soul is unable to reach its place of rest on high. We must go through a cycle of deep cleansing. Our soul is flung around at an intense spiritual heat to rid it of any residue it may have gathered, and to prepare it for entry into Heaven. Of course, this whole process can be avoided. If we truly regret the wrong we have done and make amends with the people we have hurt, we can leave this world with “clean socks”. That’s why our Sages said, “Repent one day before you die”. And what should you do if you don’t know which day that will be? Repent today. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Shaar HaGilgulim, Ch. 22; Zohar II, 99b. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 57:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 57:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Yehoshua (Joshua) 18:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 66:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Zechariah 13:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 2:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Shemot (Exodus) 34:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Tehillim (Psalms) 116:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Tehillim (Psalms) 116:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Aka Valley of Hinnom [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 66:23 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Rama (Rabbi Moshe Isserles, 1530-1572) in his gloss for Ashkenazim on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 376:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Shoftim (Judges) 16:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 15:16 and 16:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 18:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Sotah 10b [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 19:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 19:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:37 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Mishle (Proverbs) 20:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tehillim (Psalms) 147:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 25:37 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Daniel 12:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Zechariah 13:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Shemot (Exodus) 34:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, 1530-1572 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mishle (Proverbs) 8:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Shmuel bet (II Samuel) 14:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)