



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

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IN THE FLESH AGAIN

Hadassah <amreapp@bellsouth.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Shalom. In "STANDING UP FOR DOWNS" you wrote that a person with Downs syndrome "may be a reincarnation of a great tzaddik or tzaddek (righteous person) who achieved near perfection the first time around, but needs to come back to this world just to 'tie up some loose ends'."

Are you saying that there is reincarnation? Are we not given only one life to live? Are we to come back from the dead in another body and correct any mistakes we made in this life? This was very confusing to me. I have never read about reincarnation in the Torah.

David N. Sunderland <lildave@tamu.edu> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

You recently remarked regarding reincarnation. I wasn't aware that Orthodox Jews believed in reincarnation. Can you give a scriptural basis for this belief? Thank you so much for your time and effort. I read your "Ask the Rabbi" series religiously (pun intended).

Dear Hadassah and David N. Sunderland,

Reincarnation is one of the teachings of the Oral Torah. In the Written Torah there are no explicit references to reincarnation, but there are hints.

Perhaps the closest scriptural hint to this idea is Deuteronomy 25:5-10 which says that "when brothers are on the earth at the same time, and one of them dies childless, the wife of the dead brother must not marry a man outside the family. [Rather] her brother-in-law shall come to her and perform levirate marriage with her. And he shall be the first-born whom she bears; he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, and so the name of the dead brother shall not be erased from the people of Israel... But if he refuses to marry his sister-in-law... she shall remove his shoe... His name shall be called in Israel: 'The house of him whose shoe was removed'."

The main reason for reincarnation is for the soul to fulfill its role in the creation and achieve the spiritual level for which it is destined. If a soul does not manage this in its first life, it may be given another chance, and another. If the soul did not succeed in three times, it will have to settle for whatever it has gained in the everlasting afterlife. Another reason for reincarnation is to repay a soul for its deeds in a way parallel to its sins; for example, a rich miser might be reincarnated as a poor beggar and be disregarded by a rich man, who was himself one of the paupers disregarded by the rich miser in his previous life.

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, (the Arizal) writes that Moshe was a reincarnation of Adam's third son, Sheit (Seth), and that Sheit was a reincarnation of Hevel (Abel). (The "mem" of Moshe's name stands for "Moshe," the "shin" stands for Sheit, and the "heh" for Hevel. The great mishnaic Sage Shammai was a reincarnation of Moshe, and Hillel was a reincarnation of Aharon.

Sources:

- Zohar, Mishpatim, Exodus 1:1
- Sha'ar Hagilgulim, Hakdama 36

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THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

*Comments, quibbles, and reactions
concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features*

Re: Chicago Shootings (Ohrnet Devarim):

There were several letters to the editor in the Chicago Tribune attesting to what you wrote, i.e., that the Orthodox Jews did indeed talk to the police on Shabbat, and cooperate fully. The press reports to the contrary were caused by the reporters confusing the fact that people didn't want to talk to the reporters (for various reasons).

Rabbi Yehuda Albin, Chicago

Hurrah for Rabbis!

I want to express my sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all the Rabbis for their intellect and wisdom. Since my father died last year, the

collection of Ohr Somayach's articles, and the classes that I've attended, have given me a new meaning on life and what it means to be Jewish. How do Rabbis become so learned? They have the right answers, and know so much. They know about psychology and the inner soul of the human being. Thank you again and shalom.

Harold Bernstein, Wallingford, CT <habernstein@msn.com>

Ohrnet Eye-Opener:

I can't express the joy you bring to me every day. I look for you as soon as the eyelids go up. I'm learning much and praise G-d for it!

Irene Allen <heluvsu2@sprynet.com>

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