

REINCARNATION IN JUDAISM

by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel August 12, 2018

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The concept of reincarnation involves the rebirth of the soul into another body. Upon the death of a human being, the concept of reincarnation believes that the soul transmigrates to or is born again in another body. This word in English, "reincarnation" is based on the Latin, which means "entering the flesh again." In Hebrew, the term is "*Gilgul*," (related to the word for circle) implies a continuous cycle of the soul. In eastern religions, reincarnation is a mainstay and fundamental belief, such as in Hinduism or Buddhism. What about in Judaism? Is it a fundamental belief? Is it a core concept at all? If Reincarnation is indeed a Jewish idea, then how does Judaism's view of it differ from the view of reincarnation in other religions, and how is it the same? This chapter will explore Jewish reincarnation or *Gilgul* through the sources.

BRIEF HISTORY OF JEWISH REINCARNATION OR GILGUL

The concept of Jewish reincarnation or *Gilgul* is not mentioned explicitly in Tanach, not in the Talmud, and not even in the Thirteen Principles of Faith of Maimonides. Although reincarnation is found in mainstream Greek philosophy, such as in the works of Plato, Socrates and Pythagoras, the first Jewish sources that advocate this idea appear only in The Middle Ages. The first discussion of reincarnation in Judaism, in fact, is by the Karaites, the group of Jews who opposed Rabbinic Judaism. Saadia Gaon (882-943), a leading opponent of the Karaites, comes out very strongly against the idea of Reincarnation in Judaism, as does Rabbi Joseph Albo (1380-1444). On the other hand, Nachmanides (1194-1270), Rabbeinu Bechaye (1300's) and other rabbis of The Middle Ages, believe strongly in *Gilgul* or reincarnation. When the mystical renaissance replaced rationalism in sixteenth century Tzefat as the mainstream Jewish theology, reincarnation became a core idea in Judaism, both among the Jews in general and among the leading rabbinic scholars. The popularization of Kabbalah further enhanced this concept, and reincarnation is mentioned often in the Zohar. Rabbi Isaac Luria (known as the AR"l) brought this idea to the forefront in his new mystical articulation of Judaism, as seen in the writings of his main student, Rabbi Chaim Vital.

Although there continued to be proponents and opponents of this idea in Judaism, and this continues until today, most leaders of the Chassidic movements supported it, as did several of the leaders of the non-Chassidic Jewish world, from Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Elijah Kramer, 1720-1797) to Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1838-1933).

REINCARNATION-GILGUL SOLVES A MOST FUNDAMENTAL JEWISH PROBLEM

While it may be difficult for many rational people today to believe in the transmigration of souls or rebirth of the soul in another human being, this fundamental concept, in a different context, is essentially supported by scientific observation of the human body. Every day, cells in the human body constantly die and others are "born" to take their place. In fact, every seven years, the body's cells completely replace themselves. Thus, if the organism called the human body is "reincarnated" every seven years physically, is it so far-fetched to believe mystically that a soul is also reincarnated upon the death of a human body?

The idea of reincarnation or *Gilgul* helps solve one of the most difficult, or the most fundamental philosophical problems in Judaism or any religion that believes in a just G-d: theodicy. How is it possible to believe in a just and good G-d, where punishment and reward is meted out fairly, when evidence shows that very moral people suffer greatly and very immoral people often enjoy great rewards in the world? How can just G-d allow young children, too young to be culpable for sin, to suffer greatly? One answer is that the rewards and punishments in the Next World will even the scales and will compensate for this apparent injustice. (See chapter about “Why Good Things Happen to Bad People” for expansion of this overall theme.) Another answer to resolve this problem is Reincarnation or *Gilgul*. If the soul of a young person has sinned as an adult in a previous life, it might explain the suffering of that soul at an early age in the new body. It also might explain how souls that were good in a previous life are rewarded in the new bodies of people who act immorally in this life.

Thus, when the Talmud asks this fundamental question, it answers that the punishment for the righteous are for sins of the previous generations, which seems to be a far-fetched answer, unless understood in the context of reincarnation. Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (of Tzefat, 1500-1580) and others interpret this Talmudic passage to be an explanation of Reincarnation or *Gilgul*.¹ Nachmanides uses this concept to explain why Job, who in the text was acknowledged to be completely righteous, suffered so greatly. It must have been the punishment for acts committed by his soul in a previous lifetime.² Sefer HaBahir, written in Provence in the 1200's, is believed to be the first book written about Kabbalah. It says that when the Talmud explains that Moses asked to see G-d's glory – i.e., to explain why bad things happen to good people – Moses already understood the idea of Reincarnation as the explanation, but he wanted to know its details.³ It then explains that Jewish reincarnation is like a planter who tries again and again to plant crops until they grow perfectly. So, too, the soul returns again and again, until it is perfected.⁴ Thus, the major philosophical question that seems to contradict fundamental Jewish belief in a fair G-d is answered (in part) through *Gilgul*.

That this concept of Jewish Reincarnation has entered the mainstream in Judaism can be seen in the introductory words of the Shema prayer in the Sephard Nusach. In it, each Jew asks G-d to help him or her forgive anyone who made them angry or sinned against them, whether in this lifetime or even in a previous lifetime.⁵

RABBIS & ARGUMENTS PRO AND CON REGARDING JEWISH REINCARNATION

Against

As noted above, the argument about whether *Gilgul*, i.e., Jewish Reincarnation, is a valid concept in Jewish thought has been debated throughout the generations. Who are the leading personalities on each side of the issue, and what are their arguments?

A twentieth century rabbi, Rabbi Chaim David HaLevi (1924-1998) reiterated one of the strongest arguments against reincarnation, that supporting the idea that *Gilgul* is not Jewish at all. He wrote that the mere fact that this concept is not mentioned at all specifically in Tanach, is not referred at all to in the

¹ Berachot 7a and Shoresch Yishai commentary 79a

² Nachmanides, Torat Ha-adam, Shaar Hagemul 119-120

³ Sefer HaBahir 194

⁴ Sefer HaBahir 194

⁵ Introduction to Shema before Bed, Nusach Sephard

Talmud or Midrash as a Jewish idea, and that Torah giants like Maimonides and Rabbi Judah HaLevi did not speak about it, all show that this is not a fundamental Jewish belief.⁶ One of the first leading rabbis who wrote against reincarnation, as noted above, was Saadia Gaon. He cites four main arguments challenging this principle.⁷ Among them, he says that it cannot be a rational Jewish idea that after a soul was in an animal, it then becomes a soul of a human being upon the death of that animal. He also questions the validity of the suffering of little children, even though reincarnation is supposed to answer this question (by claiming that the child suffers for the sins of the soul in a previous life). Why, he asks, should a little child suffer ever, even if its soul had committed sins in a previous life? It is still not fair to that child and that child's body. Finally, he questions that if each soul has renewed free will each time it enters the new body, why should it then be punished for sins of the past in another body, before it has committed any (new) sins?

Rabbi Joseph Albo objects to the concept of *Gilgul* because a soul that already occupied another body during a different lifetime would not have true and complete free will in this lifetime, as it would be responsible for what occurred previously. This idea goes against basic Jewish belief.⁸ Rabbi Chasdai Crescas (1340-1411) objects to the concept of reincarnation for a different reason. He says that if the people and souls in the second transmigration remember nothing of their first lives (despite occasional feelings of *déjà vu*), then how can the body and soul learn from its "mistakes" in the previous lifetime?⁹ Seforno, based on the Torah verses, claims that the Torah is telling us that in Judaism there is either life or death, but not both. Therefore, there cannot be a situation where a person dies in body, and yet the soul is again alive in this world.¹⁰ Rashba (1235-1310) cites another logical argument of Rabbi Yedayah Bedershi why this concept could not work in practice. If a person is trying very hard to live a moral life but is then severely punished as a result of actions in a previous life, that person could easily just "give up" trying to act morally and correctly, since his or her actions now seem truly futile, given the "baggage" and sins of the previous life. If reward and punishment is not based on actions in the present, why be moral?¹¹

Other arguments against the notion of reincarnation include the Jewish understanding of Resurrection of the Dead, a concept accepted by nearly all rabbis as a basic Jewish belief. But if a soul has occupied so many different bodies, which body will it occupy when all the dead are resurrected? All of them, or just one? Which one? Another argument against this idea questions G-d's "ability" in running the world. If there is just not enough time in one lifetime to teach the soul to reach its goal and perfection, then why can't G-d simply extend that person's life until the soul "learns" all that it is meant to learn (rather than having it return again and again until this is accomplished)? These are just some of the arguments and claims that would not support the idea of reincarnation as something Jewish.

For

As mentioned above, the main advantage of the idea of Jewish reincarnation is that it allows an individual who believes in G-d to see a wicked person prospering in this world and not lose faith, since this situation could be caused by a reward for something the soul did in a previous life (and vice versa).¹² Abarbanel says G-d is doing a great *chesed*-kindness for any individual who died too early to achieve

⁶ Responsa Asei Lech Rav 4:67

⁷ Emunot Videi-ot, Ot 7:8

⁸ Sefer Ikarim 4:29

⁹ Ohr Hashem 4:7

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 30:15, 19 with Seforno commentary

¹¹ Responsa, Rashba 1:418

¹² Nachmanides, Torat Ha-adam, Shaar Hagemul 119-120

completion. Instead of having to suffer great punishments in the hereafter, G-d gives the soul other chances to perfect itself in order not to have to suffer as greatly.¹³ Rabbeinu Bechaye agrees that G-d is doing a kindness for the soul by letting it return for a second and third chance. He also says it helps explain why the righteous suffer even though they have not done anything in this lifetime to deserve such suffering.¹⁴

Those who believe in reincarnation say that this idea helps explain certain statements in the Talmud or Midrash which claim that one Biblical personality is actually the same person as another Biblical personality. Thus, when it says that Pinchas is really Elijah,¹⁵ that Laban is Bilaam,¹⁶ that the Ten Rabbis who died as Martyrs are really the ten sons of Jacob, or that Mordechai is Jacob while Haman is Eisav,¹⁷ it really signifies that they are the souls of the people who lived on in the bodies of these personalities in the future. However, those who argue and claim that Jewish reincarnation does not exist at all, will explain these comments about personalities by saying that (for many of these names) these are simply different names for the same person (who lived a very long time). Just as it is very clear in the Prophets that the Judge called Avtzan is actually Boaz, it merely signifies that this is another name for the same person (who is mentioned in a different book of the Tanach).¹⁸ So too, all these other statements are just other names for the same person, and not proof of reincarnation.

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) states the Torah terms *nachala*-inheritance and *Yerusha*-inheritance symbolize *Gilgul* or reincarnation. And each time the soul returns to this world, it leaves the soul a little better until, after many generations, that soul is ready to be received by G-d.¹⁹ Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1525-1572) compares the Jewish soul to the cycle of the moon. Just as the moon appears to “die” every 29 ½ days when it disappears completely, yet miraculously reappears again and begins to grow anew, so it is with souls that appear to die, only to live once again.²⁰ The Vilna Gaon explains the entire Book of Jonah as illuminating how Jewish reincarnation works. Jonah was sent by G-d to better the world, but he refused his mission in life and made it worse. Thus, G-d gave him another chance to make it better, in the same way that *Gilgul* operates.²¹ And in the twentieth century, also commenting on the Jonah story, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chofetz Chaim) writes that this story teaches us that rather than wait until one’s soul is sent back repeatedly until he “gets it right,” each person should try to “get it right” initially, and attempt to reach perfection as much as he she is able in order to avoid needless suffering through reincarnation.²²

Another argument in favor of the concept of Jewish Reincarnation is that certain commandments are better understood when accepting the concept of *Gilgul*. Most noted among these is the commandment of *Yibum*, where the brother-in-law is commanded to marry his deceased brother’s childless widow. The Torah itself says that the child born of this union will be named after the deceased brother. Jewish reincarnation understands that the baby’s soul is that of the brother who died.²³

¹³ Abarbanel commentary on Deuteronomy 25:5

¹⁴ Kad Hakemach “Hashgacha”

¹⁵ Midrash, Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar 25

¹⁶ Targum Yonatan on Numbers 22:5

¹⁷ Tikunei Zohar 110a, Sefer Oholai Yaakov, Zachor

¹⁸ Judges 12:8-10, Ruth 1:1, Bava Batra 91a

¹⁹ Alshich commentary on Deuteronomy 9:25

²⁰ Torat Ha-ola or Rama, 3:49

²¹ Commentary of the Gra on Jonah 1:1

²² Shaar Tziyon 622:6

²³ Deuteronomy 25:5-9, with Abarbanel commentary

VERSES IN TANACH THAT SEEM TO SUPPORT REINCARNATION

Although not mentioned specifically in the Torah, Prophets or Writings, once the Jewish concept of reincarnation or *Gilgul* is assumed, many verses can now be understood in a new light. The commentaries have thus interpreted selections from Tanach from the point of view of reincarnation.

After the very first death in the Torah, that of Abel at the hand of Cain, Adam and Eve conceived and bore a third child, Seth, who was born “instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.”²⁴ In light of reincarnation, this is understood to be a clear reference that the soul of Abel entered the body of Seth, as he “took the place” of Abel. When Er died childless, in the first *Yibum*-Levirate situation recorded by the Torah (and referred to above), Judah told his second son, Onan, to marry Tamar so that the son they bear will be a “seed for your brother.” Thus, Judah told Onan that the son will indeed be inhabited by the soul of Er, his deceased uncle, as explained by Nachmanides.²⁵ In the verse commanding a person building a house to construct a fence of protection around a roof so that no one falls, it specifically says “so that the fallen should not fall” implying that the person who may fall actually is already called “fallen” and deserves to fall, guilty of a previous sin that makes him fall. In light of reincarnation, this refers to a person who might have sinned in a previous lifetime.²⁶

There is a special commandment that if a Jew comes upon a nest and wants to take the eggs, he or she must first send away the mother bird. The Zohar says that the banned mother is like the *Shechina*, G-d’s Eminence, exiled from the Temple, its rightful place. The souls that have been banished through *Gilgul* have been granted permission to nest here, in the book of Zohar, until they can be reunited with their mother, G-d, in the time of Messiah.²⁷ In the famous covenant where G-d says that he is making this pact with Jews who are not only present in the desert but also with the Jews who are not present, this idea can be understood to refer to all the souls that will be reincarnated in the future in other bodies.²⁸

When Moses blessed each tribe before he died, he said to the tribe of Reuven that they will live and not die. This apparent redundancy prompted an early commentary, Onkelos, to remark (in Aramaic) that unlike most people, these souls will go directly to Heaven, and will not die to then be reincarnated several times before going to Heaven.²⁹ A later commentary, Rabbeinu Bechaye, after quoting Onkelos, spells out this concept even more clearly. He says that most other souls do return to other bodies after being rewarded in the Garden of Eden or punished in Gehinom. Then they return to another body. The souls of the tribe of Reuven will not do that.³⁰

There is one verse that seems to be “begging” for interpretation along the lines of *Gilgul* or reincarnation. When King Solomon wrote, “One generation comes while the other generation leaves, but the earth stands forever,” Rabbi Isaac Luria explains that the generations that come and go are the reincarnated souls. The first generation died, only to reappear in the bodies of a future generation so that they can improve themselves as well as future generations.³¹ Commenting on the same verse, Sefer HaBahir says that the words refer not to future generations but to the generation of souls that have already come and died. He compares it to a king who had servants and fitted them with appropriate

²⁴ Genesis 4:25

²⁵ Genesis 38:8 with Nachmanides commentary

²⁶ Deuteronomy 22:8 with Rashi commentary

²⁷ Deuteronomy 22:6-7 with Tikunei Zohar 23b

²⁸ Deuteronomy 29:13-14

²⁹ Deuteronomy 33:6 with Onkelos commentary

³⁰ Rabbeinu Bechaye commentary on Deuteronomy 33:6

³¹ Ecclesiastes 1:4-5, Commentary of Ari in Shaar *Gilgulim*, Introduction 8, 9, Book of *Gilgulim*, Vezot Habracha 8

clothing, but they were unworthy. So he threw the servants out and carefully washed the clothing so that it would appear as new. Then he tried out new people as servants. This is similar to the process of reincarnation.³² The Midrash, according to some commentaries, also says that this idea is reflected in the passage that declares that the very day that one great rabbi died is the same day another great rabbi was born. The Midrash then enumerates which rabbis were born on the days that certain great rabbis died. (See chapter on “Birthdays in Judaism” for an expansion of this theme.)³³ In the context of reincarnation, we can understand that the souls of the great rabbis who died then entered the rabbis born on that same day.

On the verse, “These are the judgments which you shall set before them,” Onkelos writes, “These are the judgments that you shall order before them.” The Zohar in turn remarks that his intention was that these are the judgments of the souls by which each of them receives its appropriate punishment, and that this is the first time the Torah openly refers to the secret mysteries of the transmigration of souls.³⁴ One verse in Samuel seems to make no sense without the idea of reincarnation. The verse states, “For we shall surely die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither does G-d take away life; but devises means, that none of us be banished.”³⁵ First it says that we die, and then it says that G-d does not take away life and that none are banished. This verse is logical only if our souls come alive again after death, several times, to perfect themselves until eventually no soul is ever banished. Regarding the words in the Torah that “The Torah of G-d is perfect, reviving the soul,” Rabbi Isaac Luria gives two mystical explanations related to reincarnation. First he says that the revival of the soul comes about several times until each soul has fulfilled all six hundred and thirteen commandments, and that is when the Torah (or the soul) is “perfect.” Or, it signifies that the soul that has lived an exemplary Torah life has already achieved “*Meshivat Nefesh*-a spiritual rest,” since it no longer needs to return to another body and can go straight to Heaven.³⁶

Isaiah said, “... have sworn by Myself, a word of righteousness is gone out of My mouth, and shall not be reversed, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” On this verse, the Talmud explains the famous Midrash that each fetus learns the entire Torah before birth in the womb, but forgets it upon birth when the angel pinches the area above the mouth. It then says that the phrase “every tongue shall swear” refers to birth and “every knee shall bow” refers to death. Rabbi Shmuel Eidels comments about this Talmudic passage that the phrase for birth comes after the phrase for death in this verse because that phrase refers to a birth that takes place after death – i.e., the *Gilgul* cycle.³⁷ One verse in Job refers to G-d saving the evil person from the “pit” and says that his flesh will be as smooth as a child’s as he returns to the days of his youth. Nachmanides explains that this refers to reincarnation, when the evil person returns to his youth through the soul’s rebirth in another person.³⁸ Later in that same chapter, G-d again says that he will redeem an evil person from the pit, he shall “see the light” and then G-d will bring his soul back from the pit.³⁹ Many commentaries explain that this too, refers to reincarnation, which will take place only two or three times for each soul.

³² Ecclesiastes 1:4-5, Commentary of Sefer HaBahir 121, 122

³³ Ecclesiastes 1:4-5, Midrash Beraishit Rabbah 58:2

³⁴ Exodus 21:1, Onkelos commentary, Zohar, Exodus II:94a

³⁵ II Samuel 14:14

³⁶ Psalms 19:8, Ari commentary in Shaar HaPoskim, Tehilim, Sefer HaLikutim, Tehilim 19

³⁷ Isaiah 45:23, Nidah 30b with Maharsha commentary

³⁸ Job 33:24-25. Nachmanides, Torat Ha-adam, Shaar Hagemul 119

³⁹ Job 33:28-30

HOW EXACTLY DOES REINCARNATION WORK IN JEWISH THOUGHT?

Although there are differences of opinion about some of the details of *Gilgul* or reincarnation, most of the rabbis agree about the basic concepts. Rabbi Isaac Luria and the Lurianic school of Kabbalah have added several layers of understanding of *Gilgul* that differ from other approaches, but the fundamental concepts remain similar.

Abarbanel writes three general reasons and purposes for reincarnation. The entire process is seen as a kindness from G-d, so that the soul is not judged immediately after death for eternal evil, but is given chances to improve itself before coming before G-d. The first purpose is for the soul that has already achieved some greatness, but is given a second or third chance to become even greater. The second is for the soul that has not sinned much but has not achieved anything great either. This soul is given another chance to do great things. The third is for the soul that has sinned in a previous life. In the next life it is punished, so that it can avoid ultimate punishment in judgment from G-d.⁴⁰ Similar to Abarbanel, Rabbi Isaac Luria says the one reason the soul is reincarnated is to repair sins from a previous life. Or, if a particular commandment was not performed at all in a previous life, in that second lifetime, this soul has the opportunity to fulfill this commandment. Another reason the soul is reincarnated is for the benefit of others, i.e., to help and improve or repair them. Then Rabbi Luria says something unique to his own philosophy: every soul has to do each of the 613 commandments in the Torah. Since it is very difficult to do them all in one lifetime, the soul is given the chance to perform these commandments in future lifetimes.⁴¹

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (1707-1746) writes similar ideas, and then adds that in a reincarnated life (albeit unknown to the person), the soul is presented with specific ethical situations in which the soul had failed the first time around, and is given the opportunity to “correct” this failure.⁴² There is some disagreement about whether the soul of a human being must specifically return into the soul of another human being, or whether it can enter the soul of an animal or even a plant or a rock. There is a story told about the AR”I, which was testified to by Rabbi Galanati, the Head of the Rabbinical Court in Tzefat, that the AR”I believed that a reincarnated soul can return even as an animal. When Rabbi Luria came to Israel, he went to visit a certain rabbi’s grave that was situated next to olive and fig trees. One crow was perched on one of these trees and was crowing incessantly. Rabbi Luria told Rabbi Galanti that he, the AR”I, knew a certain man named Shabtai, a tax collector who had died. He was an evil man and because of his heartlessness in his behavior with the poor when collecting taxes (by taking even the shirts off their backs), he was punished in that he was reincarnated as this crow. Now, through these noises, this man/crow was asking Rabbi Luria to pray on behalf of his soul. AR”I turned to the crow and said, “Evil man, I will not pray for you,” whereby the crow promptly flew away.⁴³

In a different passage, AR”I explains the details of how reincarnation works more intricately. The first time an individual enters this world, the person is able to perfect the three lower levels of soul, *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshoma*. If these are perfected, then the soul immediately goes to “The World of Souls,” where it awaits resurrection. If not, then the different levels of soul can only be perfected in subsequent lifetimes. Each time one level of soul is perfected, the person dies, is reincarnated, and is given the chance to perfect the next level of soul. Previously perfected levels of soul are not damaged by

⁴⁰ Abarbanel commentary on Deuteronomy 25:5

⁴¹ AR”I, Shaar Hagilgulim, Introduction 8, 11

⁴² Derech Hashem, Section 2, 3:10

⁴³ Shivchai Ha-ari, page 29

sins in the current reincarnation. The soul continues to be perfected in this way until it is perfected at least in *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshoma*, at which point the soul goes to "The World of Souls."⁴⁴

How many chances does the soul get to perfect itself? Most Kabbalists, like Rabbi Luria,⁴⁵ say that the maximum number of chances is three. (Rabbi Luria adds that after those three chances, the soul must attach itself to a righteous person in order to perfect itself, but most do not agree with this view.) The number three is based on the verse from Job cited above (page 6),⁴⁶ and also from the Torah, when G-d implies that He gives evil people three or four chances to repent.⁴⁷ This is the basis of Zohar's number.⁴⁸ Abarbanel also says reincarnation is only possible three times.⁴⁹ However, Sefer HaBahir believes the soul has up to a thousand generations or one thousand chances to perfect itself.⁵⁰ Can this difference of opinion be reconciled? Rabbi Menashe ben Israel explains that there is no real argument between these various views: the soul indeed has only three "chances" or reincarnations in order to perfect itself – in the form of a human being. After that, if it has not yet achieved its goal, then the soul is reincarnated in the form of an animal, until it is perfected. Only then does it go up to G-d for final judgment.⁵¹

If reincarnation is so fundamental to Judaism, then why is it most well-known among eastern religions, and not in Judaism itself? One answer to this question was provided by Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, who quotes the Torah verses in which Abraham married Ketura and gave her and her children presents as they went off to the east.⁵² These "presents," he claims, were some of the secrets of Judaism – including reincarnation – which they then spread in their new surroundings until it became a dominant theme in the religions of the area.⁵³ Thus, the fundamental concept of Reincarnation in many eastern religions has its origins in Judaism, according to this view.

In summary, then, G-d, in His infinite kindness, wants the final judgment of the soul to be judged only for good. Therefore, rather than judge the soul immediately after death, G-d allows each soul to return to a different body in order to improve itself. After three (or possibly more) reincarnations, the improved and more righteous soul is then judged by G-d for eternity.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel currently works with Rabbi Berel Wein and the Destiny Foundation as the Director of Education, whose mission is "to bring Jewish history to life in an exciting, entertaining and interactive way." Rabbi Amsel has also served as a teacher, a school principal, and an adjunct professor. He has also taught over 2000 educators how to teach more effectively. Rabbi Amsel has worked in all areas of formal and informal Jewish education and has developed numerous curricula including a methodology how to teach Jewish Values using mass media. Recently, he founded the STARS Program (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers), where more than 3000 students in 12 Russian speaking countries learn about their Jewish heritage for

⁴⁴ AR"Y, Shaar Hagilgulim, Introduction 2

⁴⁵ AR"Y, Shaar Hagilgulim, Introduction 5

⁴⁶ Job 33:29

⁴⁷ Exodus 34:7

⁴⁸ Zohar II:91b

⁴⁹ Abarbanel commentary on Deuteronomy 25:5

⁵⁰ Sefer HaBahir 195

⁵¹ Nishmat Chaim, Maamar 4:14

⁵² Genesis 25:1, 5, 6

⁵³ Sefer Ma-asei Hashem, Chelek Ma-asei Avot 25

five hours weekly. Rabbi Amsel previously served as the Educational Director of Hillel in the Former Soviet Union. He lives Jerusalem with his wife and has four children and three grandchildren.