

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## **"AND THESE ARE THE ORDINANCES" - THE SECRET OF REINCARNATION** (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**C**ommenting on the verse that states, "And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them" (Exodus 21:1), the Zohar states: "These are the individual reincarnations of each of the souls that are judged" (Zohar II:94a).

The secrets of reincarnation are certainly very profound, yet we intend to discuss them here to some degree by introducing them into the subject of our parsha.

As we have seen, just like Adam, Moses embodied all the souls of the Jewish people (Tikkun Zohar 56:90b). Thus when we engage in the study of the "Torah of Moses," we repair the sin of Adam and bring the Final Redemption closer. Let us examine how this happens.

We know that Moses was the reincarnation of Abel (Tikkun Zohar 69:99b). If Abel looked at the fire and got burned, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to gaze toward G-d" (at the incident of the burning bush – Exodus 3:6). Despite his great spiritual level, he still demonstrated great modesty and never considered himself as worthy enough to look at the Shechinah. As the Arizal teaches, Mashiach will only come when the death of Abel will be rectified. In our opinion, this is what the prophet Malachi alludes to when he states, "Remember the Torah of Moses My servant ... Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet" (Malachi 3:22-23). We get closer to the Final Redemption by recalling the Torah of Moses, the spark and reincarnation of Abel.

As he welcomed guests, Abraham invited them to "recline beneath ha'etz [the tree]" (Genesis 18:4), which alludes to the Torah, as it is written: "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it" (Proverbs 3:18). All the mitzvot in the Torah carry the name Etzot (Zohar II:82b), words of wisdom that allow an individual to fight the evil inclination. When Adam sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge (which alludes to the wisdom that the Torah disseminates), he was condemned to death in order to repair everything that he had tainted. All the souls that

were dependant upon him then dispersed (Tikkun Zohar 69:102b).

As for Adam, he was reincarnated in our holy Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (ibid. 113a). Enslaved in Egypt, the Children of Israel had to repair all the souls that had been dispersed following Adam's sin (see Ohr HaChayim on Genesis 49:9). Moses was, as we saw above, the reincarnation of Abel. He was equal to all the souls of Israel, and he had to suffer with them and help them to escape from the Kelipah (impurity), as it is written: "Moses grew up and went out to his brethren" (Exodus 2:11). This is what constitutes gilgul (reincarnation), which has the same numerical value (72) as chesed, the loving kindness that he demonstrated towards them.

According to the Zohar, Pinchas the son of Elazar was the incarnation of our Patriarch Isaac (Zohar III: 236b, 237a). For that matter, we may note that the numerical value of their names is the same (208). Esau was reincarnated into Zimri, the son of Salu. With regards to this, notice that the numerical value of the expression zeh hu Esav (added to the number of letters in hu Esav [6]) is equal to the numerical value (406) of the name Zimri ben Salu. Now as we know, Cain was reincarnated into Esau (Tikkun Zohar 69:118b). Together they constitute the origin of Kelipah, since Zimri sinned with the Midianite. Isaac (Pinchas) was to kill Esau (Zimri), but since Esau was not rectified by his incarnation as Zimri, it was Pinchas (the reincarnation of Isaac) who took charge of that task (by killing him) to demonstrate that there is a judgment and a judge. Following that incident, Esau was reincarnated into Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's donkey (Chullin 7a), and Pinchas into Rabbi Akiva. During the time of Pinchas, "Those who died in the plague were 24,000" (Numbers 25:9), and in parallel to that Rabbi Akiva lost 24,000 of his disciples because they did not show respect for one another (Yebamot 62b).

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Having eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, Eve brought death into the world (Yalkut Shimoni, Bereshith 32). She was reincarnated as Batiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, thanks to whom the world would survive because she “drew him [Moses] from the water” (Exodus 2:10). Thus she had the merit of bearing the name “bat Y-h” (“daughter of Hashem”), the work of His hands, like Eve. Now according to the Zohar, Eve also brought about Abel’s death (Tikkun Zohar 69:118b). Batiah, however, saved Moses. We may therefore say that it was by the merit of Batiah (the reincarnation of Eve) that Moses (the reincarnation of Abel) saved the Children of Israel from Egypt and gave them the Torah. Therefore Batiah completely atoned for the sin of Eve.

Commenting on the verse that states, “You shall observe the commandment ... that I command you today” (Deuteronomy 7:11), the Talmud explains: “We carry them out today, and we receive their reward tomorrow” (Eruvin 22a), meaning in the World to Come. A man does not receive the reward for his good deeds in this world lest he come back (in another incarnation) following his sins. His reward is given to him in the World to Come, at the resurrection of the dead. In the future the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring back to life the one who was but dust, and He will give him the reward he deserves. The expression “And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them” (Exodus 21:1) therefore denotes the secret of reincarnation, the means by which a man receives the reward for his good deeds.

Reincarnation also occurs in minor areas, such as food. A food that was defiled, or which did not attain the goal that G-d prescribed for it, must be rectified. Thus vegetable matter is transformed into animal matter, which in turn is transformed into a human being, who then enables it to attain its goal by eating it. Even the dried up bones in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 37:11) – “dried” meaning devoid of all Torah, of mitzvot (Sanhedrin 92b), and of holiness – can be rectified by the process of reincarnation. How does this occur? We know that even the forces of evil have, deep down, a spark of holiness in them, like a fine thread (Zohar II:201b). Impurity sticks to a man’s body by means of this spark, but in the agony of the grave, when bones become dried up and the body putrefies, this impurity becomes detached from it (Zohar I:116).

The rectification caused by reincarnation occurs primarily through Torah study, prayer, and the performance of mitzvot. Moreover, the numerical value of the expression Ve’eileh hamishpatim asher tasim lifneichem (“And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them” [Exodus 21:1]) is the same as the expression Zeh razez hagigul: BaTorah, tefillah, u’mitzvot (“This is the secret of reincarnation: With Torah [study], prayer, and mitzvot”).

## THE PATH OF THE JUST

### PRIDE - PART X

After you have distanced yourself from outward displays of mitzvot and good deeds, the evil inclination will tempt you by saying, “You will not be able to serve Hashem perfectly unless you distance yourself completely from men, hiding your good deeds and claiming the opposite of what you’ve thought up to now. Pray briefly, and when you want to study, do so in private so that Hashem alone knows. Don’t show anyone your good character traits, but on the contrary, show proof of your laziness when you pray so that you don’t acquire a good reputation. Otherwise, this might take away from your future reward. Don’t encourage others to do good, and don’t distance them from evil. Don’t show anyone your wisdom, and don’t show them that you carry the signs of a G-d fearing man (for example, Tefillin).”

All this is a trick of the evil inclination in order to catch man in its trap. Whoever acts in such a way, thinking that he is acting meritoriously, loses a million times more than he gains. He is like one who flees from glowing embers by jumping into a furnace.

This is what is appropriate to do: Pray with concentration and at length, encourage men to do good and to turn from evil, and persuade them to perform good deeds as much openly as in private. If a person is honored and praised for such, these praises will not prejudice him, since at the moment of the good deed he was not seeking praise.

Consequently, when you perform a good deed, be sure of the person from whom you are expecting a reward: If it is Hashem, your good deed is perfectly correct; if it is man, your good deed is tainted with personal interest. Also, if your good deed is performed in public, check to see if you would have done the same thing in private. If this proves to be true, then your deed is entirely good.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

## RABBI YOSSEF PEIMER - THE RAV OF SLUTZK

**R**abbi Yossef Peimer, better known as Rabbi Yossel of Slutzk, was born to Rabbi Meir in Skudy, Lithuania in 5556 (1796). At a young age, Rabbi Yossel went to study at the famous Volozhin yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva, the Gaon Rabbi Chaim (the disciple of the Gra), became attached to the boy and showed great affection for him. Rabbi Yossel finished by becoming his main student, affirming that “everything I say, I have heard from my teacher Rabbi Chaim.” Not long afterwards, his fame spread throughout the country and he was known in his own right as a Gaon and Tzaddik, humble and pious.

When the rabbinical position in the city of Slutzk opened up, its inhabitants sought out a brilliant Rav. They heard of a certain avrech from the Volozhin yeshiva named Rabbi Yossel, a man who had all the characteristics of a Talmid Chacham. They went to see him with an offer to come and be the Rav of their city.

Rabbi Yossel was 32 years old when he became the Rav of Slutzk. It was a pious community whose Rabbis had been Torah giants for many generations.

People say that after the community leaders of Slutzk invited him to come and settle down there, he traveled to Slutzk by way of a small town located near Kapulie. At the request of the inhabitants of that town, he spent Shabbat there. The Talmidei Chachamim of Kapulie took advantage of his stay to come and speak words of Torah with him, and all marveled at his great knowledge in all areas of Torah. During one conversation, someone made an astute comment in the name of Rabbi Lipman, the Rav of Kapulie and author of Kedushat Yom Tov. Hearing this, Rabbi Yossef exclaimed in astonishment, “If in the tiny town of Kapulie there lives a Gaon like him, it is he who merits taking the rabbinical position of Slutzk, not I!” When he was told that Rabbi Lipman had already passed away, he accepted to become the Rav of Slutzk.

Rabbi Yossel’s arrival in Slutzk was very impressive. He was large of stature and had the head of a lion. His forehead was high and large, and his eyes looked like glowing coals, charming and alluring. He was well-built and exuded charm, drawing looks from people passing in the streets. His good looks became so famous that the government sent an artist to draw his portrait, and today we know what he looked like because of that.

During his first Shabbat in Slutzk, Rabbi Yossel went to pray at its great Beit Midrash. There an old teacher, eminent in Torah, approached the new Rav and said to him, “Rabbi, here you are appointed as our Rav. I would like to ask you a question concerning Tosaphot on Tractate Eruvin.” The old man then posed his question, and the young Rav briefly consulted some books and presented his response. The old man was surprised and said, “Now I know that you are a great sage of Israel and worthy of being the Rav of a great city like Slutzk. May you succeed in your task!”

Rabbi Yossef always evoked people’s surprise by recounting how he had been given Heavenly assistance to answer that particular question, for afterwards he worked hard to recall his reply, but could never remember it.

He was received as the Rav of Slutzk during the winter of 5589 (1829), and he immediately began to draw his focus on education. He had all the teachers in town come to the Beit Midrash, and there he explained to them how to instill a love for Torah in children. He warned them against corporal punishment, believing that it was

better to verbally reprimand students and show them signs of affection. When a teacher asked him what to do in the event that words proved useless, he replied, “I order you to do the following: When you find yourself obliged to strike a student, do not do so with your hand. Rather, use a towel or strap, or something similar.” When he was asked the reason for this decree, he quite simply replied: “A teacher’s hands are always at his disposition, and when he becomes angry he may use them to strike a student. Now, however, I have ordered teachers not to use their hands. Rather, they are to use something else, which they will not always have with them. Thus during the time that they will look for these things, their anger will subside.”

Rabbi Yossef despised ill-gotten gain. He earned little and lived in tremendous poverty, and he detested gifts and never complained. After some years in Slutzk, the community leaders of Minsk asked him to be their Rav, and after incessant supplications, he sent them a letter expressing his acceptance. When the inhabitants of Slutzk learned of that, they came to him and begged him not to abandon them. The Rav accepted to stay, but only on condition that they intercept the letter that he had sent to Minsk, and that they not increase his salary. This he requested so that nobody could say that he had remained in Slutzk because of a salary increase. They did what the Rav asked, except that they repaired the roof of his house, for whenever it rained water leaked inside and ruined his books.

Rabbi Yossef’s greatness in Torah and the beauty of his character spread wide and far, and many young people gathered to learn Torah from him. He also issued many Halachic responses to those from around the world who asked him questions. He was extremely modest and always worried about forgetting his learning. One story has it that Rabbi Yossef once fell ill and was forced stay in bed for several weeks. After recuperating, he was sitting by his window one day getting a breath of fresh air, when then came Benjamin, the town fool, who in his youth had been well-versed in Torah. He passed by the Rav’s window and exclaimed the words of the Sages in a loud voice: “Rav Yossef fell ill and forgot all his learning” (Nedarim 41a). Rabbi Yossef was taken aback by the fool’s words, and he feared that he had actually forgotten his learning. He could not find peace before convening the Dayanim of the city and repeating all four parts of the Shulchan Aruch to them by heart.

Rabbi Yossef passed away on Friday, the first day of Iyar 5724 (1864). Rabbi Avraham Esofski, an elderly man who was the Gabbai of the Slutzk Beit Midrash in New York (whose Rav is Rabbi Moshe Shurin), recounted the following about Rabbi Yossef’s funeral: “I was a young boy when I attended the funeral of that Gaon and Tzaddik. Thousands of people followed his casket, and on that same day a great amount of snow fell, covering the streets of the city and forcing the funeral procession to move very slowly. The people of Slutzk had never seen so much snow in winter, and they viewed it as a sign that even nature was mourning the loss of the Gaon. In accordance with the wishes of the departed, the epitaph on his tombstone read, ‘Here lies Rabbi Yossef the son of Rabbi Meir.’ He had ordered that no tributes be engraved on it.”

Rabbi Yossef left behind many manuscripts on the four parts of the Shulchan Aruch. His Torah commentaries have been published of late, and his words rejoice both heart and soul.

# THE STORY OF THE WEEK

## *Bringing hearts together*

**T**he author of Birkat Avraham recounted the following story concerning Rabbi Shimshon, the Rav of Zivlin: One weekday, the Rav's wife went shopping for household items, and despite her poverty she decided to buy a large, magnificent fish in honor of Shabbat. As the Rebbetzin proceeded to make her purchase, another woman (the wife of one of the wealthiest men in town) also arrived at the market and wanted to purchase the same fish. To insure her purchase, this woman paid extra for it and insisted that she be allowed to buy it. The two women then began to have a heated argument, and the wife of the wealthy man treated the Rav's wife in a very insulting manner. Rumors of this argument – that the wife of so and so had insulted the honor of the Torah – quickly spread around town. Now a Talmid Chacham's wife should be considered as her husband, and because of that, the other woman displayed a terrible amount of disrespect. Word of this reached the leaders of the community, who decided to defend the honor of the Torah and to punish the guilty women without giving any consideration to the wrath of her husband, since the Torah states: "You shall not tremble before any man" (Deuteronomy 1:17). It was obvious to them that it was important to respond to such an insult. However, since they had made an agreement with the Rav they would not do anything without his approval, and since they had also agreed that they were to leave him alone to study Torah during the entire week – and only to come to him with questions at the end of Shabbat – they had no chance to discuss the situation with him before Shabbat ended. Hence they went to find the Rebbetzin and explained the situation to her, requesting that when the Rav came home for Shabbat, that she find a way to present the situation to him in order to "lay the groundwork" for the talk that they wanted to have with him after Shabbat ended.

On Friday night, when Rabbi Shimshon came home from synagogue, he was surprised to see that his wife was not at her usual place by the table she had prepared, but rather took refuge in a corner by another table. He asked her what she was doing, and she replied: "Given that I am not worthy of being the Rav's Rebbetzin and to sit at his table, I prepared my own table to sit at." Surprised, he asked her why she said that she was not "worthy" of being his Rebbetzin. She responded, "So and so, the wife of the wealthy man, treated me in the following way...." The Rav became angry and asked, "She insulted you like that, and everyone kept quiet? What happened to the honor of the Torah? And what will the community leaders say?" She replied by telling him that everyone was in shock, and that the leaders of the community had wanted to impose a fine on her. However, they could not do so because their hands were tied due to the fact that he, the Rav, had bound them not to do anything important without his approval or before speaking to him after Shabbat.

After calming the Rebbetzin and convincing her to take her normal seat at the table, the Rav relaxed, recited some prayers before the meal, and prepared to recite Kiddush. Then with his glass in hand, and just before beginning to recite the blessing, a thought came to him. He asked his wife, "When did all this happen?" She replied, "Last Tuesday." Taken aback by this, Rabbi Shimshon exclaimed in a loud voice as if in shock: "Since Tuesday? And since Tuesday up to now you've kept a grudge in your heart toward this Jewish woman and have not yet forgiven her?" The Rebbetzin was terrified by the Tzaddik's accusation, and she immediately said, "I forgive her! I forgive her!" The Rav, however, was not convinced. "That's not enough," he said. "One who keeps a grudge in their heart from Tuesday until Shabbat against a member of the Jewish people is duty-bound to personally ask for that person's forgiveness." The Rebbetzin began to feel tense. Was it not enough for her to suffer humiliation in public, that now she had to ask for that person's forgiveness? Nevertheless the Rav's words were sacred to her, and so he immediately put on his coat, and the Rebbetzin hers, and together they went out in the dark of night and walked to the wealthy man's house. The Kiddush cup remained on the Rav's table, its contents untouched.

When they arrived at the man's house and knocked at the door, they could hear a voice from inside asking, "Who is it?" The Rav identified himself, as well

as the Rebbetzin, and those inside immediately realized that they had come because of the unfortunate incident between the wealthy man's wife and the Rebbetzin. Since they understood the greatness of his piety, the residents were filled with fear and dreaded that he might scorch them with his words, for who could withstand his curse? They opened the door and fell to his feet with tears in their eyes. They begged that he forgive them, for their sin was inexcusable. Shocked by this, the Rav exclaimed, "Is it you who needs to ask for forgiveness? Rather, is it not we who should ask that you forgive the grudge that was kept in my wife's heart against the lady of this house since last Tuesday!" They heard this with incredulity and exclaimed, "Should you be asking for forgiveness, since it was from us that an affront to the Torah's honor originated? It is we who should be asking for it, not you!" Each party cried in front of the other, and each asked forgiveness of the other, until their voices became indistinguishable. Each one said, "I forgive everyone" and the hearts of all were brought together without a shadow of dissension. Only then did Rabbi Shimshon Zatzal agree to go back home with the Rebbetzin and sit down at the table to recite Kiddush and continue celebrating Shabbat.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### *From the Maggid of Dubno*

It is written, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor" (Exodus 22:24).

The Midrash states: " 'When you lend money' – as it is written: 'One who is gracious to the poor has lent to the L-RD' [Proverbs 19:17]. To what extent does this go? 'The rich rules over the poor' [Proverbs 22:7]."

In this passage, the Sages apparently want to teach us how to act properly in matters of generosity: Whoever lends to the poor would be better off to not insistently claim his money. Indeed, it would be better for him to totally give up on claiming it.

Let us try to understand this by using the following parable:

A person went to ask for a loan from his friend, who was willing to do so on condition that a guarantor was involved. The person presented him with two guarantors, one who was wealthy and honest while the other was bankrupt and unreliable. The borrower wrote down on an IOU that his friend could address himself to one or the other in case of a default in payment. It is clear that if the lender has the least bit of insight, and if a default in the repayment of the loan does occur, he will leave the unreliable guarantor alone and not ask him for anything. This he will do so that the wealthy guarantor will realize that it is he who must deal with repaying the loan. Otherwise, the wealthy guarantor will learn that the lender is also going after the poor guarantor, and he will say: "What do you want from me? First get what you can out of the other guarantor!"

The passage in question provides us with some good advice: The one who lends to the poor is considered to have, as it were, a signed guarantee from Hashem, Who sees to it that the lender will not incur a loss. Therefore, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor" (Exodus 22:24) – leave him in peace, so that he does not feel that you are oppressing him. If he is afraid that he will lose the money that he has lent, the Sages remind him that "One who is gracious to the poor has lent to the L-RD" (Proverbs 19:17). Therefore he should address himself to the One Who is wealthy beyond limit, and without the shadow of a doubt he will be repaid.