

Reincarnation and Resurrection: What do our Sages say?

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All of the Jewish people, even sinners and those who are liable to be executed with a court-imposed death penalty, have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: “And your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, for My name to be glorified” (Isaiah 60:21).

Pirke Avot 4:16 (c.190-c.230 CE) (Tractate in the Mishnah, Seder Nezikin, “Order of Damages”)

רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב אָמַר, הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דוֹמֶה לְפָרוּזְדוֹר בְּפִנֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. הַתְּקַן עֲצֻמָּךְ בְּפָרוּזְדוֹר, כְּדִי שֶׁתִּכְנָס לְטָרְקֵלִין:

Rabbi Jacob said: this world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule, so that you may enter the banqueting-hall.

Babylonian Talmud Moed Katan 28a (c.450-c.550 CE)

אָמַר לֵיהּ: לִיתְחַזִּי לִי מָר. אֶתְחַזִּי לֵיהּ. אָמַר לֵיהּ: הֲהוּא לֵיהּ לְמָר צַעֲרָא? אָמַר לֵיהּ: כְּמִישְׁחַל בְּנִיתָא מִחֻלְבָּא, וְאִי אָמַר לִי הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא זִיל בְּהוּא עֲלֵמָא כְּדָ הוּיִת — לֹא בְעֵינָא, דְנִפְיֵשׁ בִּיעֵתוּתִיהּ.

Rava **said to Rav Nahman: Master, appear to me** in a dream after your death. And **he appeared to him**. Rava **said to him: Master, did you have pain** in death? Rav Nahman **said to him: Like the removal of hair from milk**, which is a most gentle process. But nevertheless, **were the Holy One, Blessed be He, to say to me: Go back to that world**, the physical world, **as you were, I would not want to go, for the fear of the Angel of Death is great**.

Book of Jonah³ – Commentary by the Vilna Gaon⁴ (1720-1797 CE)

Jonah is the neshamah (soul), which is charged with a mission to fulfill in this world: perfecting itself. The neshamah boards a “vessel” to journey through this world: namely, the body. But the person tries to flee from God and avoid fulfilling His charge. Eventually, the individual is “swallowed up” and departs from this world, leaving his task unfinished. What happens after that? “And the Word of God came to Jonah a second time, saying: ‘Arise! Go to Nineveh ...’” ([Jonah 3:1-2](#)). The soul is sent back to earth, to finally accomplish its intended mission.

³ Jonah is the protagonist of the Book of Jonah. A reluctant prophet, he tried to avoid his instruction to prophecy destruction to Nineveh. He fled by boat but was tossed overboard during a storm and swallowed by a great fish. After being saved by God, he went to Nineveh, whose people heeded his warnings and repented. (<https://www.sefaria.org/topics/jonah?tab=sources>)

⁴ Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797 CE), also known as the Vilna Gaon or the Gra, was a talmudist and the greatest Torah authority of his generation. He had a photographic memory; according to legend he memorized the Torah by the age of three. By the age of 20, he was already resolving complicated legal issues that confounded other rabbis. He wrote copious commentaries on virtually all Jewish texts, including corrective notes on the Talmud. He also authored books on grammar and mathematics and encouraged his students to learn secular sciences. He may be best remembered as one of the leaders of the “Mitnagdim,” the opponents of the newly emergent Chasidic movement. He declared that the Chasidic belief in miracles and visions were lies and delusions. In response, he advocated a more rational approach to Torah observance that emphasized the traditional obligations of Torah study and fulfillment of the commandments. (<https://www.sefaria.org/topics/vilna-gaon>)