

Jewish Journal



Florida

Educator discusses Jewish view of reincarnation

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February 6, 2016

Do Jews believe in reincarnation?

For the 120 people who attended the recent discussion/lecture by Dr. Sandra Lilienthal on "The Jewish View of Reincarnation" at Orloff Central Agency for Jewish Education in Davie, the answer is that some Jews do believe in reincarnation, but not all.

Lilienthal pointed out that no answer on reincarnation will ever satisfy everyone.

"If you state that something is true and can only be interpreted one way, you are making other people take a different viewpoint. The strength of Judaism is learning that Reincarnation and other concepts can be seen through different interpretations," said Lilienthal, an adult educator with Orloff CAJE.

"Reincarnation is the belief that a soul that can transfer to the body of another person upon death. But nobody truly knows if reincarnation actually does happen. Reincarnation is faith based. In fact, Jewish texts did not speak of reincarnation until the 15th century."

Despite not slanting her discussion on whether reincarnation is true or false, Lilienthal initiated a lively discussion on the concept of Reincarnation throughout Jewish history, citing passages from Talmud, Torah and other Judaic sources.

Lilienthal cited biblical sources, such as Genesis 2:7 "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a human being" and Job 14:12 "So man lies down never to rise" to elaborate on the discussion.

"To understand reincarnation we need to know what is a soul. The soul, according to Genesis, could be created through the breath of God, but death is described as never changing in Job," said Lilienthal.

Lilienthal went on to show contradictions in the concepts of death and soul, citing Job 33:30 "To bring him back from the Pit, That he may bask in the light of life" to suggest that death may not be final."

"The many sources indicate confusion and not necessarily a consistent way of interpreting the meaning of soul, death and reincarnation. It is from learning from the different sources that we expand on our knowledge of reincarnation," said Lilienthal.

Lilienthal stimulated discussion on the concepts of after life and on the resurrection of souls during the Messianic age, citing various Judaic sources, such as Talmud and Zohar, noting that reincarnation has received strong support among Hasidism.

"Can the soul be moved from our ancestors to our descendants?" asked Darlene Cohen that provoked many responses.

"The soul relives in descendants so that its mission can be fulfilled to God's satisfaction," responded George Silver in the discussion.

Following the discussion, those attending spoke in glowing terms about Lilienthal and her approach to learning.

"Sandra is fascinating. Her research and willingness to explore so many interpretation of reincarnation opens more ways for us to learn," said Sheryl Lang, who takes many adult education classes with Lilienthal.

"Our large attendance tonight was based on both the topic and on Sandra. She challenges those at her lectures to pursue research. Her scholarship leads us to ask more questions, rather than have a finite conclusion," said Dr. Arnold Samlan, executive director of Orloff CAJE.

Lilienthal won the 2015 Covenant Award for Excellence in Education.

"Sandra has a unique ability to impart her knowledge of Judaism without judgment. As a result, her classes have become vibrant, filled with a passion for learning," said Vivian Grossman, a past board director of Orloff CAJE.

To learn more about upcoming programs at Orloff Central Agency for Jewish Education, 5890 S. Pine Island Road in Davie, call 954-660-2070 or go to www.orloffcaje.org

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/florida-jewish-journal/news/broward/fl-jjbs-reincarnation-0208-20170206-story.html>