

## Understanding *Olam Haba* (The World to Come) – Pt. 2 – JewishClarity.com

### What is the preparation for *Olam Haba*?

The *Medrash Rut* (3:3) tells us:

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, whoever is crooked is able to become straight, and whoever is straight is able to become crooked, but in the future to come, whoever is crooked will not be able to become straight, and whoever is straight will not be able to become crooked, and anything lacking will not be able to be repaired.

Two *reshayim* (wicked people) may work together in this world, one of them may do *teshuva* before his death, and one of them may not do *teshuva*. The result will be that this one [who did do *teshuva*] will be among the group of *tzadikim* (righteous), while this one [who did not do *teshuva*] will be among the group of *reshayim*.

The [second] one will then see [the first one] and say — “Woe is to me! Perhaps there is favoritism (*mashveh panim*) with this one! He and I stole together and murdered together. [And yet,] he is among the group of *tzadikim*, while I am among the group of *reshayim*!”

They will answer him and say — “You are a fool! Three days after your death, your body was disgusting and covered with worms. Your friend understood this, and he returned from his path. While you may have thought about doing *teshuva*, you never [actually] did do it.”

He answers — “Leave me and I will go do *teshuva* [now].”

They will respond to this and say to him — “You fool! Don't you know that *Olam Haba* (the world to come) is compared to Shabbat and *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world), which precedes it, is like *erev Shabbat*? If a person doesn't prepare on *erev Shabbat*, then what will he eat on Shabbat? Furthermore, *Olam Haba* is compared to the ocean while *Olam Ha'zeh*, which precedes it, is like the shore. If a person doesn't prepare [while he is still] on the shore, then what will he eat [when he is later] on the ocean? And finally, *Olam Haba* is compared to the wilderness while *Olam Ha'zeh*, which precedes it, is like where people live. If a person doesn't prepare [while he is still] where people live, then what will he eat [when he is later] in the wilderness?”

He will say — “Leave me, and let me [at least] see my friend in his glory.”

They will respond and say to him — “Fool. We are commanded by G-d that *reshayim* should not stand by the *tzadikim*, and the *tzadikim* should not stand by the *reshayim*, and not the *t'mei'im* (impure) by the side of the *tehorim* (pure), and not the *tehorim* by the side of the *t'mei'im*.

The *Yerushalmi* (*Peah* 1:1) tells us that:

One with a majority of merits and a minority of transgressions, will have his minority of light transgressions dealt with in *Olam Ha'zeh*, so that he can be paid **completely** [for his majority of merits] in *Olam Haba*.

**Rav Dessler** points out:

On the ultimate day of judgment of *Olam Haba*, *rachamim* (mercy) will not be relevant at all. The whole concept of mercy is different types of help to **prepare** us. But the essential existence and level of man is in terms of the true reality... We do, however, find some aspect of mercy within the

justice of *Olam Haba*. Beit Hillel explains that the *middah* (trait) of “*rav chessed*” means that if one has exactly half *zechuyot* (merits) and half *aveirot*, he will be judged to the side of *chessed*, and his half *zechuyot* will be considered to be the majority. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Alah b'machshava l'barah b'din — 3:226*).

The **Medrash** spells this out: Hashem says to the **wicked** — “I created two worlds for you — one to do good deeds, and one to give *s'char*. If you did not do good deeds here in *Olam Ha'zeh*, then what do you want [from Me] now?” (*Medrash Socheir Tov, Mishlei 11*).

### ***Olam Haba* is really just the actualization of *Olam Ha'zeh***

**Rav Dessler** explained:

A person merits *Olam Haba* only through what is **actually** inside of him. Everything which is external...is irrelevant for the purity of *Olam Haba*, *Olam Haba* expresses who one truly is. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Yayin haM'shumar — 3:289*).

Rebbe Chanina ben Tradyon was *moser nefesh* (risked his life) to teach Torah publicly during a time of Roman persecution. And yet he asked — “What will be my situation in *Olam Haba*?” And the key to him getting *Olam Haba* was ultimately what happened when the money for his Purim meal became mixed up with *tzedaka* money, and he gave all of the doubtful money away to the poor. Why was this the ultimate determinate of him getting *Olam Haba*?

The big actions are never the true indication of the level of the *penimiut* (internal aspects) of a person, since they may be done with only a superficial inspiration. It is rather the small actions, which may seem unimportant, which reveal the true internal level of a person.

And even if we might also be willing to do the same thing, and donate all of our doubtful money to *tzedaka*, that would not necessarily make us into *b'nei Olam Haba*. With us, it might not be such a small and obvious thing; we would probably feel it was something special. Therefore, this may not be the indication of our level in *Olam Haba*. But with Rebbe Chanina ben Tradyon, it was really nothing special in his eyes. This explains the words of the Rambam who wrote that one who does even a single mitzvah *lishmah* (purely for its own sake) will merit life in *Olam Haba*. And he brings a proof from this *ma'aseh* (story) with Rebbe Chanina ben Tradyon, who received *Olam Haba* through his complete dedication to *tzedaka*, and not the one-time *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) of teaching Torah publicly which actually resulted in him being killed by the Romans. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — 3:107–9*).

**Rav Chaim m'Volozhin** added:

The *s'char* in *Olam Haba* is simply the actions which we did. After the separation of the *nefesh* (soul) from the *guf* (body), the *nefesh* is elevated to be able to have pleasure and satiation from the radiance of the lights, powers, and sanctified worlds which were added and multiplied from one's good actions. In truth, *Olam Haba* is really the product of the person himself. This portion is broadened, increased, and fixed by the actions of every single person himself. For all of *Yisrael*, every one of them, have a portion which is sanctified with its illumination and shine, and was established and added to *Olam Haba* from his positive actions. And, similarly, the *onesh* of *Gehenom* (the place of spiritual cleansing) is also that one's *chet* (transgression) itself is his *onesh*. (*Nefesh HaChaim 1:12*).

**Rav Yerucham** also said:

The entire secret of man and his *avodah* is the matter of **netiah** (leaning), and that is also the secret of *Olam Haba*. What are *tzadikim* compared to in *Olam Ha'zeh*? To a tree which is standing completely in a place of purity. And everything depends upon *netiah* (leaning). We are generally accustomed to understand the matter of *Olam Haba* as the place where we receive *s'char*. And although this is also the truth, this is still not the secret of *Olam Haba*. The secret of *Olam Haba* is that a person needs to be a *ben Olam Haba*, i.e. to have a **leaning towards Olam Haba**. Adam HaRishon, before the *chet*, was completely leaning. His body was [entirely] in *Gan Eden* and he had no other leaning at all. The level of our *neshama* (soul) is now in the same category as the body of Adam HaRishon, even though it is presently in *Olam Ha'zeh*. The understanding of *Olam Haba* (the world **to come**) is not that eventually this world will be revealed. Rather, the secret is that here in *Olam Ha'zeh* [everything depends upon] the *netiah*, and that is [also] the secret of *Olam Haba*, as the verse says — “All of *Yisrael* has a portion **towards Olam Haba**.” (*Da'at Torah — Bereshit*, pg.158).

The Ran records this opinion of the Rambam, that through doing any single mitzvah, among all of the *mitzvot* [with complete purity and dedication], a person can merit to *Olam Haba*. And this is the opinion of the Rosh as well. (**Drashot HaRan #6**).

The language of the **Rambam**, in his commentary on the *Mishnah* at the end of *Makkot* is: Among the foundations of *emunah* in the Torah is that when one fulfills [any] one of the 613 *mitzvot* fittingly and properly, without mixing in any other intention of this world at all, but only *lishmah* [purely for the sake of G-d and] from love, he then merits life in *Olam Haba*. Rebbe Chananya, therefore, explains that since there are so many different *mitzvot*, it is impossible that one will not fulfill [at least] one of them properly and completely. And when he does that particular mitzvah, his soul will [then] exist [eternally in *Olam Haba*] through that single action.

**Rav Dessler** explained this:

The spiritual reality that one forms through Torah and *mitzvot* is **exactly** what his *Olam Haba* is, as the *Mishnah* says — “*S'char mitzvah mitzvah*.” (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Alah b'machshava l'barah b'din — 3:226*).

Development in *Olam Haba* is not really a new experience. All development is the totality of the experiences we acquired through our fulfillment of the *mitzvot*. Therefore, any *aliya* (elevation) that the *neshama* makes is never a free gift. One is rather eating the fruits of his own labor. All of the development is really a direct result of the Torah and *mitzvot*, and was fully acquired when the Torah and *mitzvot* were first accomplished. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — 1:287–288*).

**Rav Dessler** also discussed the implications of the **Gemara Pesachim (50a)**:

“*Ashrei mi she'ba l'kan v'talmudo b'yado* — Fortunate is the one who comes here [to *Olam Haba*] with his learning in his hand” — i.e. [only] that which has been acquired through effort and toil. This teaches us that one's Torah in *Olam Haba* is not evaluated based on his natural intelligence, but rather based on his toil with the Torah. Only that which we toiled in will become ours as an acquisition within our *nefesh*. As was discussed previously [1: 217], the *seichel* is merely a tool given to man to use in *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world). In *Olam Haba*, however, we will no longer have this tool. We will have only whatever we transformed into a spiritual acquisition within our *nefesh*. Therefore, a *chacham* with a quick mind, good memory, and who knows a great deal, but his toil with Torah was minimal, will be an *am ha'aretz* (ignoramus) in *Olam Haba* — while one with a weak mind, poor memory, and knows little, but has an enormous degree of work and toil in his Torah, will attain much in *Olam Haba*, since whatever he possesses through hard work is entirely his own. This is what the *Gemara (Pesachim 50a)* means when it says *Olam Haba* is an upside-

down world — those on the top [in this world] will be on the bottom [in *Olam Haba*], and those on the bottom [here] will be above [there].” In other words, one with a quick mind but without *zerizut* (excitement and enthusiasm) and *ameilut* (effort) to learn will have a weak understanding in *Olam Haba*, while one with *zerizut* and *ameilut* will be able to learn easily in *Olam Haba*. That is the *s'char* (eternal benefit) for his *zerizut*. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 3:20).

### **Whatever we do in *Olam Ha'zeh*, we will have for eternity in *Olam Haba***

**Rav Dessler** pointed out:

Those very *middot* and spiritual acquisitions which we acquire for ourselves in *Olam Ha'zeh* — they are what we will bring with us when we enter *Olam Haba*. We cannot add any new abilities there. [Rather,] the Torah we learned in *Olam Ha'zeh* will enable us to acquire the true outlook. And then, afterwards, we will be able to recognize His revelation, and to learn the true path from it. Furthermore, through the Torah and *mitzvot* which we acquired in *Olam Ha'zeh*, we will become sanctified and prepared to derive pleasure from the *ruchniyut*. But one who never got pleasure from spirituality during his life, from Torah or good things in *Olam Ha'zeh*, will be lacking the ability to [then] enjoy them in *Olam Haba* which is entirely *ruchani* (spiritual). (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — *Ayin lo ra'atah* — 3:101).

This is found in both *Medrash* and *Gemara*:

Whoever learns Torah in *Olam Ha'zeh* will merit to teach it in *Olam Haba*. (***Sanhedrin 92a***).

These *Talmidei Chachamim* (Torah Scholars) who are involved with *divrei Torah* (the words of Torah) in *Olam Ha'zeh*, Hashem reveals the secrets to them in *Olam Haba*. (***Chagiga 14a***).

All *mitzvot* which are done by *Yisrael* in *Olam Ha'zeh*, will come and be established in *Olam Haba*. (***Avodah Zara 4a***).

Whoever answers “*amen*” [i.e. affirming the truth of a blessing] in *Olam Ha'zeh* will merit to answer “*amen*” in *Olam Haba*. (***Tanchuma Tzav 7***).

Whoever says *Shira* (a song of praise to G-d) in *Olam Ha'zeh* will merit to say *Shira* in *Olam Haba*. (***Tanchuma Tzav 7***).

All *mitzvot* done by *Yisrael* in *Olam Ha'zeh*, will come and give them [spiritual] pleasure in *Olam Haba*. (***Avodah Zara 5a, 6b***).

### **Negative choices in *Olam Ha'zeh*, will also last eternally in *Olam Haba***

**Rav Dessler** discussed this:

*Onshei Gehenom* (negative spiritual consequences after death) are categorically different from *onshim* in this world. In this world, the *onsh* comes to a person from the outside and against his will. With *Gehenom*, however, the person is [really] bringing the negative consequences upon himself. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — *Ha'adam meichin l'atzmo et efsharut ha'onesh* — 3:232).

We have already explained in many places that a **physically oriented** person remains with his physical nature even after his death. He accustomed himself to a material life, to feel the continuation of self only in terms of physical matters. But there [in *Olam Haba*], he will no longer be able to chase after these [physical] aspirations. If so, what will now fill up his sense of self? He

will feel himself without any substance for an eternity of hours, days, and years, without change, nothing of interest, and with no relationship to anything. Is there any affliction more difficult than this? [Think about] the punishment of prison [in *Olam Ha'zeh*]. Its essence is to separate a person from the busy external world. However, one still eats, drinks, sleeps, and sees other prisoners. And, even so, one suffers from a great longing. All the more so, one who will be locked up, all by himself, eternally, with nothing. Only spiritual content gives meaning to life, but if one never incorporated spiritual content, Torah and *mitzvot*, into himself in *Olam Ha'zeh*, he will now be left with nothing [in *Olam Haba*]. With the prisoner [in *Olam Ha'zeh*], even if he is not able to see or speak with others, in any case, he will still occasionally hear some noise from the outside, and this will settle him a bit, even while he is in isolation. But with nothing at all [in *Olam Haba*], it will be impossible to bear it. These will be horrific afflictions, when one feels he has no substance or meaning for eternity. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Chayei netzach — bli tochein — 4:148*).

The **Rambam** adds:

The [ultimate] retribution, which has no retribution greater than it, is for the *nefesh* to be cut off and not to merit [eternal] existence. This is referred to by the prophets metaphorically as the pit of destruction, obliteration, the fire, the leech, and all terms of nullification and annihilation, since this is destruction with no resurrection afterwards, a loss which will never be undone. (***Hilchot Teshuva 8:5***).

### The Great Importance of *Hakarat HaTov* (gratitude) in *Olam Haba*

**Rav Dessler** emphasizes this:

Whoever has the quality of *hakarat hatov*, will experience the giving of *s'char* in *Olam Haba* — a great and powerful revelation of the *chessed* of Hashem. And from this, the pleasure of the splendor of G-d's presence will express itself with no limit. The very giving of the *s'char* reveals G-d's wondrous *chessed*. Since even if one did merit to *s'char* through his *avodah* and *ameilut* in this world, when one really thinks about the matter, one will realize that the good which he did was tiny compared to the *siyata d'Sh'maya* (Heavenly assistance) he received while in this world, and in terms of the benefit of the powerful and wondrous *s'char* that was revealed to him in *Olam Haba*. The path of growth depends on recognizing the *chessed* from Hashem, which is the essence of the giving of *s'char*. And whoever has not properly developed this trait of ***hakarat hatov***, will not recognize the *chessed* of Hashem. His *Olam Haba* will, therefore, remain in the category of an *Omeid* (one standing still), and will never be able to develop the quality of being a "mover." He will completely lack this aspect of eternal life. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Ayin lo ra'asah — 3:101*).

The **Ben Ish Chai** adds:

There is no person who has *s'char shaleim* (complete benefit) [in *Olam Haba*] exclusively from his own efforts. Hashem helps us with all *mitzvot*, and if not, we would be unable to do them. Every single *tzadik* has only [earned] a fraction of his *s'char*, but, even so, Hashem gives *s'char shaleim* to every one of them through *chessed* and *tzedakah*. (*Shnei Eliyahu* of the Ben Ish Chai — 1:5).

### What is the Minimum for *Olam Haba*?

The **Rambam** wrote:

All of the *reshayim* (evil ones) whose transgressions are great, are judged according to their transgressions, but they will still have a portion in *Olam Haba*, because all of *Yisrael* has a portion

in *Olam Haba*, even though they transgressed. And similarly, the pious among the nations of the world also have a portion in *Olam Haba*. (*Hilchot Teshuva* 3:5).

But the **Rambam** then goes on to list the ones that **don't** have a portion in *Olam Haba* —

These are cut off and destroyed, and judged according to the greatness of their evil and their transgressions, forever and ever and ever:

*Minim* (deniers of some essential aspects of G-d),

*Apikorsim* (denying prophesy or G-d's knowledge of man's actions),

Deniers of Torah,

Deniers of *Techiat HaMeitim* (the revival of the dead) or of the coming of *Mashiach*, *Mumarim* (openly violating one mitzvah, or all of the *mitzvot*),

Causing many to transgress,

Separating oneself from the community,

Brazenly transgressing,

Handing Jews or Jewish property over to their enemies,

Placing fear upon the community improperly,

Spilling blood,

Habitual Gossipers and Slanderers, and

Trying to undo one's circumcision.

Although they are from *Yisrael*, they have no portion in *Olam Haba*. (***Hilchot Teshuva*** 3:6,14).

The **Rambam** concludes this with a key clarification:

One only loses his portion in *Olam Haba* if he does **not** do *teshuva*. If he **does** do *teshuva*, however, even in private, then he **will** have a portion in *Olam Haba*. And one can do *teshuva* even from one of the 24 things (discussed in chapter 4 of *Hilchot Teshuva*) which generally inhibit *teshuva*, and still have a portion in *Olam Haba*. (*Hilchot Teshuva* 3:14, 4:6).

**Rav Dessler** goes even further than this:

Hashem promises His nation that even one that went down very far, as long as he keeps some connection to *Yisrael*, his spiritual spark will not be severed. This internal spark is actually the essence of the person, which he will take with him to *Olam Haba*.

And even the Jews who lost their *chelek* (portion) in *Olam Haba*, and are no longer fit to earn *Olam Haba* through their service of G-d, still have the treasury of *matnat chinam* (free gifts). This internal spark of *kedusha*, which was given to us as a *matnat chinam* when we were first created,

still exists inside of us [even] after we transgress, and it will remain within us [even] when we leave this world. However this person is [certainly] different from one who is a true *ben Olam Haba*. The one who earned *Olam Haba* through his good choices in his service of G-d can still continue to grow and develop, both himself and his understandings, while the one who got there through the treasury of *matnat chinam* has no ability to continue to grow in his understanding or elevation. (*Michtav M'Elياهو* 290).

**Rabeinu Bachya** revealed a remarkable point:

Those people that the *Mishnah* in Sanhedrin (90a) told us have no portion in *Olam Haba* — this means that there is no *chelek* which is **specific** to them. However, they can [still] have pleasure and nourishment from the many treasure houses of *tzedaka* (charity) that have been hidden away for those who did not merit [on their own]. This is like a poor person who has nothing in his hand to eat and relies on the table of his friend. Even those complete rebels whom we are supposed to pull down and [certainly] not pick them up, will have *menuchah* (a rest and tranquility) on Shabbat and the holidays. Therefore, we can explain that it is impossible for the *nefesh hasichlit* (the intellectual force) to be nullified completely. When the verse says — “that soul (*nefesh*) shall be cut off from its nation,” it means that it will be cut off from the place that had been carved out [specifically] for it. After all, how would it be possible to make a decree to nullify the *nefesh* completely? Behold, it says in the *Gemara Rosh Hashanah* (17a) — “It will be judged there for all generations.” The intention is not for nullification, but rather to be kept in existence — for an eternal *onesh* for all generations. And certainly, there were never evil people who caused destruction (*mach'chishim*) in terms of Hashem and His servant Moshe more than Korach and his group, who were banished from *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*. And even so, they were not nullified, since they are living in *Gehenom*, and existing with their *onesh*. And, in the future, they will merit *Techiat HaMeitim* (the revival of the dead) along with the other souls that are in their nation. Their *nefesh* will derive pleasure from *ziv haShechina* (the splendor of G-d's presence), away from their proper place, once they have accepted that they are cut off from the particular place that was carved out for them, and this is the opinion of the Ramban. (*Vayikra* 18:29).

The **Rikanti** takes this one step further:

Every case where *Chazal* told us that one has no *chelek* in *Olam Haba*, it means that they will have no separate place in *Olam Haba*, no treasure house in their own area, which they can rule over. That would all be [part of] having a dignified place. One with no merit, however, will still be able to stand in the place of the masses. He will not have the *chelek* which was known, and was shown to him before he came into this world. But G-d will [still] give it to him as *tzedaka* once he has received his *onesh*. And in terms of what *Chazal* say that this person has no portion in the world to come, the meaning is that this transgression destroyed the person's *chelek* which he would have had independently. However, there is still a place for him where the masses are standing.

## Final Points

**Rav Dessler** concluded:

In the earlier generations, before the *churban* (destruction) of the first *Beit HaMikdash*, when there was *nevuah*, (prophesy), the *Shechina* (G-d's presence), and open miracles, people felt in their hearts that there was really only a single world. They saw a spiritual world in the present. For that generation, *Olam Ha'zeh* was merely a hidden *Olam Haba*. For them, therefore, there was no need to imagine *Olam Haba* as a separate world. However, when the hearts became smaller, *nevuah* was removed, and there was no *Shechina* during the second *Beit HaMikdash*, people needed to speak about two different worlds — *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*. They then

described *Olam Haba* as a separate world, spiritual and complete, in order to connect it to their heart.

In the times of the second *Beit HaMikdash*, the *Tzedukim* (a group of heretics) saw only one world — *Ha'Olam Ha'zeh*, like the widespread *hashkafa* (perspective) of **our present generation**. The perspective of the *ben Torah* [today] is exactly the opposite. The *ben Torah* [also] sees only one world, but it is a spiritual world. And if he relates to two different worlds, it is only to distinguish himself from the *Tzedukim*, and for the sake of conceptualizing it better. There is, however, a danger of laxity with this. The *yeitzer [hara]* (negative inclination) can manipulate this to prevent our connection to spirituality, and to say that *Olam Ha'zeh* is also a world. The essential point is that inside [ourselves] there must be only one world, of only *ruchniyut*. Besides this world of spirituality, there can be no other world, except as a tool to connect with the world of spirituality alone. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 390 — *Dorot HaRishonim, Bizmaneinu*).

**Rav Chaim m'Volozin** wrote, in the beginning of *Ruach Chaim* —

One who does a mitzvah finds himself instantly in *Olam Haba*, even though he may not be aware of this. The *rei'ach* (scent) of *Gan Eden* enters within him and his life, and orients him to do more *mitzvot*. In other words, the *s'char* of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself. One of the *Gedolei haChasidim* wrote that **it is not the tzadik who is in *Olam Haba*, but rather *Olam Haba* which is in the tzadik**. And similarly, at the end of the *Zohar*, it is written that *Olam Haba* already existed before the six days of creation, i.e., the *ohr haganuz* (the light that was set aside) for the *tzadikim*. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* — 390 — *Olam Haba b'Tzadik*).

G-d willing, these understandings about *Olam Haba* should help all of us to live richer and more meaningful lives in *Olam Ha'zeh*.

**This should all be *l'zechut ul'iluy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun***