

Understanding *Olam Haba* (The World to Come) – Pt. 1 – JewishClarity.com

How much can we really understand *Olam Haba* (The World to Come)?

The **Rambam** wrote:

The early Sages already informed us that we have no ability to grasp the good of *Olam Haba* clearly. We can't know its greatness, beauty, and essence, only Hashem alone can. All of the goodness which the prophets prophesized about to Israel was only concerning physical matters which we will enjoy during the times of the *Mashiach* (Messiah), when kingship and sovereignty will return to Israel. The goodness of life in *Olam Haba*, however, is beyond our ability to value or compare. [Therefore,] the prophets never described it, in order to not diminish it through their description. This is what the prophet Yeshaya said — “The [human] eye never saw it, only Hashem alone.” And as the Sages said — “All of the prophets only prophesized about the days of *Mashiach*, but *Olam Haba* — ‘The [human] eye never saw it, only Hashem alone.’” (*Hilchos Teshuva* 8:7).

In fact, **Rav Dessler** suggested that our inability to understand *Olam Haba* is one reason why it is never explicitly stated in the Torah. He does mention, however, in the name of the Ramban (*Acharei Mot* — end), that the *kritut* of the *nefesh* (the cutting off of the soul) which the Torah does speak about, gives us a strong confidence in the existence of the souls after death, and in the giving of *s'char* (eternal benefit) in the world of the souls. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* 5:389).

Introduction to *Olam Haba*

The **Ramchal** explained (in *Derech Hashem*):

G-d's purpose in creation was to bestow His goodness to another. (1:2:1).

Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will and desire. (1:3:1).

G-d's goodness decreed that there be a limit to [the time period of] man's effort required to attain perfection. After this period is completed, he attains his level of perfection, and is then able to enjoy it for all of eternity. G-d therefore created two distinct periods, one as a time of earning, and the other as a time of receiving benefit. (1:3:3).

Since the aspect of good is greater, the period of earning is limited, and lasts no longer than G-d's wisdom decreed suitable for His purpose. The period of reward, however, has no limit, and man continues to derive pleasure from his earned perfection for all of eternity. (1:3:3).

G-d, therefore, created two worlds, *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world) and *Olam Haba* (the world to come). (1:3:4).

The purpose of the creation is that man should merit to attain the true good. The end point of this process is a connection to G-d and tranquility in *Olam Haba*. However, the Highest Wisdom decreed that it would be most fitting and appropriate for man to first exist in *Olam Ha'zeh* as the ideal preparation to reach this desired purpose. (2:2:1).

The ultimate and main place of benefit for good deeds is in *Olam Haba*, as we have said. The *s'char* (benefit) for the one who merits it is an eternal bonding with Hashem, and the *onesh* (negative consequence) is being pushed away from this true good and being lost. (2:2:3).

The *Medrash* (***Bereshit Rabba* 1:14**) tells us:

The world was made with the letter “*beit*” [the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet] to teach that there are really two worlds — *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*.

***Pirkei Avot* (4:21–22)** spells out the difference between these two worlds:

Rebbe Yaakov says — *Olam Ha'zeh* (this world) is similar to a lobby leading into *Olam Haba* (the world to come). Fix yourself in the lobby in order to enter the banquet hall. He [also] used to say — One moment of *teshuva* and good deeds in *Olam Ha'zeh* is greater than all of existence in *Olam Haba*; and one moment of spiritual pleasure or satisfaction in *Olam Haba* is greater than all of existence in *Olam Ha'zeh*.

Classical Sources about *Olam Haba*

The **Rambam** (*Hilchot Teshuva* 8:1) wrote:

The good which is hidden for the *tzadikim* (righteous) is *chayei Olam Haba* — life in the world to come. This is the life which has no death associated with it, and the good which has no bad associated with it... The *s'char* (benefit) for the *tzadikim* is that they should merit this pleasure and this good, and the negative consequence for the wicked is that they will not merit this life, but rather be cut off and die.

Reish Lakish said:

There is no *Gehenom* (eternal punishment) in the world to come, rather Hashem will bring out the sun from its container; *tzadikim* (the righteous) will be healed through it, and *reshayim* (the wicked) will be judged through it. (***Nedarim* 8b**).

The *Medrash* (***Otiot Rebbe Akiva* — 4**) says:

Yisrael asked the Master of the Universe for an example of *Olam Haba* in *Olam Ha'zeh*. G-d responded — this is what Shabbat is.

Similarly, the *Gemara* (*Brachot* 57b) states that Shabbat is one sixtieth of *Olam Haba*.

***Olam Haba* has no aspect of physicality at all**

The **Zohar** (*Shemot* 33) wrote:

Olam Haba has no body or form, and the *neshama* (soul) is clothed in spirituality.

The **Rambam** explained:

Olam Haba has no body or physical form, just the souls of *tzadikim* alone without a *guf* (physical body), like the angels. And since there is no physical form, there is no eating or drinking, and nothing that the body needs in *Olam Ha'zeh*. There is also nothing [physical] that occurs among the various [physical] things that occur to bodies in *Olam Ha'zeh*, for example sitting and standing, sleep and death, sadness and laughter, etc. The early Sages (*Brachot* 17a) thus said — *Olam Haba* has no eating, no drinking, no being fruitful and multiplying, [no business (giving and taking), no jealousy, no hatred, no competition (*tacharut*)] but rather *tzadikim* sit with their crowns on their heads and bask in the *ziv haShechina* (splendor of G-d's Presence). When it says that

“*tzadikim* are sitting,” it is a metaphor which means the *tzadikim* will be there without work or toil. And this which says “their crowns on their heads” means the knowledge that they know — which is what allowed them to merit to life in *Olam Haba* — is found with them, and it is their crown. (**Hilchot Teshuva 8:2**).

Know that in the same way that a blind person cannot recognize colors, a deaf person cannot perceive sounds, and a eunuch does not feel any desire for marital relations, similarly bodily creatures cannot experience spiritual pleasures. Just as the fish are not aware of the element of fire, as they live in the element of water, and the two elements are opposites, in the same manner we cannot know the pleasure of the spiritual world while we are in this material world. There is no such pleasure within our experience; only physical enjoyments and sensory perceptions of food, drink and other satisfactions of our senses. Spiritual enjoyment is almost non-existent [in this world], we cannot realize it and cannot attain it easily in our thinking, but only after a period of long and profound thought. This makes sense, since we are living in a physical world. For this reason we only attain its lowly, temporal pleasures. But spiritual pleasures are permanent, and continue forever without interruption. There is no similarity and no connection at all between these two kinds of pleasure.

After death, however, we will no longer be susceptible to physical pleasure, nor will we desire it. It would be like a powerful king abandoning his kingship and going back to playing ball with boys, as he had done before assuming the throne, in his young years, when he did not realize the difference in level between the two positions. It is specifically in this world that we praise and extol physical pleasure instead of spiritual pleasure. But when we think about these two types of enjoyment, we will notice the limitations of the one (i.e., physical) and the superiority of the other (i.e. spiritual), even in *Olam Ha'zeh*. We will find that the great majority of people will endure much pain and effort, both physical and spiritual, to attain greatness, glory and recognition. This is not the pleasure of food and drink. Or, [on the negative side], many people would prefer to take revenge on their enemies than to have even much physical enjoyment. Additionally, many people resist the greatest physical pleasure out of fear of shame and social degradation, or because they want to earn a good name. If this [appreciation of spiritual pleasure] is already so in this physical world, how much more must it apply in the spiritual world, namely the World to Come, where our souls will have an understanding of the Creator such as is found among the higher beings. (**Perek Chelek**).

This pleasure in *Olam Haba* will grow continually

Rav Dessler wrote:

Whatever we are able to experience and grasp in *Olam Haba* will **continue to grow and increase**. This is the concept of the *tzadik* continuing to climb higher in *Olam Haba*. He won't only grow in his understanding to the next higher level, but this experience will also grow from level to level, forever and ever... This treasure will allow us to ascend higher and higher without end, forever and ever. And who is capable of picturing the incredible pleasure which will never stop growing and will become sharper and clearer forever?... Every bit of our Torah and *mitzvot*, every aspect of our fight against the *yeitzer hara* (negative inclination) which allowed us to grow in this world, is a separate root which will flourish continually in *Olam Haba*. With every aspect we will see the greatness of G-d's kindness and recognize His goodness, and this will continue forever and ever. We will come to *Olam Haba* with all of these roots together, and continually be elevated from them, separately as well as together.

An angel is called an *omeid* — one that is standing still. Since it has no *avodah* (active service) and *s'char*, it cannot have any development. Therefore, it always remains in its place. But the *tzaddik* — since he had constant development in *Olam Ha'zeh* in his *avodah*, he has constant development in his *s'char* in *Olam Haba* as well. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* 287–288, 5:383).

Rav Gifter (*Shiurei Da'at*) quoted the *Gemara Brachot* (64) that tells us:

Talmidei chachamim have no menucha (rest) — neither in Olam Ha'zeh nor in Olam Haba.

In other words, just like in *Olam Ha'zeh*, they go from level to level, and ascend in their understanding and recognition of reality, it is the same in *Olam Haba*.

Every *tzadik* will have his own separate and appropriate portion in *Olam Haba*.

The ***Medrash*** (*Chaye Sara*) explains:

Hashem has many prepared places in that world (*Olam Haba*), and in all of them, there is a dwelling place for every single *tzadik*, according to the level which is fit for him. And there are others that are even further inside — i.e., they are not in the courtyard, but rather in the house. And there is a place for the elevated *chassidim* that enter inside even more than this, i.e., to the *heichal* (courtyard). There are dwelling places upon dwelling places, and lights upon lights, all separate from each other in that world. Every single person is shamed by the light of his friend. Just like the good actions of a person in *Olam Ha'zeh* are separate from that of his friend, similarly their dwelling places and lights are separate in that world.

Husband and wife will be together in *Olam Haba*.

Rav Eliyahu Hatzarfati (the author of *Aderet Eliyahu*), a Rav in the 1600s, pointed out that there is an important exception to this idea of every person having their own separate portion in *Olam Haba*:

In *Gan Eden*, the *neshamot* (souls) will be in pairs, male and female, man and wife, as is said in the *sefer Tzuf D'vash on Parshat Bereshit* (from Rabbi Vidal HaTzarfati, the grandfather of Rabbi Eliyahu Hatzarfati). He explains that — there is never a half-entity above, but only a complete entity. Once *ish v'ishto* (man and his wife) were in *Gan Eden* complete, and that is what Adam was, how then would it be possible that in [*Olam Haba*], he would be alone and she would be alone? It would not be proper if the male would not have his *eizer k'negdo* (help mate) [in *Olam Haba*]. In other words, just like she was with him in *Gan Eden*, she needs to be with him now [in *Olam Haba*]. This is why it doesn't mention any aspect of *yetzirah* (creation) regarding the woman [in *Gan Eden*] since she had already existed [with him]. Hashem merely needed to give her a physical form and bring her *neshama* (soul) down to this world.

What happens in *Olam Haba*?

Rav Dessler wrote:

Whatever happened in the world for 6,000 years, in terms of all of the choices of people, along with how Hashem related to them, down to the finest specifics and details, will be revealed to every single person in *Olam Haba*. And through this, the entire creation will join together in a single massive revelation of the combinations of the various Divine names. The various revelations will combine together to a huge and wondrous system. All of these revelations will be renewed and continuously multiplied in their combinations, and all of the *neshamot* (souls) of the *tzadikim* will learn from these revelations. That is what it means that they will be sitting and deriving pleasure from the *ziv haShechina* (splendor of G-d's presence). (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* 4:158).

Differences between *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*

Rav Dessler discussed this:

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, we make the blessing *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* (the One Who is good and does good) on good news, and we say *Dayan HaEmet* (the True Judge) on bad news; but in *Olam Haba* — we will only say *HaTov v'HaMeitiv*. (*Gemara Pesachim* 50a).

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, it is impossible to see everything that happens to us as truly for our good. Even one on the level of Moshe Rabeinu would need to say the blessing of *Dayan HaEmet* on what he feels is negative from the perspective of *Olam Ha'zeh*. However, in *Olam Haba*, we will clearly see that all of the ways of Hashem are intrinsically good. That is why we will make the blessing of *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* on everything... Those concepts that we know today with our minds, will be [fully] revealed to us in *Olam Haba*. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu – Ikar hagilui sh'b'Olam Haba* 3:279).

The **Medrash** tells us:

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, individuals can prophesize, but in *Olam Haba*, all of Israel will be [like] *nevi'im* (prophets). (*B'ha'alo'secha* 16 — *Medrash Tanchuma*).

Sefer Halkarim points out a fundamental distinction between individuals and the community — The prayers of the community are always answered and their situations are supervised and successful, more than with individuals. That is only true, however, with their success in *Olam Ha'zeh*. But in *Olam Haba*, the level of every single individual is according to their actions and the *mitzvot* which they did. And even doing an action which is not an actual mitzvah or prohibition, if the *kavanah* (intention) is *I'sheim Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven) and for the sake of Hashem or His Torah, one will merit life in *Olam Haba* through it.

In other words, in *Olam Ha'zeh*, Hashem relates to us largely in terms of the community. In *Olam Haba*, however, he deals with us in terms of how we are as individuals.

Rav Simcha Zissel explained:

There is a difference between the pleasures of *Olam Ha'zeh* and *Olam Haba*. In *Olam Ha'zeh*, the greatest pleasure comes only after discomfort, while in *Olam Haba*, the actual pain turns into great joy. The *ameilut* (toil) in Torah and *avodat Hashem* is all that will remain for us in the various worlds. The *tzaar ha'amal* (pain of the toil) itself is what will become the wondrous pleasure and the eternity acquired by the person for ever and ever. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Ha'Amal b'Torah hu HaS'char* — 3:285).

Medrashim discuss this:

All of the Torah which we learn in *Olam Ha'zeh* is like nothing compared to the Torah in *Olam Haba*, since in *Olam Ha'zeh* a person can learn Torah and forget it. (***Kohelet Rabba* 2:1**).

In *Olam Ha'zeh*, death does not allow man to have [complete] *simcha*, but in *Olam Haba*, death will be banished. (***Tanchuma — Vayechi* 3**).

Olam Ha'zeh has wars and difficulties. And the *yeitzer hara* (negative inclination) along with the *Malach HaMavet* (Angel of Death) have the ability to control the world. But in *Olam Haba*, there will be no difficulties, no suffering, and no subjugation. (***Medrash V'Yosheah* 22**).

The Greatness of *Olam Haba*

The **Rambam** wrote:

Perhaps this good will seem trivial in our eyes. There is no way in *Olam Ha'zeh* to be able to appreciate and to understand the great benefit that there will be for the *nefesh* in *Olam Haba* — because while we are in *Olam Ha'zeh*, we can understand only the good of the body, which is what we desire. That exceedingly great [spiritual] good [of *Olam Haba*] cannot be compared to the good of *Olam Ha'zeh*, except by way of analogy. There is no way to really compare the benefits for the *nefesh* in *Olam Haba* with what is good for the body in *Olam Ha'zeh*, such as food and drink. Rather that great good [in *Olam Haba*], which cannot really be understood, is beyond any value or comparison. (**Hilchot Teshuva 8:6**).

That enjoyment is indivisible and indescribable. It cannot even be intimated by means of an allegory. It can only be hinted at, as the prophet has done. When he realized the greatness of this absolute good and its high level, King David declared (*Tehillim* 31, 20): “And how great is Your bounty that You have hidden for those who fear You!” And they explain that the “enjoyment of the Divine Presence” means that these souls are elated by what they grasp and know of the true nature of G-d, the same as the holy *Chayot* and the other classes of Angels are elated by their understanding and knowledge of His Essence. The final good and purpose, therefore, is to reach and join this exalted group at that high level... This is the great good to which no other good can be compared. No pleasure can equal it, for how can that which is eternal be compared to something transitory? (**Perek Chelek**).

Rav Dessler adds:

Who could possibly understand or imagine with their intelligence the incredible treasure they will merit [in *Olam Haba*]? Every degree of victory over the *yetzer hara* for the sake of Heaven will lead to an independent aspect of the revelation of the reality of Hashem. Fortunate will be the one who merits this. How much will the days of his life be filled with spiritual elevation from Torah and *mitzvot* in this world, and how much will he grow through this elevated life in *Olam Haba*! How wondrous are these things for the one who understands what their greatness will be in *Olam Haba*. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu* 287–2 88).

Tzadikim* will be amazed by their *s'char* in *Olam Haba

Rav Dessler explained:

The *Medrash* says that Rebbe Abahu was shown his future *s'char* before his death — thirteen rivers of pure *afarsimon*, a hint to the wonders of how Hashem relates to us with the thirteen *middot* of *rachamim* (aspects of mercy). He asked — “Who is all of this for?” and was told — “For you.” He was amazed, and exclaimed — “All of this for Abahu? I thought that my toil had been for nothing, and my strength had been spent for emptiness. However, Hashem is just.” (*Bereshit Rabba* 62b, *Shemot Rabba* 52:3) The *tzadikim*, in their humility, will be amazed and startled by the *s'char* that will be given to them. (*Michtav M'Eliyahu — Hispatchus S'char* — 5:383).

While there is *bracha* and *klalah* (blessing and curse) in *Olam Ha'zeh*, true *s'char* and *onesh* (eternal positive and negative consequences) are only in *Olam Haba*.

The **Rambam** addresses what seems to be a basic contradiction in the giving of *s'char* and *onesh* (positive and negative consequences for our actions):

When we follow all of the *mitzvot* in the Torah, we will get all of the goodness of *Olam Ha'zeh*; and when we transgress them, all of the negatives that are written will occur. But even so, all of that good [in *Olam Ha'zeh*] is not the ultimate benefit for the *mitzvot*, and all of that negative is not the ultimate retribution for those who transgress all of the *mitzvot*.

Rather, the reconciliation for all of these matters is the following — Hashem gave us this Torah as an *eitz chayim* (a tree of life). All who follow what is written in it along with having a proper understanding of it, will merit life in *Olam Haba*. And they will merit this according to the abundance of their actions, and the greatness of their wisdom. And the Torah promises that if we follow [the *mitzvot*] with *simcha* and a good heart, and study the wisdom [of Torah] consistently, that He will remove whatever could prevent us from doing this, like sickness, war, famine, and similar things. And He will bestow upon us all of the good which will strengthen our ability to follow the Torah, like satiation, peace, and an abundance of silver and gold, so we will not need to spend all of our days on our bodily needs. Rather, we will [be able to] sit *panui* (unobstructed), learn wisdom and do *mitzvot*, in order to merit life in *Olam Haba*. And similarly, the Torah informs us that if one abandons the Torah willfully to be involved in nonsense, that the true Judge will [then] remove from him all the bounty of *Olam Ha'zeh* which enabled him to rebel, and bring upon him all of the negatives which will [then] prevent him from acquiring *Olam Haba*, so that he will be destroyed in his wickedness.

The message of all of the *brachot* (blessings) and *klalot* (curses) is — If you serve G-d with *simcha* and guard His way, you will get all of these *brachot*, and all of these curses will be distanced from you, until you will be free to gain wisdom from the Torah and delve into it, in order to merit life in *Olam Haba*. **You will end up meriting both worlds** — a good life in *Olam Ha'zeh* which will bring you to life in *Olam Haba*. After all, if you don't acquire wisdom here, and you have no good deeds, with what will you merit?

And if you abandon G-d and go astray after food, drink, and illicit relations, and similar things, all of these *klalot* will be brought upon you, and all of these *brachot* will be removed, until your days will be finished in fear and confusion. Your heart won't be free and your body won't be complete to do the *mitzvot*, in order to be destroyed from life in *Olam Haba*. **You will then end up losing both worlds**, since when a person is busy with *Olam Ha'zeh*, with illness, war, and famine, he won't be involved in either wisdom or *mitzvot*, which would allow him to merit life in *Olam Haba*. (*Hilchot Teshuva* 9:1).

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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 *cheded*, 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 *neschama* (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 *onesh* 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 *chesed* 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'Eliyahu* 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*, (prophecy), 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