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# BACK TO THE FUTURE: THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT WORLD

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## Introduction to the Messiah, World to Come, and Resurrection of the Dead

Some people think about their ultimate future. What happens after a person dies? Is there life after death? Can we know what is the ultimate purpose of our lives? Will we find out if there is a God? Do we have a soul or not? If we do, what will become of it? Is there justice for those who treated others unjustly? Why did we have to endure difficult challenges in life? Will we earn compensation for our acts of altruism?

Answers to these questions have been postulated throughout the ages by myriads of philosophers, religious thinkers, and spiritual seekers alike. Judaism offers a profound and comprehensive approach to life that literally spans eternity. And it's not based on conjecture; it's rooted in the Torah as God gave it to us on Mount Sinai, which was then further transmitted by the prophets, and is expressed in our daily prayers and recorded in the Talmud.

From a Jewish perspective, the world as we know it will change to a new reality that traverses time known as the Messianic Era and the World to Come. Reaching the World to Come is not a function of one's financial assets or making it into the Guinness Book of World Records. Each individual has the potential to create a dynamic eternal existence by perfecting his character, helping others, studying Torah, and performing the mitzvot.

There are a variety of opinions as to what the Era of the *Mashiach* (Messiah), and the World to Come will look like and these classes generally follow the approach of the Ramchal, Rav Tzadok HaKohen, Rav Eliyahu Dessler and Rav Chaim Friedlander. These giants in Torah base their approach to these issues on classic Jewish sources. In order to understand the Era of Mashiach and the World to Come, we first need a synopsis of world history and God's purpose for Creation.

### WORLD HISTORY AND THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

According to Judaism, world history is divided into many phases. The two primary divisions comprise the history of the world from the beginning of the creation of the First Man until the Messianic Era, which we call "This World," and the history of the world after the Messianic Era called "The World to Come." The Messianic Era itself is strictly a part of this world, though it forms an intermediary between This

World and The Next. These two divisions, This World and The Next World, have two distinct environments, each of which is perfectly tailored for the goals of that stage. But both are a function of God's desire to give to man in the most perfect way possible.

Jewish sources teach that the purpose of Creation is that God, being perfectly good, wants to share that goodness with "others" (although none yet existed). In His desire not only to give, but to give as perfectly as possible, God created the world in such a way that others (namely, people) could attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible, that being the ultimate good. "Attachment" to God in the spiritual sense is translated as likeness: to the degree that man can come to resemble God's own perfection is the degree that he will be "close" to God.

Like God's own perfection, man's source of perfection must be self-sufficient (to the greatest degree possible); that is, man must earn that perfection and be its master, for only then will he resemble God. God therefore created a system through which man would have the opportunity to earn his own perfection. Had God simply created man spiritually perfect to begin with, man would be very far from God in one crucial respect: God would be an active giver of good, whereas man would be a mere passive recipient of it. In order to overcome this obstacle, God had to create man in such a way that he could be an active creator of goodness in his own right. As such, the Creation had to be structured in such a way that man could earn his reward. This was accomplished by giving man moral autonomy to choose between good and evil.

To this end, God created the world incomplete and imperfect. Hence the existence of evil, or the apparent lack of Divine influence. God then gave man the power and the mandate to be able to complete the world which He had begun. God proceeded to give man all the details necessary to finish, or perfect, the world. This would be accomplished through the fulfillment of God's commandments to man. God set up the challenge as follows: on the one hand, He endowed man with considerable spiritual strength with which he could control his own actions and the world around him. On the other hand, in order to maintain free will to make his choice of good his own achievement, man also had to have a self-dimension which was quite removed from the spiritual. That is why man is a dynamic synthesis of body and soul, one part seemingly detached from God and the other striving to move toward Him. By willfully choosing to follow God's Will and to thereby overcome the base instinct to follow his own selfish will, man perfects himself and the world along with him.

## THE GARDEN OF EDEN

When man was first created, he was in a state perfectly balanced between good and evil. Before the transgression of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Chavah had such a high degree of spirituality that they could have easily achieved the perfection of the world. And although there was the possibility of transgression even before they sinned, it did not exist as a tangible reality for them. At that point they identified themselves with the good and saw the Evil Inclination as something external. Good and evil existed in two opposing and separate domains.

Had Adam and Chavah not transgressed the prohibition of eating from the Tree of Knowledge,

their souls would have purified their bodies in continuing successive stages until the soul would have completely purified the body. They would have brought in the Messianic Era (Adam being the Mashiach), all of the rest of mankind would have been born into the Messianic Era, and there would have been no distinction between Jew and non-Jew since all of mankind would have comprised the concept of the Jewish people.

But in choosing to disobey God and eat from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Chavah drastically redefined their perspective of reality and changed forever the path that would ultimately lead to the perfection of the world. On a very simple level, eating from the tree was a statement of their faith in the physical world's ability to sustain mankind without any connection to the spiritual. Taken on a more metaphorical level, as Maharal explains, the tree represents the source while the fruit is its product. Plucking the fruit from the tree was an act of divorcing the physical world from its spiritual root, a reversal of values that treated the effect as more important than its cause.

### A NEW WORLD ORDER

After the sin, God altered the program for the perfection of the world in two key ways. First of all, He instituted death. Since man's soul was no longer powerful enough to purify the body as much as was needed, the soul was blocked from totally expressing itself. Therefore, death became necessary to purify the body and to allow the soul to express itself more fully. When a person dies, his body and soul separate from each other. His soul goes to the World of the Souls where it reconnects to its source, God, in proportion to the extent of its success in purifying the body during their time together. That purification is achieved in 613 specific ways referred to as the mitzvot of the Torah. The connection to God experienced in the World of the Souls is sometimes expressed as "reward" for keeping the Torah, but the ultimate reward will only be realized at a later stage of existence, together with the body, in the World to Come. In the meantime, the body buried in the ground returns to its most elemental form, dust, only to be reconstituted at a higher spiritual level later in history, at a time known as the Resurrection of the Dead. At that point, body and soul will be recombined and the soul will then be able to fully purify the body in preparation for eternal life.

God also decreed that man would have to work "by the sweat of his brow." He would have to engage the physical world as if it really were the source of his sustenance, and then regain on his own accord the same level of spiritual awareness that had existed in the Garden of Eden before his transgression. Jewish history itself is the process of bringing the world back to that state of spiritual awareness. It is a process that was initiated by our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and carried forward through their descendants who willfully received the Torah and have dedicated themselves to its fulfillment. When the Jewish people follow God's Will and keep the Torah, God promises to "send the rains in their seasons" and enable them to "dwell securely in your land." Just as in the Garden of Eden, man's physical wellbeing will flow from its spiritual source. Through the historical experience of the Jewish people in its ebb and flow of mitzvah observance, mankind will come to realize the true relationship between the physical and the spiritual. At that point the era of Mashiach will be upon us.

## THE TIMES TO COME

The Messianic era will be a stepping-stone to the World to Come. It will provide a completely new kind of environment for the service of God that will give mankind an unprecedented opportunity for earning closeness to God. After the arrival of the Mashiach there will be two separate resurrections of the dead. A first resurrection will take place immediately following the arrival of the Mashiach. However, only people who were completely righteous during their lifetime will rise at that time. A second resurrection for the rest of mankind will follow at the end of the period of Mashiach. At that time, God will settle every score of injustice and determine precisely the intensity of eternal existence to be granted to each body/soul unit.

In the World to Come that will exist after the second resurrection, the soul itself will finally reach its full potential. In a reversal of Adam's transgression, man's soul will finally do what it was created to do, turning from being a taker of goodness to being a giver of goodness to the body. It will then assume full control, purifying the body to the maximum extent possible. Then, both body and soul will continue to grow toward ultimate spirituality, forever enjoying the well-deserved delight of closeness to God for which they were created.

There are five Morasha classes addressing Judaism's vision of the Messianic Era and the World to Come:

The Messiah I: The Concept of the Messiah, His Necessity, and Qualifications  
Section I. World History and the Necessity for Mashiach  
Section II. The Centrality of Belief in the Mashiach  
Section III. Qualifications and Accomplishments of the Mashiach

The Messiah II: The Nature of the Messianic Era  
Section I. When Will Mashiach Come?  
Section II. What Can We Do to Bring Mashiach?  
Section III. The Pre-Messianic Era  
Section IV. The Messianic Era

The World to Come Part I: What in the World is the World to Come?  
Section I. The Existence of a World to Come  
Section II. What is the World to Come?  
Section III. The Purpose of the World to Come

The World to Come Part II: How Can I Secure a Front Row Ticket?  
Section I. How to Earn a Share in the World to Come  
Section II. Why Is There No Explicit Mention in the Torah of the World to Come?

The World to Come Part III: The New You! Resurrection of the Dead  
Section I. Belief in Resurrection  
Section II. The Purpose of Resurrection  
Section III. How the Resurrection Will Happen  
Section IV. The Nature of the Post-Resurrection World to Come  
Section V. The Lesson of the World to Come for This World

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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Ramban, *Shaar HaGemul*

Maharal, *Gur Aryeh*, Bereishit 1:11, s.v. *V'Hee*

Ramchal, *Ma'amer HaGeulah*, Part 2; *Derech Hashem* (The Way of God) 1:3:9

Rabbi E. E. Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. III, pp. 207-218

Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, *Emunah U'Bechirah*, Vol. II

Ner Le'Elef Booklet: *This World and the Next*