
THE WORLD TO COME: PART I

What in the World is the World to Come?

In this three-part series on the World to Come, we will discover that there is more to the world than meets the eye. Fundamental to the Jewish worldview is the understanding that a spiritual reality exists beyond what we experience in the physical world. When a person dies, only his body is buried while his soul enters a spiritual realm where it continues to live and have self-awareness. During the Messianic Era the soul rejoins the body during the Resurrection of the Dead in a world that has a clearer recognition of God.

Just as the individual experiences different phases of existence that ultimately end up in a higher reality, so too the human race as a whole. The present state of existence is a temporary stage in the unfolding development of mankind toward a utopian future.

In this first of a three-part series on the World to Come, we will explore the following questions:

- ∞ What is the World to Come – is there life after death?
- ∞ Where does the Torah talk about a World to Come?
- ∞ What happens after death?
- ∞ What does one experience in the World to Come?
- ∞ Is the World to Come in any way similar to this world?
- ∞ What is the purpose of the World to Come?

Class Outline:

Section I. The Existence of a World to Come

Part A. Biblical Sources

Part B. Talmudic and Midrashic Sources

Section II. What is the World to Come?

Part A. The Two Phases of the World to Come

Part B. The Spiritual Delight of the World to Come

Part C. A Taste of the World to Come

Section III. The Purpose of the World to Come

Part A. The Place for Reward, Accountability, and Spiritual Perfection

Part B. The Natural Consequence of One's Actions

Part C. The Purpose of Creation

SECTION I. THE EXISTENCE OF A WORLD TO COME

Before getting into the specific definition of the World to Come and how it is attained, we will start by demonstrating from the Chumash (Five Books of Moses), Prophets, and Talmudic sources that Judaism definitely affirms belief in the afterlife. The Chumash does not directly refer to the afterlife or the World to Come for reasons discussed in the Morasha class World to Come Part II.

PART A. BIBLICAL SOURCES

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 25:8-9; 35:28-9 – The term “gathered to his people,” which comes after death and before burial, hints at an afterlife.

Avraham (Abraham) expired and died at a good age, mature and content, and he was gathered to his people. His sons, Yitzchak (Isaac) and Yishmael (Ishmael), buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, son of Zohar the Hittite, which borders Mamre ...

Yitzchak lived to be 180 years old. He expired and died, and was gathered to his people, old and in the fullness of his years. His sons, Eisav (Esau) and Yaakov (Jacob), buried him.

וַיָּגוּעַ וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׂבַע וַיֵּאָסֶף
אֶל עַמּוּיוֹ: וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנָיו אֶל מְעַרְת
הַמְּכַפְלָה אֶל שְׂדֵה עֶפְרָן בֶּן צֹהַר הַחִתִּי אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי
מַמְרֵא...
...מְמָרָא...

וַיְהִי יָמָיו יִצְחָק מָאֵת שָׁנָה וְשָׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה: וַיָּגוּעַ יִצְחָק
וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמּוּיוֹ זָקֵן וְשָׂבַע יָמָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עֵשָׂו
וַיַּעֲקֹב בְּנָיו.

The phrase “gathered to his people” reflects joining the souls of others in a soul world.

2. Toldot Yitzchak, ibid. – The disembodied soul attaches itself to other souls after death.

“And he was gathered to his people” – this refers to the soul which is gathered together with the souls of its righteous ancestors; for when the soul is in the body it is separated from the rest of the souls that are not connected to a body. Yet when it leaves the body, the soul attaches itself to the rest of the souls that are similarly separated from their bodies.

וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל עַמּוּיוֹ, הוּא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ שֶׁנֶּאֱסָף עִם נַפְשׁוֹת
קְרֹבָיו הַצְּדִיקִים, שֶׁכִּשְׁהַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּגוּף הִיא נִפְרָדֶת מִשְׂאֵר
הַנֶּפֶשׁוֹת שֶׁהֵם בְּלֵי גוּף, וְכִשְׁנִפְרָדָה מִן הַגּוּף נִתְחַבְּרָה
עִם שְׂאֵר הַנֶּפֶשׁוֹת שֶׁהֵן נִפְרָדוֹת מִן הַגּוּף כְּמוֹהָ:

3. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 12:7 – After death the soul returns to God.

And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God, Who gave it.

וַיָּשָׁב הָעָפָר עַל הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה:

4. I Shmuel (Samuel) 28:3; 11-15 – After his death, the prophet Shmuel was raised up in a vision.

Shmuel had died and all Israel eulogized him and buried him in Ramah, in his home town ...

וַשְׁמוּאֵל מָוֶת וַיִּסְפְּדוּ לוֹ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ בְּרָמָה
וּבְעִירוֹ...
...וּבְעִירוֹ...

And the woman said, “Whom shall I raise from the dead for you?” And he [King Shaul/Saul] said, “Raise up Shmuel for me” ... And the woman said to Shaul, “I saw a great man ascending from the earth.” He then said to her, “What does he look like?” She said, “An elderly man is ascending, and he is garbed in a cloak.” Shaul realized it was Shmuel and he bowed down with his face to the ground, and prostrated himself. And Shmuel said to Shaul, “Why did you disturb me, to raise me up?”

ותאמר האשה את מי אעלה לך ויאמר את שמואל
העלי לי: ... ותאמר האשה אל שאול אלהים ראיתי
עלים מן הארץ: ויאמר לה מה תארו ותאמר איש זקן
עלה והוא עטה מעיל וידע שאול כי שמואל הוא ויקד
אפים ארצה וישתחו: ויאמר שמואל אל שאול למה
הרגנתני להעלות אתי

5. **Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:5, with Sifra, parshasa 9:10 – The Torah promises eternal life for keeping mitzvot.**

You shall observe My statutes and My ordinances, which a person shall do and thereby live. I am the Lord.

“And thereby live” – in the World to Come. Perhaps you might think that this phrase refers to this world. But eventually everyone will die and therefore what would be the meaning of “live by them”? [Hence it must refer to the] World to Come ...

ושמרתם את הקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אתם
האדם וחי בהם אני יהוה:

...וחי בהם – לעולם הבא. ואם תאמר בעולם הזה,
והלא סופו מת הוא, הא מה אני מקיים וחי בהם, לעולם
הבא...

PART B. TALMUDIC AND MIDRASHIC SOURCES

1. **Bereishit Rabbah 1:10 – At the beginning of existence, two worlds were created: this world and the World to Come.**

Why was the world created with the letter *beit* [i.e. in the word *bereishit*]? To teach you that there are two worlds – this world and the World to Come [since the letter *beit* has the numerical value of two].

למה נברא העולם בב' להודיעך שהן שני עולמים
העוה"ז והעוה"ב.

2. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:16 – This world is compared to a corridor that leads into a banquet hall, which is the World to Come.**

Rabbi Yaakov said, “This world is like a lobby before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall.”

רבי יעקב אומר: העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני
העולם הבא. התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס
לטרקלין:

3. **Rambam (Maimonides), *ibid.* – If an individual acquires the proper attributes in this world, he merits life in the World to Come.**

The analogy is understood and the purpose is well-known: In this world a person acquires the attributes that enable him to merit life in the World to Come, and this world is the path and passageway.

והמשל מובן, והכוונה ידועה, שבזה העולם יקנו המעלות אשר בהן יזכה האדם לחיי העולם הבא, וזה אמנם הוא דרך ומעבר לההוא.

4. **Mishnah, Peah 1:1 – The principal place for the reward of our efforts is in the World to Come.**

These are the precepts whose performance have no set measure: leaving the corner of a field for the poor, the first fruit offering, pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem, acts of kindness, and the study of Torah. These are the precepts whose performance derives benefit in this world, but the principal reward awaits a person in the World to Come: honoring one's father and mother, acts of kindness, bringing peace between two individuals, and the study of Torah is equivalent to them all.

אלו דברים שאין להם שיעור הפאה והבכורים והראיון וגמילות חסדים ותלמוד תורה. אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא כיבוד אב ואם וגמילות חסדים והבאת שלום בין אדם לחבירו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם:

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⇒ Judaism affirms the existence of life after death and a World to Come.
- ⇒ The Chumash (Five Books of Moses) does not directly refer to the afterlife or the World to Come for reasons that will be discussed in the Morasha class World to Come Part II.
- ⇒ Nevertheless, the Talmud contains many references to life after death and the World to Come, and the Prophets record communicating with the souls of the dead.

SECTION II. WHAT IS THE WORLD TO COME?

We demonstrated above that the Torah affirms the existence of an afterlife, and that the soul continues to live even after it has left its earthly abode. In this section we will discuss what the World to Come actually is, and what place it takes within the context of the Jewish worldview.

PART A. THE TWO PHASES OF THE WORLD TO COME

As discussed in the Morasha *Introduction to the Messiah and World to Come*, The World to Come is split into two phases. The first phase is experienced after death when the soul goes to the *Olam HaNeshamot*, the World of the Souls, and is already in existence. This stage is referred to by the Talmud as *Gan Eden* (The Garden of Eden). The second phase of the World to Come will be a future era beginning with the Messianic period.

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, known as the Great Day of Judgement, God will settle every score of injustice and determine precisely the level of eternal life to be granted to each body/soul unit. This will be an entirely new form of existence, unlike either this world or the World of the Souls.

1. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Ma'amar HaKharim – The World to Come has two stages.**

The reward of the World to Come is, in accordance with one's deeds in this world, a fixed degree of the true good, i.e. attachment to God, which will then be enjoyed for all eternity. This in turn is also divided into two parts, one being in the World of the Souls, and the other in the World after the Resurrection ...

גמול העולם הבא הוא שכפי מעשיו שעשה בעולם הזה
כן תקבע לו מדרגה בטובה האמיתית, שהיא הדבקות
בו ית' ויהנה בה לנצח נצחים. וגם הוא יחולק לשני
חלקים, בעולם הנשמות ובעולם התחייה...

2. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Torat Adam, Sha'ar HaGemul – The World to Come follows a progression of events and is ultimately an eternal existence.**

The reward of the souls and their existence in the World of the Souls is called Gan Eden by our rabbis ...

After the World of the Souls will come the era of the Messiah, which is a part of this world.

At the conclusion thereof, the Great Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead will occur. This is the period of reward that includes the body and soul.

This is the World to Come, in which the body will become like the soul and the soul will cleave to the knowledge of God, just as it adhered to it in the Gan Eden of the World of the Souls. Now, however, it will be elevated to an even greater degree and everything will continue to exist forever and ever.

כי שחר הנפשות וקיומם בעולם הנשמות נקרא
לרבותינו גן עדן...

ואחרי כן יבואו ימי המשיח, והוא מכלל העולם הזה.

ובסופם יהא יום הדין ותחיית המתים, שהוא השחר
הכולל הגוף והנפש...

והוא העולם הבא, שבו ישוב הגוף כמו נפש, והנפש
תדבק בדעת עליון בהדבקה בגן עדן עולם הנשמות,
ותתעלה בהשגה גדולה ממנה, ויהיה קיום הכל לעדי
עד ולנצח נצחים.

3. **Ramchal, Adir Bamarom, Part I – The ultimate World to Come is an entirely new form of existence.**

At that point God will judge each and every detail that happened since the beginning of Creation, all six thousand years of it. Then will come the seventh millennium to break the mold ... then the eighth millennium, that is, the new world. At that point a new structure [of Creation] will be built ... of which we have no concept at all.

כי אז... יעשה הקב"ה דין פרטי על כל דבר ודבר
שנעשה בכל זמן מזמן בריאת העולם בכל השית אלפי
שני. ואז יבא אלף השביעי להסיר הצורה... ואח"כ אלף
השמיני, דהיינו חידוש העולם, אז יהיה נבנה הבנין...
שאי אפשר לדעת ממנו כלל.

For the sake of simplicity, we will use the term “the World to Come” to refer to the experience of the soul after death in general, although some of the sources below may refer specifically to one stage rather than the other.

PART B. THE SPIRITUAL DELIGHT OF THE WORLD TO COME

The details of immortality and the World to Come are not mentioned explicitly in the Written Torah. The prophet therefore says when speaking of the World to Come, “No eye has seen it, other than God, that which He will do for those who hope in Him” (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 63:4). Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following sources, the Oral Torah contains descriptions by way of analogy and metaphor.

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Berachot 17a – The World to Come is a spiritual delight.

A favorite saying of Rav was: The future world is not like this world. In the future world, there is neither eating, nor drinking, nor propagation, nor business, nor jealousy, nor hatred, nor competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of the Divine Presence.

מרגלא בפומיה דרב: לא כעולם הזה העולם הבא. העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא פריה ורביה ולא משה ומתן ולא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות אלא צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה.

2. Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 31a – The righteous will rejoice in the Presence of God.

Ulla Biraah said in the name of Rabbi Elazar, “In the future the Holy One, Blessed be He, will make a circle for the righteous, and He will sit among them in the Garden of Eden, and each one will point to Him with his finger, as it is written: ‘And men will say on that day, this is our God for Whom we have waited and He will save us; this is the Lord for Whom we have waited and we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’ [Yeshayahu, 25.9].”

אמר עולא ביראה אמר רבי אלעזר עתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות מחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן וכל אחד ואחד מראה באצבעו שנאמ' (ישעיהו כה) ואמר ביום ההוא הנה אלהינו זה קוינו לו וישיענו זה ה' קוינו לו נגילה ונשמחה בישועתו:

3. Ramchal, Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 1:3:12, Translation by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers, p. 57 – The disembodied soul experiences delight in the World of the Souls similar to what it will experience in the World to Come (after Resurrection).

However, when the soul leaves the body and enters the World of the Souls, it can then radiate freely with a brightness that befits it as a result of its good deeds [while associated with the body]. Through both this and what it can attain in the World of the Souls, the soul is able to regain the power it lost while associated with the body.

ואמנם בצאת הנשמה מהגוף ולכתה אל עולם הנשמות, הנה שם מתפשטת ומזהרת בזהררה, כפי מה שראוי לה על פי מעשיה. ובמה שהיא משגת שם כל זמן היותה שם, מתחזקת ממה שנתחלשה בגוף, ומזדמנת יותר למה שראוי שתעשה בזמן התחיה. עד שכשתשוב בגוף בזמן הראוי, תוכל לפעול בו הפעולה הנאותה לה, דהיינו היכוך שזכרנו:

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive for Truth, Vol. III, p. 191 – A person will delight in the appreciation of God’s love and acknowledgment, and get satisfaction from his own contribution to the fulfillment of the purpose of Creation.**

Upon entering the state known as “the World to Come” the *tzaddik* (righteous person), as we saw above, begins to “enjoy the splendor of the *Shechinah* (God’s Presence).” God raises, so to speak, a corner of the curtain, and the *tzaddik* experiences a little of God’s greatness, of His overwhelming, many-faceted love for His creatures. He gets an inkling of the majestic universal plan which God has for all His creatures, and derives unimaginable joy from the realization that his struggle with his *yetzer hara* (Evil Inclination) in his previous state has significantly contributed to the fulfillment of that plan. His soul is suffused with unutterable delight.

And another thing, the very fact that he is granted such revelations, the very fact that he is privileged to experience so much pleasure must mean [i.e. he realizes] that his past efforts are appreciated. To know that God, Whom he served, is pleased with him adds immeasurably to his satisfaction.

PART C. A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME

1. **Talmud Bavli, Berachot 57b – Certain things are a taste of the World to Come.**

There are three things which are a taste of the World to Come: Shabbat, the sun, and “usage.” What does “usage” mean? Usage of the bed [i.e. marital relations]? But that weakens the body. Rather it means usage of the orifices [i.e. emptying one’s bowels].

שלשה מעין העולם הבא אלו הן שבת שמש ותשמיש
תשמיש דמאי אילימא תשמיש המטה הא מכחש
כחיש אלא תשמיש נקבים.

2. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – Physical sensations of a higher reality are a taste of the World to Come.**

Each one of these things [in Berachot 57b] is a feeling of spiritual awareness that a person experiences with his physical senses:

1. Shabbat: a sense of the nature of spirituality experienced by the body.
2. The sun: a sense of the influence of celestial bodies on the body.
3. Marital relations: the continuity of the Jewish people experienced with the body. But since the physical sensation weakens the body it fails to parallel the experience of the World to Come, therefore the alternative version:
4. Emptying one’s bowels: the body’s experience of expelling the bad.

Any awareness of a higher existence that a person can sense with his own body is a “taste” of the World to Come.

3. **Maharsha, Berachot 57b – Shabbat is a faint yet discernable trace of the World to Come**

Five things are one-sixtieth of another: Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World to Come.

Just as we find in regard to forbidden mixtures that one part in sixty maintains its identity and is not nullified ... so too here, all the things mentioned retain faint traces of the original.

חמשה אחד משישים... שבת אחד משישים לעולם
הבא.

לפי מה שמצינו לענין בטול דא' מס' אינו בטל ויש
בו קצת ממשות... ה"נ בדוגמא קאמר בכל הני ששה
דקחשיב דיש בהו קצת ממשות מדוגמתו.

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. V, p. 96 – Shabbat reveals some of the hidden spiritual light that awaits us in the World to Come.**

Shabbat is a “taste of the World to Come,” meaning that it is an aspect of the World to Come right here in *this* world, [it is a piece of] the hidden spiritual light [that exists in the World to Come].

כי שבת היא “מעין עולם הבא” והיינו בחינת עוה”ב שבעוה”ז – אור גנוז.

Similarly, observing Shabbat – ceasing all physically creative activity and efforts to improve the physical world – instills a sense that the true purpose of life is spiritual and that our involvement with the physical world is not all-important.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ Certain experiences in this world hint to the nature of existence in the World to Come. The main feature, though, is that the World to Come will be experienced as the spiritual delight of being in God’s Presence.
- ∞ One will delight in the appreciation of God’s love and acknowledgment, and get satisfaction from his own contribution to the fulfillment of the purpose of Creation.
- ∞ Physical sensations of a higher reality are a taste of the World to Come.
- ∞ Shabbat reveals some of the hidden spiritual light that awaits us in the World to Come.

SECTION III. THE PURPOSE OF THE WORLD TO COME

The World to Come is the ultimate purpose of Creation – to be eternally attached to the Will of God. By using our free will and utilizing the opportunities for spiritual growth in this world, we create a meaningful World to Come. The World to Come is also the time we are rewarded for our positive actions in this world, learn from our mistakes, and become spiritually purified. As will be explained in the third Morasha class on the World to Come, *The New Me, Resurrection of the Dead*, it is where we will experience the greatest spiritual delight and connection to God.

PART A. THE PLACE FOR REWARD, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION

In the World to Come we will be rewarded for the goodness we accomplished, learn from our misdeeds, and become spiritually purified.

i. Reward for the Righteous

1. **Devarim (Deuteronomy)7:11, with Rashi citing Talmud, Eruvin 22a – The World to Come is the place of receiving reward for keeping the mitzvot.**

Keep the commandment, the decrees and the laws that I command you today to do.

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת הַמִּצְוָה וְאֶת הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

Rashi

“Today to do” – and tomorrow, in the World to Come, to receive the reward.

רש"י

היום לעשותם – ולמחר לעולם הבא ליטול שכרם:

2. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:3:3 – In the World to Come a person reaps the eternal reward for the effort he made to perfect himself in this world.**

God's goodness decreed that there be a limit to man's effort required to attain perfection. After his period of effort is completed, he attains his level of perfection and is then allowed to enjoy it for all eternity. God therefore created two distinct periods, one as a time of earning and the other as a time of receiving reward. However, the trait of goodness is stronger since the time for earning is fixed according to God's Will, while the time for receiving the reward has no end. Rather, a person will derive pleasure forever from the perfection that he achieved.

ואמנם גזר טובו ית', שיהיה גבול להשתדלות הזה המצטרך לאדם להשיג השלימות, וכשהשלים השתדלותו ישיג שלימותו וינוח בהנאתו לנצח נצחים. על כן הוחקו לו שני זמנים, אחד זמן העבודה, ואחד זמן קיבול השכר. ואולם מדת הטוב מרובה, שהעבודה יש לה זמן מחוקק, כמו שגזרה חכמתו ית' היותו נאות לזה, וקיבול השכר אין לו תכלית, אלא לנצח נצחים הוא מתענג והולך בשלימות אשר קנה לו:

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) 8:1 – Righteousness is rewarded with life in the World to Come.**

The goodness that awaits the righteous is the World to Come. This is life which has no death, and goodness which has no element of bad. This is the meaning of the verse: “In order that it will be good for you and you will have length of days” (Devarim 22:7). We learn from tradition that “it will be good for you” in the world which is all good [this world] and “you will have length of days” in a world which is “limitless” [lit. ‘all long’].” This is the World to Come.

The reward for the righteous is to merit this pleasantness and be part of this goodness. The punishment for the wicked is that they will not merit this life, but will die.

הטובה הצפונה לצדיקים, היא חיי העולם הבא; והם החיים שאין עימהן מוות, והטובה שאין עימה רעה. הוא שכתוב בתורה, “למען ייטב לך, והארכת ימים” (דברים כב, ז): מפי השמועה למדו “למען ייטב לך” לעולם שכולו טוב, “והארכת ימים” לעולם שכולו ארוך; וזה הוא העולם הבא.

שכר הצדיקים--הוא שיזכו לנועם זה, ויהיו בטובה זו; ופרעון הרשעים--הוא שלא יזכו לחיים אלו, אלא ייכרתו וימותו.

ii. Accountability and Spiritual Purification

As the last source indicated, it is possible for a person to miss out, even entirely, on the experience of life in the World to Come. But the alternative to reward in this instance is not punishment, but rather simply lack of existence. Judaism does not believe in eternal damnation.

The World to Come has a mechanism to maximize the number of those who will be awarded eternal life. It is called *Gehinnom*, a spiritual cleansing process that prepares the soul for entrance to the World to Come.

Imagine standing completely visible before God, with your memory wide open, completely transparent without

any jamming mechanism or reducing valve to diminish its force. You will remember everything you did and see it in a new light. You will see it in the light of the unshaded spirit, or, if you will, in God's own light that shines from one end of Creation to the other. The memory of every good deed and mitzvah will be the sublimest of pleasures, as our tradition speaks of Olam Haba. But your memory will also be open to all the things of which you are ashamed. They cannot be rationalized away or dismissed. You will be facing yourself, fully aware of the consequences of all your deeds. We all know the terrible shame and humiliation experienced when one is caught in the act of doing something wrong. Imagine being caught by one's own memory with no place to escape. This indeed, may be what Daniel is alluding to when he says (Daniel 12:2), "And many of them that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting shame." (From, If You Were God, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, NCSY Publications, pp. 30-31.)

1. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 2:2:4 – Gehinnom is a spiritual cleansing process to ensure the maximum attendance in the World to Come.**

In his kindness, God maximized man's chances of successfully attaining his ultimate goal. He therefore decreed that there should be a secondary way to attach oneself to God for those for whom such attachment is fitting, namely those who were overcome by evil, but not to such an extent that they should lose existence entirely. These people therefore experience the punishment of Gehinnom, the purpose of which is to recompense the person according to his transgression in a way that he will be left with no debt to pay for his misdeeds. He will then be able to achieve his ultimate reward in accordance with the good acts that he performed.

By virtue of this system, the actual number of those who are lost completely is minimized. [Such a severe consequence] only applies to those who have so completely been taken over by evil that it would be impossible for them to experience the true reward and eternal delight.

ואמנם גזר עוד חסדו ית' להרבות ההצלה לבני האדם, שימצא עוד מין צירוף אחר למי שיתכן בו הצירוף, דהיינו למי שגבר בו הרע תגבורת גדול, אך לא כל כך שיהיה משפטו להאבידו לגמרי, והוא כלל עונשים שהיותר רשום בהם הוא הדין בגהינם. והכונה בו הוא להעניש החוטא כפי חטאיו, באופן שאחרי העניש לא יהיה עוד חוב עליו על המעשה הרע שעשה, ויוכל אחרי כן לקבל הגמול האמיתי כפי שאר מעשיו הטובים.

ונמצא שעל ידי זה, האובדים ממש יהיו מזער לא כביר, כי הנה לא יהיו אלא אותם שגבר בהם הרע שיעור כל כך גדול, שאי אפשר שימצא להם מקום בשום פנים להיות נשארים בגמול האמיתי ובהנאה הנצחית.

The following is an example from the Mishnah of one who needs the spiritual cleansing of Gehinnom.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 82a, with Maharsha – A haughty doctor is destined for Gehinnom.**

The best of doctors are destined for Gehinnom.

Maharsha

That is, someone who considers himself to be the best of doctors, the most expert of whom there is no equal. He relies too much on his own intelligence, and in his arrogance sometimes makes an incorrect diagnosis and ends up killing the patient by prescribing something that was actually harmful for him. He should rather have consulted with other doctors since he is dealing with matters of life and death.

טוב שברופאים לגיהנם.

מהרש"א

דהיינו שמחזיק עצמו לטוב ולמומחה שברופאים שאין כמוהו וסומך ביותר על המחאתו מתוך גאוותו ולפעמים הוא טועה בטבע זה החולה וממית את החולה ברפואותיו בדבר שמזיק לחולה זה אבל יש לו לישא וליתן עם שאר הרופאים כיון שהוא סכנת נפשות:

The Mishnah is not picking on doctors. They are highlighted here since they have great responsibility in dealing with matters of life and death. Nevertheless, the principle of accountability for one's actions, whether in our careers, interpersonal relationships, or to God, applies to everyone.

iii Reward in this World and the Next

One of the classic answers that Judaism offers to the question of why the righteous suffer or the wicked prosper is that the righteous suffer in this world in order to avoid any suffering in the next; so too the wicked are given their reward in this world rather than receive any share in the World to Come for whatever mitzvot they might have performed.

1. Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Peah 1:1 (5a) – The wicked are rewarded in this world for whatever good they do, while the righteous are punished here for whatever sins they commit.

If someone has a majority of merits and a minority of sins, he will be punished for the few sins in this world so that he can receive his full reward in the World to Come. But if someone has a majority of transgressions and a minority of merits, he is given the reward for his few mitzvot in this world and will be held accountable for his misdeeds in the World to Come.

רובי זכויות ומעוטי עבירות נפרעים ממנו מיעוט עבירות קלות שעשה בעולם הזה בשביל ליתן לו שכרו משלם לעתיד לבא אבל רובי עבירות ומעוטי זכויות נותנין לו שכר מצות קלות שעשה בעוה"ז בשביל לפרע ממנו משלם לעולם הבא.

2. Devarim 7:10, with Rashi – God gives the wicked their reward in this world.

And He repays those who hate Him, to their face, to cause them to perish; He will not delay the one who hates Him, but he will repay him to his face.

Rashi

“And He repays those who hate Him to their face” – during his lifetime, God pays him his good reward, in order to cause him to be lost from the World to Come.

ומשלם לשנאיו אל פניו להאבדו לא יאחר לשנאיו אל פניו ישלם לו:

רש"י

ומשלם לשנאיו אל פניו: בחייו משלם לו גמולו הטוב כדי להאבדו מן העולם הבא:

The following two stories illustrate the inverse relationship between reward in this world and reward in the World to Come:

3. Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 25a – It is preferable to receive reward in the World to Come.

[Rabbi Eliezer's] wife said to him, “How long must we go on suffering so much from poverty?” “What should I do?” he asked her. “Pray that Heaven give you something.” He prayed and a shape of a hand came from Heaven and handed him a golden table leg. In a dream he saw that in the future all the righteous would be eating on tables that have three legs and he and his wife would be eating on a table with two legs.

אמרה ליה דביתהו עד אימת ניזיל ונצטער כולי האי אמר לה מאי נעביד בעי רחמי דניתבו לך מידי בעא רחמי יצתה כמין פיסת יד ויהבו ליה חד כרעא דפתורא דדהבא [חזיא] בחלמא עתידי צדיקי דאכלי אפתורא דדהבא דאית ליה תלת כרעי [ואיהו] אפתורא דתרי כרעי.

He asked his wife, "Is it alright with you that everyone else will be eating at a complete table and we will be eating at an incomplete table?" She said to him, "What can we do? Pray that they take it back." He prayed and they took it back. It was taught that the second miracle was greater than the first miracle because we have a tradition that Heaven can give things, but does not take them back.

[אמר לה] נוחא לך דמיכל אכלי כולי עלמא אפתורא דמשלם ואנו אפתורא דמחסר אמרה ליה ומאי נעביד בעי רחמי דנשקלינהו מינך בעי רחמי ושקלוהו תנא גדול היה נס אחרון יותר מן הראשון דגמירי דמיהב יחבי מישקל לא שקלי.

4. **Shemot (Exodus) Rabbah 52:3 – Reward in this world can deduct from reward in the World to Come.**

It once happened that a student of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai left Israel [to earn money] and returned very wealthy. The students saw him and were jealous. They also wanted to leave Israel [to make money]. Rabbi Shimon understood and took them to a certain sloping valley. He prayed and said, "Valley, valley, fill up with golden coins." It began to flow with golden coins. Rabbi Shimon said to his students, "If you want gold, here is gold. Take for yourselves whatever you want. But you should know that whatever you take now will be deducted from your portion in the World to Come, for the real compensation for learning Torah is only in the World to Come."

מעשה בתלמיד אחד של ר"ש בן יוחאי שיצא חוצה לארץ ובה עשיר והיו התלמידים רואין אותו ומקנאין בו והיו מבקשים הן לצאת לחוצה לארץ וידע ר"ש והוציאן לבקעה אחת של פגי מרון ונתפלל ואמר בקעה בקעה מלאי דינרי זהב התחילה מושכת דינרי זהב לפנייהן אמר להם אם זהב אתם מבקשים הרי זהב טלו לכם אלא היו יודעין כל מי שהוא נוטל עכשיו חלקו של עוה"ב הוא נוטל שאין מתן שכר התורה אלא לעוה"ב הוי.

Note: One should not get the impression that Judaism idealizes poverty as a sign of righteousness. Earning a living and providing for one's family are basic responsibilities. The point being made here is that ultimately the goal of life is to accrue spiritual accomplishments. Moreover, we can never know whether or not we are destined for life in the World to Come. Hence, there is no way of telling if our fortunes in this world are due to reward for the minority of our mitzvot or for some other reason altogether. Sometimes God gives us things that we have not yet earned just for the sake of giving us the chance to do a mitzvah. Similarly, we cannot know if our misfortunes are a punishment for the minority of our transgressions. Maybe they are just a test of our virtues, an opportunity to earn greater reward!

Practically speaking, the advice of our Sages has always been not to spend our time fretting about the implications of our fortunes or misfortunes, rather to do the utmost to attach ourselves to God in this world. This is the only real assurance of life in the World to Come.

PART B. THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF ONE'S ACTIONS

Viewing the World to Come as a reward for our actions does not quite capture the causal relationship between the two. In reality, the World to Come is less of a reward granted by Divine grace than it is the natural product of one's effort to grow spiritually in this life through Torah and mitzvot.

1. **Meiri, Chibbur HaTeshuvah 541 – The World to Come grows out of this world.**

The World to Come is not a reward for one's actions but their fruit. In other words, it is produced from them like a fruit from a tree.

אין העולם הבא שכר המעשים אבל הוא פרים, ר"ל יוצא מהם כצאת הפרי מן העץ.

2. Nefesh HaChaim 1:12 – We create our World to Come with our deeds.

The reason that the Sages said that “all Israel have a portion *to* the World to Come” and not “*in* the World to Come” is because it is not something that was created during the Six Days of Creation. It is not a separate entity such that if a person is righteous they will give him his reward from it. The truth is that the World to Come is built by the person himself. Each person expands, adds, and determines his own portion through his actions. Each member of Israel has his own portion in holiness, light, and radiance that is fixed and added to the World to Come through his good deeds.

וזה שאמרו רז"ל כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא, ולא אמרו בעולם הבא, שמשמעו היה שהעולם הבא הוא מוכן מעת הבריאה, ענין ודבר לעצמו, ואם יצדק האדם יתנו לו בשכרו חלק ממנו, אבל האמת שהעולם הבא הוא מעשה ידי האדם עצמו, שהרחיב והוסיף והתקין חלק לעצמו במעשיו, לכן אמרו שכל ישראל יש להם לכל אחד חלק הקדושה והאורות והצחצחות שהתקין והוסיף לעולם הבא ממעשיו הטובים.

3. Rabbi Zev Leff, Audio Tape – The more effort we expend on something, the more we appreciate it.

If a person receives a watch as a gift and then loses it, the person may feel badly, but not as badly as if he actually purchased the watch. However, let's say the person manufactured the watch himself from scratch, toiling endless hours in crafting it. If the watch were to get lost now, how would he feel? The idea is that those projects which we invest effort in, bring us the greatest appreciation and meaning. Consequently, our effort in this world actually builds our World to Come.

4. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 61 – The World to Come is really “the World that Comes” out of our actions.

The condition of the soul's existence in Olam Haba, its degree of closeness and connection to God, is directly determined by its previous activities in the physical world; it is the “world that comes” – the state that results directly from what happens in this world.

An illustration that death reveals whatever spiritual state already exists in the person is found in the following Talmudic excerpt, as explained by Rabbi Dessler in the subsequent source.

5. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 18b – The dead maintain the same concerns as when they were alive.

... A man went and spent the night in a cemetery, and he heard two spirits conversing with one another. Said one to her companion, “My dear, come and let us wander about the world and let us hear from ‘behind the curtain’ what suffering is coming on the world.” Her companion said to her, “I cannot go since I am buried in matting of reeds [she was ashamed to be seen in such “attire” – Ritva]. But you go, and whatever you hear tell me ...”

... והלך ולך בבית הקברות. ושמע שתי רוחות שמספרות זו לזו, אמרה חדה לחברתה: חברתי, בואי ונשוט בעולם ונשמע מאחורי הפרגוד מה פורענות בא לעולם. אמרה לה חברתה: איני יכולה שאני קבורה במחצלת של קנים, אלא לכי את ומה שאת שומעת אמרי לי...

6. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. II, p. 62 – The transition from life in this world to life in the next world (the World of the Souls) does *not* change the essence of a person, it just reveals it.**

A person's desire is his essence ... And you should know that death does not change the internal state of the person. The wicked person, who in his lifetime was attached to the illusion [of this world], so too after death will be attached to this very illusion; but since he will not be able to satisfy his desires, he will lust after them all the more and develop an enormous appetite for them. The Talmud records how the spirits were interested in the affairs of this world. Furthermore, there was even one spirit that was embarrassed by the fact that she was buried in reeds. See how her sensitivity for self-respect remained in death just as it was in life!

רצון האדם הוא מהותו...

וזאת לדעת כי אין מיתת הגוף משנה בעצם את מצבו הפנימי של האדם. הרשע, שבזמן חיי הבלו דבק היה בדמיון, גם כשיפרד מגופו נשאר הוא דבק בדמיונו. אך מכיון שאינו מוצא את סיפוקו, ישתוקק הוא אליו כל עוד יותר, וימלא רעבון עצום. ע"י במסכת ברכות בפרק מי שמתו, שהרוחות התענינו לדעת מאחורי הפרגוד מה נגזר על העולם בעיני הגשמיות, ויותר מזה, שאותה הרוח שהיתה קבורה במחצלת של קנים נתבישה מזה – הרי שהרגשות הכבוד נשארו ממש כבעולם הזה.

PART C. THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

The World to Come is the ultimate goal for each individual and humanity as a whole. Only by utilizing every opportunity for spiritual growth in this world can we create a meaningful World to Come. Therefore, while in this world we need to focus our efforts to earn the greatest good by striving to fulfill the Will of God with all our energy and resources.

1. **Pirkei Avot 4:16-17 – Each world has its advantages.**

Rabbi Yaakov said, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall."

He used to say, "Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come. Better is one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come than the entire life of this World."

רבי יעקוב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדוד בפני העולם הבא; התקן עצמך בפרוזדוד כדי שתכנס לטרקלין.

הוא היה אומר, יפה שעה אחת בתשובה ומעשים טובים בעולם הזה, מכל חיי העולם הבא; ויפה שעה אחת של קורת רוח בעולם הבא, מכל חיי העולם הזה.

Which world is better?

On the face of it, the two statements above seem to contradict each other, but they were said in the same breath by the same person. The resolution is as follows:

God's purpose in Creation was to give the ultimate good to another, namely man. That good, closeness to God Himself, is only experienced in the World to Come. As such, this world is secondary, a mere antechamber, to the World to Come.

But in order for it to be the greatest possible good, the closeness to God must be earned rather than simply handed over on a silver platter. Life in this world is the opportunity for earning the true good of the World to Come, and in that sense it is more valuable.

2. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:2:1-2 – This world is an opportunity to earn the greatest good, attachment to God.**

God's purpose in Creation was to bestow of His good to another ... His wisdom therefore decreed that the nature of this true benefaction be His giving created things the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible for them.

God's wisdom, however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must be its master. That is, he must earn it for himself ...

הנה התכלית בבריאה היה להטיב מטובו ית' לזולתו... על כן גזרה חכמתו שמציאות הטובה האמיתית הזאת יהיה במה שינתן מקום לברואים לשיתדבקו בו ית', באותו השיעור שאפשר להם שיתדבקו...

ואולם גזרה חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי שיהיה הנהנה בו בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו...

3. **Ramchal, Mesillat Yesharim (Path of the Just), Ch. 1 – The delight of attachment to God in the World to Come is the very purpose of Creation.**

Our Sages of blessed memory have instructed us that man was created for the sole purpose of reveling in the Eternal and delighting in the splendor of the Divine Presence, this being the ultimate joy and greatest of all pleasures in existence. The true place for this pleasure is in the World to Come, which was created solely for this purpose.

However, the path that helps us reach our desired goal is this world. That is what our Sages meant when they said that "this world is like an antechamber to the World to Come" (Avot 4:21). The means that lead to this goal are the mitzvot that God commanded us to observe, and the place for doing the mitzvot is in this world alone. Therefore, man was first placed in this world to use the methods available to him in order to reach his intended destination, the World to Come. There he will enjoy the good which he acquired by virtue of these means. That is what our Sages of blessed memory meant when they said, "Today to do and tomorrow, in the World to Come, to receive the reward" (Eruvin 22a).

והנה מה שהורנו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה הוא, שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעידון הגדול מכל העידונים שיכולים להמציא. ומקום העידון הזה באמת הוא העולם הבא, כי הוא הנברא בהכנה המצטרפת לדבר הזה.

אך הדרך כדי להגיע אל מחוז חפצנו זה, הוא זה העולם. והוא מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה (אבות ד:טז) העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא. והאמצעים המגיעים את האדם לתכלית הזה, הם המצוות אשר צונו עליהן האל יתברך שמו. ומקום עשיית המצוות הוא רק העולם הזה. על כן הושם האדם בזה העולם בתחלה כדי שעל ידי האמצעים האלה המזדמנים לו כאן יוכל להגיע אל המקום אשר הוכן לו, שהוא העולם הבא, לרוות שם בטוב אשר קנה לו על ידי אמצעים אלה. והוא מה שאמרו, זכרונם לברכה (עירובין כב א): היום לעשותם ומחר לקבל שכרם:

The following story demonstrates how the possibility of reward in the World to Come invests life in this world with limitless value.

4. **Rabbi Aharon Pollack, The Laws of Tzitzit, p. 6 – This world is an opportunity for earning the reward of the next.**

It is told that the students of the Vilna Gaon, in the last hours of his life, gathered around his bed, eager to hear their great master's last words. They expected to see him joyous at the prospect of his reward in the World to Come, but were surprised to see him with tears on his face. He held up his tzitzit and said, "How beautiful this world is! For just a few coins one can buy threads and tie tzitzit, and so come close to the Shechinah. But in the World to Come it is impossible to do any of this."

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ≈ The reward for spiritual development in this world is life in the World to Come, first in the World of the Souls and ultimately in the post-Resurrection world.
- ≈ That reward, a connection to God, is infinitely more valuable than anything that can be experienced in this world. More than just a payoff for good behavior, though, a share in the World to Come is the direct consequence of our actions during this lifetime. Death only removes the outer shell, revealing the soul in whatever state it reached during its brief stay in this world.
- ≈ The experience of closeness to God in the World to Come is the ultimate reason that God created the universe. Only in the World to Come is God's purpose in Creation – the giving of good to another – actually realized. Nevertheless, it is only through utilizing every opportunity for spiritual growth in this world that we can create a meaningful World to Come.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT IS THE WORLD TO COME – IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

Yes. Judaism affirms belief in life after death and in a phase of history called the World to Come.

WHERE DOES THE TORAH TALK ABOUT A WORLD TO COME?

The Torah refers to the World to Come indirectly (for reasons discussed in part II). It talks about the soul “being gathered to its people” after death, returning to God, and records accounts of communicating with the dead.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

The soul leaves the body and enters the World of the Souls (*Olam HaNeshamot*). It remains there until the Resurrection of the Dead, at which time the soul is re-united with its body and the world assumes a totally new form of existence, referred to as the World to Come.

WHAT DOES ONE EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD TO COME?

A person enjoys the level of personal perfection and closeness to God that he managed to build with the good deeds he accomplished in this world. The pleasure of the experience in the World to Come is greater than anything available in this world.

IS THE WORLD TO COME IN ANY WAY SIMILAR TO THIS WORLD?

Physical sensations of a higher reality are a taste of the World to Come. However, the main feature will be “taking pleasure in the radiance of God's Presence.”

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE WORLD TO COME?

The World to Come is the ultimate purpose of Creation – to be eternally attached to the Will of God. By using our free will and utilizing the opportunities for spiritual growth in this world, we create a meaningful World to Come. The World to Come is also the time when we are rewarded for our positive actions in this world, learn from our mistakes, and become spiritually purified. It is where we will experience the greatest spiritual delight and connection to God.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought*, Vol. II, Ch. 23, “Immortality and the Soul”

SECTION I.

Rabbi Yaakov Astor, *Soul Searching*, Appendix A

SECTION II.

Ramban, *Shaar HeGemul*

Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, Part 1, Ch. 3

ArtScroll Tractate Sanhedrin, Vol. III, Appendix A

Ner Le’elef Books, *This World and the Next*, pp. 39-49

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