

## Debunking the Myth of the Jewish Afterlife

The Olami Resources Chaburah October 24, 2018

---

This shiur is the third in a series of classes inspired by [Rabbi Yehoshua Lewis](#), founder of Olami affiliate Mesorah NJ, addressing myths held by outsiders of Judaism. The Olami Resources Chaburah used materials from the [Olami/NLE Morasha Syllabus](#) module on [Spirituality and Kabbalah](#) to clarify the understanding of Jewish eschatology.

---

*In 'A Brief History of Time' (published in 1998) Professor Stephen Hawking was equivocal about the possibility of a Creator, stating that finding a complete theory of the universe would allow mankind to know the mind of G-d".*

*But in his final book, "Brief Answers To The Big Questions," which is published on Tuesday, the astrophysicist is clear. There is no G-d. Or an afterlife. And certainly no heaven. (By Sarah Knapton, "Stephen Hawking's Final Book: 'There is no God or Afterlife,'" The Telegraph, October 15, 2018.)*

---

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 G-d? 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 G-d 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.

Individuals not familiar with Jewish thought may have misunderstandings of whether or not Judaism believes in an afterlife which lead to a myth that Judaism does not believe in the World to Come.

### Section One. There is No Basis to the Myth

There is no basis to the myth that Judaism does not believe in an afterlife. The Talmud clearly teaches that there is not only an afterlife, but every Jewish person has the potential for what is known as "Olam Haba" – the World to Come.

#### 1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud) Sanhedrin 90a – The default position of every Jew is that he or she will have life in the World to Come.

All Israel have a portion in the World to Come.	כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא.
---	--------------------------------

**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.**

<p>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.”</p>	<p>רבי יעקב אומר: העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא. התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס לטרקלין:</p>
--	---

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

<p>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.</p>	<p>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:</p>
--	--

If the Talmud unambiguously teaches the existence of the World to Come, why should people doubt the Jewish position?

**Section Two. How did the Myth Arise?**

It is possible that the myth that there is no afterlife in Judaism arose because the most read book in Judaism, the Chumash – the Five Books of Moses – has only subtle references to what Judaism describes as “Olam Haba” – the World to Come. Although the Chumash has been accessible to a wide audience through translations for millennia, the subtle references to the World to Come would not be apparent. Despite clear Talmudic and Midrashic references to the afterlife, until only very recent Jewish history were these compendiums available in popularized translation and hence inaccessible to those unfamiliar with Jewish eschatology.

**Section Three. Why Is There No Explicit Mention of the World to Come in the Torah?**

Many of the classical commentators were bothered by the obvious omission of overt references by the Chumash to something so central to Jewish thought. Why doesn’t the Chumash explicitly mention spiritual reward for observing mitzvot or reveal the ultimate purpose of G-d’s Creation?

By exploring a few of the answers, we will find that the Torah tells us much more about the World to Come simply by being quiet about the subject.

## Part A. It's Obvious

There is a basic principle that the Talmud applies when deriving information from the Torah: if the principle is logical, then it does not need to be located in an actual Biblical verse. This principle applies to the reward of the World to Come.

### 1. Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon, Emunot ve-Deot, 9:2 – Logic dictates that there is reward in a World to Come.

<p>One may wonder why the Torah makes no mention of reward other than in this-worldly terms? ... One explanation for this is that since the reward in the World to Come is something that reason can demonstrate, the Torah did not mention much about it, as is the case with many mitzvot. For example, G-d did not explicitly command Adam not to murder, commit adultery, or steal because these things are demanded by the dictates of reason. Rather, He told him not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil because that was not so intellectually obvious. So too, the Torah did not speak about ultimate reward, but rather relied upon the logic that necessitates it.</p>	<p>ואם יאמר אומר, הן לא נמצא מה שנזכר בתורה מן הגמול, כי אם בעולם הזה בלבד? ... אחת מהנה, שגמול העולם הבא מפני שאין עומדין עליו כי אם בשכל כאשר בארנו, לא זכרתהו התורה כי אם בקצרה, כאשר עשתה בויצו יי' אלהים על האדם לאמר, ולא אמרה, אנכי יי' אלקיך לא תרצח לא תנאף לא תגנוב, כי השכל מורה על כל אלה, אבל הראתה ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל, מפני שאין השכל מורה עליו. וכן לא הזכירה הגמול האחר, בעבור שסמכה על השכל שיוורה עליו.</p>
--	--

When one witnesses the injustice of this world, when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, it only makes sense that there exists another world where all will be justified. In the following source, we see the example of the Patriarchs who seemingly went unrewarded for their deeds, unless one considers that they will be rewarded in the World to Come.

### 2. Kli Yakar, Vayikra 26:12 – In what way were the forefathers rewarded more than any other people in history? They were rewarded in the World to Come.

<p>We can see with our own eyes how great G-d's love was for our forefathers, Avraham (Abraham), Yitzchak (Isaac), and Yaakov (Yaakov). Now, if their achievements in this world were all that they achieved, then what would be the advantage of Avraham over the wicked Nimrod, for he was king of a vast domain while Avraham wandered his whole life from one tent to the next, from one nation to the next.</p> <p>So too, when it comes to Yitzchak and Yaakov we have no idea what their true reward was. Even if we factor in the reward given to their descendants [i.e. the Land of Israel], the question remains: of what good was such a reward to them since others would inevitably</p>	<p>...שראינו בעינינו כמה גדלה חיבת ה' אל אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב. ואילו היתה הצלחתם בעולם הזה סוף הצלחתם אם כן מה יתרון היה לאברהם על נמרוד הרשע כי זה מלך בכיפה ואברהם היה נע ונד כל הימים מתהלך מאהל אל אהל מגוי אל גוי,</p> <p>וכן יצחק ויעקב לא ידענו מה היה להם מן השכר האמיתי כי אם זה השכר המיועד לזרעם הוא סוף שכרם מה כשרון לבעליו כי אחרי מותם ינחלו זרעם את הארץ והמה יצאו מן העולם ריקם מכל עמלם, ואפילו לישראל נוחלי הארץ מה יתרון להם אפילו בזמן השלוה על כל</p>
---	---

<p>inherit their land when they die and they will leave this world with no recompense for all their labor? And even if you point to the Jewish people's inhabitation of the Land on the whole, nevertheless, even in times of peace, how is it any better than any of the other nations who succeed and rule as they do on much greater territory than do the Jewish people?</p> <p>Rather, it must be that the great good hidden away for the righteous [in the World to Come] is the real reward of the forefathers, and likewise for all their descendants, for they have all kept the same Torah.</p>	<p>מלכי הארץ אשר צלחו ומלכו בעולם כמותם ומקצתם יותר מהמה,</p> <p>אין זה כי אם שרב טוב הצפון לצדיקים הוא חלקם ונחלתם של האבות ושל כל תולדותיהם כיוצא בהם כי תורה אחת לכלם:</p>
---	---

## Part B. Trivialization

Rabbi Mordechai Becher tells the story of the time he came home with a big folding table packaged in a square box on top of his car. His three-year-old son came out to greet him and when he saw the box, exclaimed, "Abba, big pizza!"

We can only describe things within the bounds of the conceptual and linguistic categories familiar to our experience. Since we lack the vocabulary to describe the World to Come, the Torah omitted talking about it for fear of trivializing this very deep concept.

### 1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 34b – No mind can fathom the World to Come.

<p>Rabbi Chiya bar Abba also said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "All the prophets prophesied only for the days of the Messiah, but as for the World to Come, 'No eye has seen it, G-d, besides You' (Yeshayahu 64:3)."</p>	<p>ואמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: כל הנביאים כולן לא נתנבאו אלא לימות המשיח, אבל לעולם הבא - עין לא ראתה אלהים זולתך. (ישעיהו סד:ג.)</p>
---	---

### 2. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) 8:6-7 – Any comparison to the pleasures of this world would cheapen the World to Come.

<p>The great goodness which the soul experiences in the World to Come is beyond any means of comprehension in this world. In this world we know only the physical pleasures to which we are tied, but that goodness [in the World to Come] is exceedingly good, and has no rating when compared to the pleasures of this world, except figuratively.</p> <p>The earlier Sages have already made it known that it is beyond one's capabilities to comprehend the goodness of the World to</p>	<p>הטובה הגדולה שתהיה בה הנפש בעולם הבא אין שום דרך בעולם הזה להשיגה ולידע אותה, שאין אנו יודעים בעולם הזה אלא טובת הגוף ולה אנו מתאוין אבל אותה הטובה גדולה עד מאד ואין לה ערך בטובות העולם הזה אלא דרך משל ....</p> <p>... כבר הודיעונו החכמים הראשונים שטובת העולם הבא אין כח באדם להשיגה על בוריה ואין יודע גדלה ויפיה</p>
--	--

<p>Come at all, and that one cannot know its greatness, beauty and very essence; only the Holy One, Blessed Be He, can understand it. All the good things which the prophets prophesied to Israel are only physical pleasures from which they will benefit in the days of the Messiah and when the monarchy has been returned to Israel. The goodness of the World to Come, however, has no limit or size, and was not discussed by the prophets so as not to cheapen it by comparison.</p>	<p>ועצמה אלא הקב"ה לבדו, ושכל הטובות שמתנבאים בהם הנביאים לישראל אינן אלא לדברים שבגוף שנהנין בהן ישראל לימות המשיח בזמן שתשוב הממשלה לישראל אבל טובת חיי העולם הבא אין לה ערך ודמיון ולא דמוה הנביאים כדי שלא יפחתו אותה בדמיון.</p>
---	---

**3. Ibn Ezra, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 32:39 – The World to Come is too deep a concept to be mentioned in the Torah.**

<p>Rabbeinu Hai [Gaon] says that the Torah did not need to speak explicitly about the subject of the World to Come because it was something taken for granted in the ancient world. But I say that the Torah was given to everyone, not just to an individual [generation]. Rather, [the reason the Torah omits it] is because no one understands it, for it is a very deep matter indeed.</p>	<p>ורבינו האי ז"ל אמר, כי לא הוצרך הכתוב לפרש דבר העולם הבא, כי היה ידוע בהעתקה. ולפי דעתי, שהתורה נתנה לכל, לא לאחד לבדו. ודבר העולם הבא לא יבינו אחד מני אלף, כי עמוק הוא.</p>
--	--

**4. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 63 – The dangers of oversimplification.**

<p>The World to Come is purely spiritual, but it is impossible for us to describe it without resorting to metaphors from our physical world. These metaphors easily take on the character of reality in people's minds, so that the more Olam Haba is described the further it is diminished by our finite imagination. You can see the disastrous results of oversimplification and metaphors by observing the popular western notions of Heaven and Hell with their respective scenes of angels strumming harps and devils with pitchforks!</p>
---

**Part C. Correct Motivation**

The Torah did not mention the World to Come because we are not supposed to keep Torah and do mitzvot for the sake of receiving reward; we must do them simply because G-d says so.

**1. Pirkei Avot 1:3 – One should not serve G-d in order to receive reward.**

<p>Antignos of Socho received the tradition from Shimon the Righteous. He would say, "Do not be as servants who serve their master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as servants who serve their master not for the sake of reward. And the fear of Heaven should be upon you."</p>	<p>אנטיגנוס איש סוכו קבל משמעון הצדיק הוא היה אומר אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס אלא הוו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב שלא על מנת לקבל פרס ויהי מורא שמים עליכם:</p>
--	--

**2. Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael, Ch. 58 – Mention of the World to Come would be sending the wrong message.**

<p>Had reward been written in the Torah, it would have wrongly implied that a person should serve G-d in order to receive that reward – and that would be out of the question. Therefore, the Torah does not mention the World to Come, for it would have implied that one is to serve G-d for the sake of receiving reward, and that is not so.</p>	<p>כי איך אפשר לומר שיהיה נזכר בתורה שום שכר כאילו אמר שיעבוד האדם בוראו בשביל השכר ודבר זה אין ראוי לומר כלל ולפיכך לא נזכר בתורה עולם הבא שהיה משמע לעבוד השם יתברך על מנת לקבל פרס ואין זה ראוי.</p>
--	---

**Part D. Falsifiability**

In science, a theory is deemed “unscientific” if it is not falsifiable. That is, if the theory is compatible with all possible observations then there is no way of constructing an experiment to either prove or disprove the truth of the theory. Similarly, as evidenced in the next source, Jewish philosophers have argued that promising a reward that no one could ever verify does not lend credence to the Torah.

**1. Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael, Ch. 58 – “Torah” is not a matter of speculation.**

<p>It is only fitting that the words of the Torah be clear and recognizable to the eye, so as not to erroneously compare it to any other religion that promises a reward that is uncertain and outside the realm of experience. Something that is outside of man’s experience and is uncertain is not fit to be called “Torah” because anyone could claim that the reward is this or that. Therefore, the Torah only promised physical things [like peace and prosperity], things that are clear and apparent. But it would not be right for the Torah to mention a spiritual reward that would have to be taken on faith alone.</p>	<p>...ראוי לתורה שיהיו דבריה מבוררים ונכרים לחוש העין עד שלא תוכל לדמות לה אחד מן הדתות שמבטיחים שכר עולם הבא דבר בלתי מבורר ובלתי ידוע לחוש, אבל דבר הבלתי ידוע לאדם והם בלתי מבוררים אין ראוי שיכנסו בגדר התורה כיון שכל אחד יוכל לומר שבשכר תורה זאת יגיע לכם כך וכך, ובשביל כך זכרה התורה הטוב הגופני במה שהוא דבר נראה וברור, ואין ראוי להזכיר בתורה שכר רוחני שאינו מבורר לאדם והוא צריך להאמין.</p>
--	--

**Section IV. The Jewish Description of the World to Come**

According to Judaism, world history is divided into 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 G-d’s desire to give to man in the most perfect way possible.

Jewish sources teach that the purpose of Creation is that G-d, 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, G-d 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 G-d in the spiritual sense is translated as likeness: to the degree that man can come to resemble G-d’s own perfection is the degree that he will be “close” to G-d.

Like G-d’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 G-d. G-d therefore created a system through which man would have the opportunity to earn his own perfection. Had G-d simply created man spiritually perfect to begin with, man would be very far from G-d in one crucial respect: G-d would be an active giver of good, whereas man would be a mere passive recipient of it. In order to overcome this obstacle, G-d 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, G-d created the world incomplete and imperfect. Hence the existence of evil, or the apparent lack of Divine influence. G-d then gave man the power and the mandate to be able to complete the world which He had begun. G-d proceeded to give man all the details necessary to finish, or perfect, the world. This would be accomplished through the fulfillment of G-d’s commandments to man. G-d 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 G-d and the other striving to move toward Him. By willfully choosing to follow G-d’s Will and to thereby overcome the base instinct to follow his own selfish will, man perfects himself and the world along with him.

### **Part A. Body and Eternal Soul**

A person is made up of a body and a soul, which are combined to experience life in this world. When a person dies, the body is buried, but the soul is eternal. Indeed, the belief in the eternity of our souls is the foundation of the ethics of personal responsibility. (See the Olami Morasha Syllabus class on Free Will.) Furthermore, the fact that we are comprised of an elevated, spiritual soul requires us to take steps to provide for our soul’s needs by engaging in spiritual activities. The soul is the home of a person’s identity, his true *self*. (See the Olami Morasha Syllabus class on Body and Soul).

**1. Bereishit (Genesis) 2:7 – Man was created from the dust of the earth and from the “breath” of G-d.**

G-d formed man of the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being.	וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.
---	---

**2. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech HaShem (The Way of G-d), 1:3:2, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers, p. 45 and p. 47. – Dual nature of man.**

<p>... The Highest Wisdom decreed that man should consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual.</p> <p>The two are then in a constant state of battle. If the soul prevails, it not only elevates itself, but elevates the body as well, and the individual thereby attains his destined perfection. If he allows the physical to prevail, on the other hand, then besides lowering his body, he also debases his soul. Such an individual makes himself unworthy of perfection, and thus divorces himself from G-d. He still has the ability, however, to subjugate the physical to his soul and intellect, and thereby achieve perfection.</p>	<p>...גזרה החכמה העליונה שיהיה האדם מורכב משני הפכים, דהיינו מנשמה שכלית וזכה, וגוף ארציי ועכור, שכל אחד מהם יטה בטבע לצדו, דהיינו הגוף לחומריות והנשמה לשכליות.</p> <p>ותמצא ביניהם מלחמה, באופן שאם תגבר הנשמה, תתעלה היא ותעלה הגוף עמה, ויהיה אותו האדם המשתלם בשלימות המעותד, ואם יניח האדם שינצח בו החומר, הנה ישפל הגוף ותשפל נשמתו עמו, ויהיה אותו האדם בלתי הגון לשלימות, ונדחה ממנו ח"ו, ולאדם הזה יכולת להשפיל חומריו לפני שכלו ונשמתו, ולקנות שלימותו כמו שזכרנו:</p>
--	---

The purpose of the dual nature of man is to place him in a position of struggle, so that he may earn eternal reward. After death, the struggle ends, and man receives his reward.

**3. Ibid., pp. 47-49 – Striving in this world and earning reward in the World to Come.**

<p>Since the period of earning and that of reward are different, it is appropriate that man's environment and experiences be different in the two. While he is striving toward perfection, he must be in a setting containing elements necessary for such effort. The period of earning must therefore be one [where a maximum challenge exists and] where the spiritual and physical are in constant strife ...</p> <p>In the period of reward, however, the exact opposite is appropriate. The more the physical would prevail, the more it would darken the soul and prevent it from being drawn close to G-d. During the time of reward, it is therefore</p>	<p>ואולם כפי התחלף זמניו, כך ראוי שיתחלף מצבו ושאר מקריו. כי כל זמן ההשתדלות הנה צריך שיהיה בתכונה אחת, שיוכלו לימצא בו כל הענינים המצטרפים לו לפי ענין ההשתדלות הזה. פירוש - כי הנה מוכרח שתמצא לו המלחמה שזכרנו בין השכל והחומר, ולא יהיה לו דבר שיעכב את החומר מלשלוט ולעשות את שלו כפי השיעור הראוי לו, ולא דבר שיעכב את השכל מלשלוט כראוי לו ולעשות את שלו. וכן לא יהיה דבר שיגרום לחומר להתחזק יותר מן הראוי, וגם לא יגרום לשכל להתחזק יותר מן הראוי.</p> <p>...ובזמן קיבול השכר הנה ראוי לו שיהיה במצב הפכי לזה, כי הנה כל מה שיהיה החומר שולט באותו זמן, הנה לא היה אלא מחשיך ומעכב על הנשמה שלא תתדבק בבורא ית', ועל כן הנה ראוי הוא שלא ישלוט אז אלא</p>
--	--



<p>appropriate that the soul prevail, and that the physical be totally subjugated to it and not restrain it at all.</p> <p>It is for this reason that G-d created two worlds, this world and the World to Come. The environment and principles of the World to Come, on the other hand, are what are necessary for a person during the time that he receives his reward.</p>	<p>הנשמה, והחומר יהיה נמשך אחריה לגמרי באופן שלא יעכב על ידה כלל.</p> <p>ואמנם על כן נבראו שני העולמות, עוה"ז ועוה"ב, עוה"ז המקום והחוקים הטבעיים שלו הם מה שראוי לאדם כל זמן ההשתדלות, העוה"ב המקום והחוקים שלו הם מה שראוי לו בזמן קיבול השכר:</p>
--	--

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.

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

<p>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.</p>	<p>אין העולם הבא שכר המעשים אבל הוא פריים, ר"ל יוצא מהם כצאת הפרי מן העץ.</p>
--	---

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

<p>The reason that the Sages said that “all Israel have a portion <i>to</i> the World to Come” and not “<i>in</i> 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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
--	--

### Part B. The Two Phases of the 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, G-d 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 Halkarim – The World to Come has two stages.**

<p>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 G-d, 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 ...</p>	<p>גמול העולם הבא הוא שכפי מעשיו שעשה בעולם הזה כן תקבע לו מדריגה בטובה האמיתית, שהיא הדבקות בו ית' ויהנה בה לנצח נצחים. וגם הוא יחולק לשני חלקים, בעולם הנשמות ובעולם התחייה...</p>
--	--

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

<p>The reward of the souls and their existence in the World of the Souls is called Gan Eden by our rabbis ...</p> <p>After the World of the Souls will come the era of the Messiah, which is a part of this world.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>This is the World to Come, in which the body will become like the soul and the soul will cleave to the knowledge of G-d, 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.</p>	<p>כי שכר הנפשות וקיומם בעולם הנשמות נקרא לרבותינו גן עדן...</p> <p>ואחרי כן יבואו ימי המשיח, והוא מכלל העולם הזה.</p> <p>ובסופם יהא יום הדין ותחיית המתים, שהוא השכר הכולל הגוף והנפש...</p> <p>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.</p>
--	--

**3. Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction to Sanhedrin, Ch. 10 – In the Messianic era there will be no political oppression, knowledge of G-d will be all pervasive, and peace and perfection will reign.**

<p>The great benefit which will be in those days [of the Mashiah] is that we will rest from our subjugation to the non-Jewish governments, which is what prevents us from fulfilling all the mitzvot. Wisdom will increase, as the verse states, "The world will be filled with</p>	<p>התועלת הגדול אשר תהיה באותם הימים הוא שנגנו משעבוד מלכויות שהוא מונע אותנו מעשיית המצות כולם, ותרבה החכמה כמו שנאמר "פי מלאה הארץ דעה [את ה' פמים לים מכסים]"</p>
---	--

<p>knowledge [of G-d as water covers the sea bed]" (Yeshayahu 11:9).</p> <p>War will cease, as the verse states, "[They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.] Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall they learn war any more" (Ibid. 2:4). In those days there will be ultimate perfection and we will merit the life of the World to Come.</p>	<p>וישבתו המלחמות כמו שנאמר "[וכָתְתוּ חֶרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים וְחִנְיֹתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמְרוֹת] לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב [ולֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה]", ויהיה נמצא בימים ההם שלימות רב ונזכה בו לחיי העולם הבא.</p>
--	--

**4. Ibid. – With miraculous assistance, Mashiach will ensure world peace, whether by force or consent.**

<p>The Messianic Era will be a time when kingship will return to Israel and [all Jews] will return to the Land of Israel. This king will be very great and his palace will be in Zion [Jerusalem]. His name and fame will spread and become more widespread than that of King Shlomo (Solomon). All the nations will make peace with him and all the countries will serve him on account of his great righteousness and because of the wonders that will be done by him. Anyone who rises against him will be destroyed by G-d, and will be given into his [Mashiach's] hand.</p>	<p>אמנם ימות המשיח הוא זמן שתשוב המלכות לישראל ויחזרו לארץ ישראל, ויהי אותו המלך גדול מאד ובית מלכותו בציון יגדל שמו וזכרו יהיה מלא הגוים יותר מן המלך שלמה, וישלימו אתו כל האומות ויעבדוהו כל הארצות לצדקו הגדול ולנפלאות שיהא על ידו, וכל מי שיקום עליו יאבדהו השם יתעלה וימסור אותו בידו.</p>
---	--

Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead is fundamental to Judaism.

**5. Nusach HaTefillah, Birkat HaGevurot (second blessing of the silent Amidah) – We praise G-d daily for His ability to resurrect the dead.**

<p>You are eternally mighty, my Lord, the Resuscitator of the dead are You. You are abundantly able to save.</p> <p>He sustains the living with kindness. He resuscitates the dead with abundant mercy. He supports the fallen, heals the sick, releases the confined, and maintains His faith to those who sleep in the dust.</p> <p>Who is like You, Master of mighty deeds, and who is similar to You? A King Who causes death and resurrection, and Who causes salvation to sprout.</p>	<p>אַתָּה גִבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי. מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים אַתָּה רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ:</p> <p>מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסֵּד. מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים. סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים. וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים וּמְתִיר אֲסוּרִים. וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַד עַד.</p> <p>מִי כְמוֹךָ בַּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ. מֶלֶךְ מְמִית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמְצַמֵּחַ שׂוֹעֵה: וְנֹאמֵן אַתָּה לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים:</p> <p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים:</p>
---	---

And You are faithful to resurrect the dead. Blessed are You, G-d, Who resurrects the dead.	
---	--

The ultimate World to Come is an entirely new form of existence.

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

At that point G-d 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.
---	---

This new state of existence will not come about overnight; rather, mankind and the world will proceed through four levels of existence as spirituality slowly but surely overcomes and then replaces physicality.

**7. Rabbi Chaim Freidlander, Sifsei Chaim, Pirkei Emunah U'Bechirah, Vol. II, pp. 226-7 — In the first level of the World to Come the soul will be in control and the body will be nourished from spirituality.**

The first level of the world of reward is the seventh millennium, which the Sages described as “a millennium of desolation” after which “G-d will renew His world” (Sanhedrin 92b). The world of the seventh millennium will be temporal, but unlike the first six millennia in which physicality rules like “the master of the house,” in the seventh millennium, while physicality will still exist, it will be “as a wanderer from place to place, a guest looking for lodging” (as Ramchal has described it in Da’as Tevunos, p. 83). That is, the body will not have control.  Rather, everyone will be on the level of Moshe (Moses) when he ascended the mountain: who did not eat or drink. This does not mean that he fasted for forty days, but rather that his body was completely drawn after the spiritual and sustained by the spirituality of the soul. As such, there was simply no need to eat or drink. That is why the Sages have referred to this type of world as “a day that is entirely Shabbat and	המדרגה הראשונה בעולמות השכר – אלף השביעי, כפי ואח"כ "שהגדירו חז"ל (סנהדרין צב.) "יחד חרוב הקב"ה מחדש עולמו", העולם של אלף השביעי הוא "כפי שעתה, אך ההבדל שכאמור בשית אלפי שני הגוף הוא שולט "כאיש השורר בביתו", ובאלף השביעי אף שיש גוף כמו שהוא עתה, אך הוא רק "כאיש נודד ממקומו וכאורה נוטה ללון" (לשון רמח"ל דע"ת עמ' פג), שאין לגוף שליטה,  אלא מדרגת האדם תהיה כמו משה רע"ה כשעלה להר, שלא אכל ולא שתה, שאין פירושו שהתענה בצום ארבעים יום, אלא גופו הלך לגמרי אחרי הנשמה וניזון מרוחניות הנשמה, ממילא לא היה זקוק לאכול ולשתות, לכן הגדירו חז"ל עולם זה "יום שכולו שבת ומנוחה לחי העולמים" (סנהדרין צז.), עדיין לא בטל הגוף אל הנשמה, אלא שיש רק שביתה מפעולות הגשמיות של הגוף, זו ההגדרה בפי חז"ל על אלף השביעי "יחד חרוב" – חורבן פעולות הגוף, דהיינו, שאין הגופניות
--	--

<p>tranquil for eternal life” (Sanhedrin 97a). The body will not be entirely nullified by the soul but rather the soul will be free of the necessity of physical needs. That is what the Sages meant when they said that there would be “one millennium of desolation” – desolation of physical needs, that is, physicality shall not dominate. Clearly, though, the desolation of the physical is an empowerment for the soul, for by virtue of the cessation of physical needs the soul is able to develop and build itself up for the future elevation of the time after the seventh millennium.</p>	<p>פועלת, ברם חורבן הגוף הוא בנין הנשמה, שבעולם ההוא ע"י שבייתה מפעולות הגוף היא יכולה להתפתח ולבנות את עצמה, לקראת המשך עלייתה אחר אלף השביעי.</p>
---	---

**7. Ibid. – In the second level of the World to Come the soul increases its dominion, yet the body still has some influence.**

<p>The second level – the eighth millennium – will see the universe transformed into a world of pure spirituality with only the slightest trace of physical influence. At this stage the body will be completely secondary and subservient to the soul. This will facilitate the ability of both of them to receive their spiritual reward.</p>	<p>המדרגה השנייה – אלף השמיני, חידוש העולם והפיכתו לעולם רוחני זך, תהיה עדיין שליטה מסוימת של הגוף, אבל אז הגוף יהיה טפל ובטל אל הנשמה, כך שיוכלו שניהם לקבל את שכרם הרוחני.</p>
---	--

**8. Ibid. – In the third level of the World to Come the soul will be only slightly burdened by the body.**

<p>In the third level – the ninth millennium – the body and soul combination that ascended to the level of the eighth millennium will be further refined, the body having even less dominion, as Ramchal has written (Da'as Tevunos, p. 79), “The soul will not be able to develop all of its potential. Rather, it will feel an ever so slight burden without being able to pinpoint quite what is holding it back.” In this world the soul will still be somewhat bound by the body.</p>	<p>מדרגה השלישית – אלף התשיעי, שהגוף והנשמה שעלו במדרגתם באלף השמיני, יעלו מדרגה נוספת שישאר לגוף רק שליטה כלשהי, כדברי הרמח"ל (דע"ת עמ' עט): לא תמצא כח הנשמה בעצמה להתפשט בכל כוחותיה, אלא תרגיש כמו איזה כובד מועט לה, ואין פרטי המניעה נודעים", שבעולם ההוא יהיה עדיין איזה מוגבלות לנשמה ע"י הגוף.</p>
--	---

**9. Ibid. – The fourth stage of the World to Come is when the body is completely subservient to the soul.**

<p>The fourth level, which is the highest level in the world of reward – the tenth millennium – is when the body will be completely and utterly subservient to the soul. From then on, the body and soul will together take delight in G-d</p>	<p>מדרגה הרביעית שהיא מדרגה העליונה בעולמות השכר – אלף העשירי, שהגוף יתבטל לגמרי לנשמה, ומאז והלאה גוף ונשמה יתענגו יחד בשלימות את השי"ת לנצח נצחים, מדרגה זו היא נשגבה מאוד למעלה...מהשגת אנוש</p>
--	---

in perfection forever and ever. This level is far beyond what man can fathom ...	
--	--

**Part C. A Note on Accountability and Spiritual Purification**

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 G-d, 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 G-d'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 G-d, 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.**

<p>In his kindness, G-d maximized man's chances of successfully attaining his ultimate goal. He therefore decreed that there should be a secondary way to attach oneself to G-d 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.</p> <p>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</p>	<p>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 הענשו לא יהיה עוד חוב עליו על המעשה הרע שעשה, ויוכל אחרי כן לקבל הגמול האמיתי כפי שאר מעשיו הטובים.</p> <p>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.</p>
---	--

by evil that it would be impossible for them to experience the true reward and eternal delight.	
---	--

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.**

<p>The best of doctors are destined for Gehinnom.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>טוב שברופאים לגיהנם.</p> <p>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:</p>
---	---

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 G-d, applies to everyone.

**Further Reference**

See the five Olami Morasha Syllabus shiurim on the [Messiah and the World to Come](#).