
WHAT DOES OLAM HABA MEAN FOR ME IN OLAM HAZEH?

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פרשת ויגש תשפ"ד

WAIT, BUT WHAT IS OLAM HABA?

(1) SEFER HA-IKARIM 4:30 (R' YOSEF ALBO)

בשכר הרוחני שאמרנו שיגיע לאדם אחר המות נחלקו בו חכמי ישראל האחרונים לשתי דעות, הדעת האחד הוא דעת מי שיאמין שאף אם יש לצדיקים הגמורים בעולם הזה שכר טוב כפי מעשיהם כמו שהיה לאבות, מכל מקום עיקר השכר הוא רוחני ולנפש בלבד בעולם הבא, רצה לומר העולם שהוא בא לאדם אחר המות מיד כשתפרד הנפש מן הגוף, שאין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא שום תענוג ושמוש מתענוגי הגוף ושמושיו, אמרו רבותינו ז"ל מרגלא בפומיה דרב העולם הבא אין בו לא אכילה ולא שתיה ולא שנאה ולא קנאה ולא תחרות אלא צדיקים יושבים ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנין מזיו השכינה, כלומר כי כתר שם טוב מעשיהם הטובים היא העומדת על ראשיהם מלמעלה ובה ישיגו ליהנות מזיו השכינה.

Concerning the spiritual reward which comes to a man after death, the later Jewish scholars are divided into two schools. The one holds that while it is true that the perfectly righteous receive in this world reward for their deeds, as did the patriarchs, nevertheless, the main reward is spiritual, bestowed upon the soul alone in the world to come, i.e. the world which comes to a person after death as soon as the soul is separated from the body—a world in which there is no eating or drinking or any of the physical pleasures. As our Rabbis say: Rab was accustomed to say: In the next world there is neither eating nor drinking, nor hatred, nor envy, nor strife, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Shekinah. The meaning is: the crown of a good name resulting from their good deeds stands above their heads and confers upon them the privilege of enjoying the splendor of the Shekinah.

ויאמין עם זה שעם היות עיקר השכר הזה לנפש בלבד, עוד יש שכר אחר גשמי בעולם הזה לימות המשיח, וזה בתחית המתים שיחיו אז הצדיקים הגמורים, אם כדי לפרסם נסי השם ואמונתו בעולם, ואם כדי שישגו קצת תענוג גשמי אז כימים שנצטערו בהם או יותר כפי מה שתגזור חכמת השם, או כדי שיקנו שלמות יותר מאשר קנו בתחלה כאשר לא יכלו להשיג בחייהם המדרגה שהיתה ראויה אליהם לפי יושר לבם מפני המעיקים מחוץ ועול הגלות, אבל מכל מקום ימותו אחר שיחיו וישובו לעפרן, ויזכו אז הנשמות ההן במה שהשיגו בחייהן השניים ההן להתענג במדרגה יותר גדולה בעולם הבא ממה שהיו בה קודם התחיה, זהו דעת הרמב"ם ז"ל וגדולי החכמים האחרונים שנמשכו אחר דעתו ז"ל. והדעת הזה כשיעויין היטב נמצאהו ראוי ומחוייב מצד השכל ומסכים אל מה שנמצא בתורה...

The men of this opinion also hold that while the main reward is purely spiritual, there is also another corporeal reward in this world at the time of the Messiah. This is the same as the time of the resurrection, when the perfectly righteous will come to life, either in order to publish God's miracles and truth, or in order that they may receive some corporeal pleasure corresponding to the pain they suffered during life, or more, according as the divine Wisdom shall decree, or in order that they may acquire a higher perfection than before, in case they were not able in their lifetime to attain the degree to which they were entitled, considering their upright character, on account of external hindrances and the yoke of the exile. Then they will die again and return to dust, and then the souls will, by reason of their attainments during the second life, be privileged to enjoy the future world in a higher degree than the one they enjoyed before resurrection. This is the view of Maimonides and the distinguished men who came after him and adopted his opinion. If we examine this view, we find that it is correct and inevitable logically, and in agreement with the Torah...

והדעת השני הוא דעת מי שיאמין כי עם היות שיש לצדיקים גמורים שכר גשמי בעולם הזה, אחר שהצדיקים ההם מעטים ורוב הצדיקים אינם מקבלים שכר גשמי בעולם הזה, ראוי שישולם בעולם הבא שכר אל הגוף עם הנפש ביחד, וזה יהיה אחר תחיית המתים, שאז יתקיימו הגוף והנפש יחד בלי אכילה ושתייה, כמו שנתקיים משה רבינו עליו השלום ארבעים יום וארבעים

לילה בלי אכילה ושתייה בגוף ונפש, ויאמר שזהו הנקרא בדברי רבותינו ז"ל עולם הבא, כשיאמרו על הצדיקים שהם מזומנים לחיי העולם הבא, ויאמינו עם זה שלא תמות הנפש האנושית במות הגוף, אבל מיד אחר המות יש מדרגה נקראת גן עדן שנפשות הצדיקים גנוזות שם עד שיקומו לתחית המתים ויזכו לחיי העולם הבא אחר תחית המתים, וזה שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל במסכת שמחות על רבן שמעון בן גמליאל שאמר לו לר' ישמעאל כשנגזר עליו שיהרג והיה בוכה, רבי למה אתה בוכה לשעה קלה אתה נתון בגן עדן בחלקן של צדיקים, ואמרו גם כן במסכת נדה על רבה בר שילא שנפטר קודם רבה בר רב הונא מעט, ואמר רבה בר רב הונא עליו לשעה קלה הקדימני לגן עדן. זהו דעת הרמב"ן ז"ל ודעת הרמ"ה ז"ל וכת מהאחרונים שנמשכו אחר דעתם זכר כלם לברכה... והנך רואה כמה הרחקות יש בזה הדעת לפי הדרך הזה.

The second opinion is that though the perfectly righteous get material reward in this world, yet since their number is small, and the great majority of righteous men do not get corporeal reward in this world, there should be in the next world corporeal as well as spiritual reward. This comes, they say, after the resurrection when the soul and the body will exist in conjunction, but without food and drink, as Moses lived forty days and forty nights with body and soul without eating and drinking. This is what, according to them, the Rabbis call the world to come, when they say concerning the righteous that they are prepared for the life of the world to come. They believe at the same time that the human soul does not die when the body dies, but that there is a stage of existence called Gan Eden (Paradise) where, immediately after death, the souls of the righteous are kept until they rise in resurrection and obtain the life in the world to come after the resurrection. This is what the Rabbis mean when they relate concerning Rabban Simon ben Gamaliel that he said to Rabbi Ishmael, who was weeping when he was condemned to die: Master, why weepest thou? In a brief moment thou wilt be placed in Gan Eden in the community of the righteous. We are also told that Rabbah bar Rab Huna said concerning Rabbah bar Shela, who died a short time before him: He preceded me in Gan Eden by a brief hour. This is the opinion of Nahmanides, of R. Meir Halevi, and a number of modern writers who follow them, may they all be blessed... It is obvious that there are many objections to this conception.

(2) RAMBAM TESHUVA 8:8

(ח) זה שקראו אותו חכמים העולם הבא, לא מפני שאינו מצוי עתה, וזה העולם או בד ויבוא אותו העולם, אין הדבר כן, אלא הרי הוא מצוי ועומד, שנאמר "אשר צפנת" (תהלים ל"א:כ'), "פעלת" (תהלים ל"א:כ'), ולא קראוהו העולם הבא אלא מפני שאותן החיים באין לו לאדם אחר חיי העולם הזה שאנו קיימין בו בגוף ונפש, וזה הוא הנמצא לכל אדם בראשונה:

(8) The Sages did not use the expression "the world to come" with the intention of implying that [this realm] does not exist at present or that the present realm will be destroyed and then, that realm will come into being. The matter is not so. Rather, [the world to come] exists and is present as implied by [Psalms 31:20: "How great is the good] that You have hidden... which You have made...". It is only called the world to come because that life comes to a man after life in this world in which we exist, as souls [encloded] in bodies. This [realm of existence] is presented to all men at first.

(3) RAAVAD TESHUVA 8:8

א"א: נראה כמכחיש שאין העולם חוזר לתוהו ובוהו והקב"ה מחדש עולמו, ואמרו: שיתא אלפי הוי עלמא וחד חרוב (ראש השנה לא, א) – ונמצא שהעולם חדש.

Avraham says: It appears that he denies that the world will again be without form and void, and that the Holy One, blessed is He! will renew His world, as the sages have said: (Sanhedrin 97a.) Six thousand years will this world last, and one thousand years it will be desolate. It follows that the world after that is a new one.

(4) BERAKHOT 17A

מְרַגְלָא בְּפֻמֵיהּ דְרַב: לֹא פְעוּלָם הִנֵּה הָעוֹלָם הֵבֵא. הָעוֹלָם הֵבֵא אֵין בּוֹ לֹא אֶכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִיָּה וְלֹא פְרִיָּה וְרִבְיָה וְלֹא מִשָּׂא וּמִתֵּן וְלֹא קִנְיָה וְלֹא שְׂנְאָה וְלֹא תַחְרוּת, אֶלָּא צְדִיקִים יוֹשְׁבֵין וְעִטְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרִאשֵׁיהֶם וְנִהְיִים מִזֵּיו הַשְּׂכִינָה, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "וַיִּחְזוּ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֵּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ".

Rav was wont to say: The World-to-Come is not like this world. In the World-to-Come there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business negotiations, no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Rather, the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence, as it is stated: "And they beheld God, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11).

(5) RAMBAM, INTRODUCTION TO PEREK CHELEK

וממה שאתה צריך לדעת שדברי חכמים עליהם השלום נחלקו בהם בני אדם לשלש כתות.

And it is from that which you must know that [with regards] to the words of the sages, may their memory be blessed, people are divided into three groups:

הכת הראשונה והם רוב אשר נפגשתי עמהם ואשר ראיתי חבוריהם ואשר שמעתי עליהם, מבינים אותם כפשטם ואינם מסבירים אותם כלל, ונעשו אצלם כל הנמנעות מחויבי המציאות, ולא עשו כן אלא מחמת סכלותם בחכמות וריחוקם מן המדעים...

The first - and it is most of what I have seen and of the compositions that I have seen and of what I have heard about - believes them according to their simple meaning, and does not reason that they have any sort of esoteric meaning. And for them, the impossible things must correspond to reality. However they do this as a result of their not understanding wisdom; and they are far from the sciences...

והכת השנייה גם הם רבים והם אותם שראו דברי חכמים או שמעוהו והבינוהו כפשטו, וחשבו שאין כונת חכמים בכך אלא משמעות פשוטי הדברים, ולכן זלזלו בו וגנוהו וחשבו למוזר מה שאינו מוזר, וילעיגו על דברי חכמים לעתים קרובות, וחושבים שהם יותר נבונים מהם ויותר זכי רעיון...

And the second group is also numerous, and they are the ones that saw the words of the sages or heard them, and understood them according to their simple meaning, and thought that the sages did not intend in them anything more than that which is indicated by the simple [understanding]. And they come to make them foolish and to disgrace them and to bring ill-repute to that which has no ill repute; and they mock the words of the sages. And [they believe that] they are more refined in their intellect than [the sages]...

והכת השלישית והם חי' מעטים מאד עד שאפשר לקרוא להם כת כמו שאפשר לומר על השמש מין, והם האנשים שנתבררה אצלם גדולת החכמים וטוב תבונתם במה שנמצא בכלל דבריהם דברים המראים על ענינים אמתיים מאד, ואף על פי שהם מעטים ומפוזרים בכמה מקומות בחבוריהם הרי הם מראים על שלמותם והשגתם את האמת. וגם נתברר אצלם מניעת הנמנעות ומציאות

מחוייב המציאות, וידעו שהם עליהם השלום לא דברו דברי הבאי, ונתברר אצלם שיש בדבריהם פשט וסוד, ושכל מה שאמרו מדברים שהם בלתי אפשריים אין דבריהם בכך אלא על דרך החידה והמשל, וכך הוא דרך החכמים הגדולים...

And the third is, as God lives, very small to the point that is not fitting to call them a group except in the same way as one says about the sun that it is a species [even if] it is [in fact] unique. And these are the same people to whom the greatness of the sages, may they be blessed, and the quality of their intellect was made clear, from what was found among their words, [things] that indicate matters that are very true. And even though [these things] are few and scattered in different places in their compositions, they indicate their wholeness and that they grasped the truth; and that the impossibility of the impossible and the necessity of that which exists was also clear to them. And [the members of the third group] knew that [the sages], peace be upon them, were not saying jokes; and it became established for them that [the sages'] words have a revealed and a secret meaning, and that in everything they said about things that are impossible, they were speaking by way of a riddle and a parable - since this is the way of great wise men...

(6) RAMBAM YESODEI HA-TORAH 4:3

וכל המחובר מארבעה יסודות אלו, להם הוא נפרד בסוף.

Every entity which is a combination of these four fundamental [elements] will ultimately decompose into them.

(7) RAAVAD TESHUVA 8:2

א"א: דברי זה האיש קרובים למי שאומר אין תחיית המתים אלא לנשמות. וחיי ראשי לא היה דעת חכמי התלמוד על זה, שהרי אמרו: עתידין צדיקים שיעמדו בלבושיהן קל וחומר מחטה (כתובות קיא, ב), וכן היו מצווין לבניהם: אל תקברוני לא בכלים לבנים ולא בשחורין שמא אזכה (שבת קיד, א). והצדיק אמר שלא ישובו הצדיקים לעפר אלא עומדים בגוייתן (סנהדרין צב, א). וכן אמרו: במומן עומדים ומתרפאין (שם צא, ב). וכל אלה מוכיחים כי בגוייתם הן עומדים חיים. אבל אפשר שהבורא ישים גוייתם חזקות ובריאות כגויית המלאכים וכגויית אליהו זכור לטוב, ויהיו העטרות כמשמען ולא יהא משל.

This man's words are in my eyes nigh to such who assert that there is no resurrection to body but the souls alone. But, by the life of my head, this was not the opinion of our sages, may their memory be blessed! Behold, they have said: "The righteous are prepared to rise up in their garments, deduct major from minor, by comparison of a grain of wheat" (Ketubot, 111b); and they left instructions to their children, saying: "Bury us not in either white or black garments, lest I be meritorious and be resurrected" (Shabbat, 114b); and they have again said: "The righteous will never again return unto dust, but remain standing in their concrete form" (Sanhedrin, 92a); and yet again they said: "They will rise in their deformities, but will be healed" (Ibid. 91b). All of which is conclusive proof that the dead will arise with their bodies and remain alive. Nevertheless, it is possible that the Creator will set them in strong, healthy forms as are the forms of angels, and as is the form of Elijah, of good memory!, when the garlands, too, will be literally and naturally, not in similitude".

(8) RABBI ASSAF BEDNARSH, "OLAM HA-BA"

On an existential level, we can see this dispute as an expression of a fundamental disagreement about how to view a human being. What is a human being? According to one opinion, a human being is a soul in a body. The ideal human being is a body ruled, controlled and properly channeled and focused by the soul. However, a human being is only a human being because it combines body and soul. In this way, a human being is better than an angel. An angel is purely spiritual. A human being can take their spirituality and fuse it with their physicality. The true perfection of the soul is in its proper relationship with the body. If so, the body and soul deserve to live out that perfection and be rewarded both physically and spiritually in the World to Come.

The Rambam, however, explains in many places that the ultimate goal of a human being is intellectual (which for the Rambam is equivalent to spiritual), i.e., the knowledge and contemplation of God. According to the Rambam, a human being is essentially a soul. The body is an additional feature, which a human being is born with in this world; but the real human being is the soul, which is trapped within the body. Then, of course, in Olam Ha-ba, we should be free of this handicap and be merely souls.

HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT OLAM HABA?

(9) MESILLAT YESHARIM 1 (R' MOSHE CHAIM LUZZATO, 18TH CENTURY)

הָאָדָם לֹא נִבְרָא אֶלָּא לְהִתְעַנֵּג עַל ה' וְלִהְנוֹת מִזֵּיו שְׂכִינְתּוֹ שֶׁזֶהוּ הַתְּעֵנוּג הָאֱמִתִּי וְהַעֲדוֹן הַגָּדוֹל מִכָּל הַעֲדוּנִים שִׁיכוּלִים לְהַמְצֵא. וּמְקוֹם הַעֲדוֹן הַזֶּה בְּאֵמֶת הוּא הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, כִּי הוּא הַנִּבְרָא בְּהִכְנֵה הַמְצַטְרֶכֶת לְדַבֵּר הַזֶּה. אִךְ הַדָּרָךְ כְּדֵי לְהַגִּיעַ אֶל מְחֻז תְּפִצְנוּ זֶה, הוּא זֶה הָעוֹלָם. וְהוּא מָה שְׁאֲמָרוּ זְכוּרֵנָם לְבִרְכָה (אבות ד): הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה דוֹמֶה לְפָרוּזְדוֹר בְּפְנֵי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְהָאֲמָצְעִים הַמְגִיעִים אֶת הָאָדָם לְתַכְלִית הַזֶּה, הֵם הַמְצַוּוֹת אֲשֶׁר צָנְנוּ עֲלֵיהֶן הָאֵל יִתְבָּרַךְ שְׁמוֹ. וּמְקוֹם עֲשִׂית הַמְצַוּוֹת הוּא רַק הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה... וְהִנֵּה שְׁמוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאָדָם בְּמְקוֹם שְׂרָבִים בּוֹ הַמְרַחֲקִים אוֹתוֹ מִמְּנוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ, וְהֵם הֵם הַתְּאֻוֹת הַחֲמֻרִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר אִם יִמְשָׁךְ אֲחֲרֵיהֶן הַזֶּה הוּא מְתַרַחֵק וְהוֹלֵךְ מִן הַטּוֹב הָאֱמִתִּי וְנִמְצָא שֶׁהוּא מוֹשֵׁם בְּאֵמֶת בְּתוֹךְ הַמְלַחְמָה הַחֲזוּקָה, כִּי כָל עֲנִינֵי הָעוֹלָם בֵּין לְטוֹב בֵּין לְרַע הַזֶּה הֵם נִסְיוֹנוֹת לְאָדָם, הַעֲנִי מִצַּד אֶחָד וְהַעֲשָׂר מִצַּד אֶחָד כְּעִנְיָן שְׁאֵמֶר שְׁלָמָה (משלי ל): כִּי אֲשַׁבֵּעַ וְכַחֲשִׂיתִי וְאִמְרַתִּי מִי ה', וְכִן אֲנַרְשׁ וְנִגְבַּחְתִּי וְכו'. הַשְּׁלֵוָה מִצַּד אֶחָד וְהִסּוּרִין מִצַּד אֶחָד, עַד שֶׁנִּמְצָאָת הַמְלַחְמָה אֵלָיו פְּנִים וְאֲחֹר.

Man was created solely in order to delight in God and derive pleasure from the glory of His Presence, which is the truest delight and the greatest possible pleasure. And the place of this pleasure is truly the World to Come, for it was created with that very design. But the way to arrive at this, our desired destination, is the Present World, as our Rabbis of blessed memory said: 'This world is like a corridor to the next.' The means which bring a person to this end are the mitzvot which were commanded to us by God. And the only place where mitzvot may be fulfilled is the Present World... Now, the Holy One has put man in a place where there are many forces which can distance him from God. Such are those very physical lusts which, if he should tend after them, he would be removing himself continuously from the absolute good. It follows that man is really in the midst of a great battle, for all the events of the world, for better or for worse, are moral trials ('nisyonot'): poverty on the one hand, and wealth on the other, as Shlomo said (Proverbs 30): 'Lest I grow satisfied, for then I might deny, saying - Who is God? And lest I become impoverished, for then I might steal...' Thus, the prospects of contentment, on the one hand, and suffering, on the other, mean that the battle is upon man, from the front as well as from the rear.

(10) SERIDEI EISH VOL. 4 PP. 365-366

The Israelite religion does not wish to uproot the Jew from the soil of his growth, and transplant him elsewhere. Rather, it wishes to influence the whole man, to prepare his whole heart, his thoughts and deeds, for his exalted tasks. All that is human is near to it, for Judaism is - as Rav Hirsch himself put it - flawless, perfected humanity, a Jewish humanity. So it was in ancient Israel, and in the time of the Tannaim and Amoraim and Geonim, and partially so in the Golden Age experienced by the Jewish people in Spain. Judaism was never a source of suffering for Israel. Judaism for Israel was life in its fullness. No one dreamed of a possible separation between religion and life, as though they were separate or opposing forces.

But the Jewish people underwent a mighty change during the time of the terrible Crusades. The terrible persecutions, the banishment from the different areas of life, the deprivation of breathing space and limitation of movement, also damaged the religious strength of the Jew seriously and weakened it.

Together with the impoverishment of our life, the scope of our religion became increasingly narrower. Broad, important areas of life were cruelly wrested from our people and its religion. The Hebrew soul was torn to shreds. That joy which results from the total correspondence of spirit and life, ceased in Israel. Religion no longer had anything to do with life, and consequently, life ceased to be a matter of religion. Concrete living lost its religious form, and became a secular affair.

The concept 'secular life,' which is foreign to the spirit of Israel, came into being during those dark times. The religious sense no longer drew sustenance directly from life... and was sustained only by the fear of death, and terror of the severe penalties of the World-to-Come. It is true, of course, that belief in divine reward and punishment is a basic Jewish principle... but extensive use of it, placing it at the center of religious feeling, turning it into the solitary propelling force for fulfilling mitzvot - can plunge a man into depression and induce spiritual malaise...

This 'separation from life' resulted in the adoption of a negative stance towards life's achievements. The spirit of Israel wore black, donning a cloak of asceticism foreign to the spirit of Judaism. The ghetto stood for hundreds of years, and brought forth great, pious, holy men... who benefited from the splendor of the Torah, and whose thoughts, speech and deeds were inspired by its holy Presence. But within the ghetto walls lived multitudes who couldn't taste Torah or be inspired by it. They thirsted for life, and their spirit was crushed by their inability to reach it...

But one day new winds began to blow in the world. The ghetto walls fell. Swirling currents of hope for light and freedom, for the prospect of life and productive activity, acquisition of wealth and social standing, flooded the furthest corners of the ghetto and its disenfranchised residents. The thirst for healthy life, so natural to the Jews... awoke once more with storm and fury. These revolutionary developments brought a crisis upon the congregation of Israel. The one-sided, life-negating religiosity collapsed ...On the one hand stood the elders... who defended with all their might the accepted form of religion which was based on the negation of life and its achievements, and on the other hand raged the newly-liberated from the ghetto-prison, intoxicated and giddy with freedom, who destroyed without scruple all that was precious and sacred in traditional life.

At this time of peril appeared Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch of blessed memory and stood in the breach. He stood and proclaimed the ancient truth of Judaism: Religion and life are one and the same...

WHY ISN'T IT IN TANAKH?

(11) DANIEL 12:1-3

(א) וּבַעַת הַהִיא יַעֲמֹד מִיכָאֵל הַשָּׂר הַגָּדוֹל הַעֹמֵד עַל בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְהִזְתָּה עִת צָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִהְיְתָה מִקִּיּוֹת גּוֹי עַד הַעֵת הַהִיא וּבַעַת הַהִיא יִמְלֹט עַמֶּךָ כָּל הַנִּמְצָא פְּתוּב בְּסֶפֶר. (ב) וְרַבִּים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֲדַמְתָּ עִפְרָיִם וְקִיצוּ אֵלֶיהָ לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם וְאֵלֶיהָ לְחַרְפוֹת לְדָרְאוֹן עוֹלָם. (ג) וְהַמְשֻׁכָּלִים יִזְהָרוּ כְּזֹהָר הַרְקִיעַ וּמִצְדִּיקֵי הַרְבִּים כְּכּוֹכְבִים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

(1) And at that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands over the children of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time; and at that time your people shall be rescued, every one that shall be found written in the book. (2) And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence. (3) And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and those that bring the many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever.

(12) MISHNA SANHEDRIN 10:1

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁנֵאמַר: וְעַמֶּךָ כֻּלָּם צְדִיקִים לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ נֶצֶךְ מִטְעֵי מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי לְהַתְּפָאֵר (ישעיהו ס"כ"א). וְאֵלוֹ שְׂאֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, הָאוֹמְרֵי אֵין תְּחִיַּת הַמֵּתִים מִן הַתּוֹרָה, וְאֵין תּוֹרָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶפִיקוֹרִס.

All of the Jewish people, even sinners and those who are liable to be executed with a court-imposed death penalty, have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: “And your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, for My name to be glorified” (Isaiah 60:21). **And these** are the exceptions, the people **who have no share in the World-to-Come**, even when they fulfilled many mitzvot: **One who says: There is no resurrection of the dead derived from the Torah, and one who says: The Torah did not originate from Heaven, and an epikoros**, who treats Torah scholars and the Torah that they teach with contempt.

(13) RABBI HAYYIM ANGEL, “AFTERLIFE IN JEWISH THOUGHT”

Numerous other biblical references similarly suggest that death is not absolutely final. There are two mysterious deaths in Tanakh: God took Enoch (Gen. 5:24), and Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot (II Kings 2:11). Malachi prophesies that Elijah will return in the future as the harbinger of the messianic era (Mal. 3:23–24). A witch evidently conjured up Samuel’s spirit (I Sam. 28:11–14), and Elijah and Elisha revived dead children (I Kings 17:19–23; II Kings 4:32–36).

(14) RABBI ASSAF BEDNARSH, “OLAM HA-BA, PART 3”

We have elucidated several different explanations suggested for the Torah’s omission of the doctrine of *Olam Ha-ba*. Some are technical: the existence of *Olam Ha-ba* is philosophically obvious or was already well known. Alternatively, perhaps the concept is too difficult for the masses to understand; or maybe the

Torah wants to promise verifiable rewards which would prove the veracity of the Torah to the residents of this world.

Others give historical explanations, such as that the generation which received the Torah was not sophisticated enough to understand the value of *Olam Ha-ba*, or that their immediate need was to learn principles relevant to national life in the Land of Israel. Alternatively, for polemical reasons, the Torah focuses on those benefits which were promised by the competing pagan religions.

We concluded with three explanations which take this philosophical difficulty and used it to derive a deeper insight into the nature of the Torah. The omission of explicit mention of *Olam Ha-ba* in the Torah, according to Abarbanel, comes to emphasize that we must keep the Torah for its own sake and not in order to earn reward. According to *Sefer Ha-ikkarim*, it is to teach us that the covenant with God is collective and not individualistic. Finally, according to Maharal, it is to teach us that the purpose of the Torah is not to transcend this world and escape to a perfect spiritual realm, but rather to bring spirituality and perfection into this physical world.

(15) RAV KOOK, L'MAHALACH HA-IDEOT B'YISRAEL 5

אבל חשכת הלילה היא שגרמה להרחיב את חוג הרעיון של האדם, בהעיפו עין השמימה על מרחבי אין קץ ועולמיהם. וחשכת חרבן בית ראשון וסלוק השכינה העליונה, האידיאה האלהית, מהתגלות בהוה באוצר החיים של האומה, היא שגרמה להרחיב את אופק המחשבה של האומה ולעדנה בנשיאת עין למרחקים, ולפרט את מה שהיה גנוז ובלוע בזיו אורו של הכלל כולו. הלמודים הגדולים והעמוקים המתפרצים למעלה מהחושים והגבולותיהם ונושאים דעם למרחקים, על אותן הגדולות של חיי העולם הבא ותחית המתים וחיי הנצח בכלל, בכל חליפותיהם ושנויי צביוניהם, אלה אשר היו מקודם קנינם של יחידי סגולה, נעשו עתה לקנין כללי לאומה, על ידם שאפה רוח. הם המשיכו לה את האורה האלהית במובן רחב ונאדר, החובק בזרוע עזו עולמי עד ונותן מחיה לרעיונות המתנשאים, אשר הככר של ההגבלות החושיות צר להם.

(16) BERAKHOT 8A

וְהִינּוּ דְאָמַר רַבִּי חִיָּיא בַר אֲמִי מִשְׁמִיהָ דְּעוּלָא: מִיּוֹם שֶׁחָרַב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ אֵין לוֹ לְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ אֶלָּא אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת שֶׁל הַלְקָה בַּלְבַד.

And this concept, that *halakha* is the most sublime pursuit, is expressed in that which **Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Ami said in the name of Ulla: Since the day the Temple, where the Divine Presence rested in this world, was destroyed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, has only one place in His world where he reveals His presence exclusively; only the four cubits where the study of *halakha* is undertaken.**

FURTHER READING

(17) R' ELYAKIM KRUMBEIN, "OLAM HAZEH, OLAM HABA: THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT"

Our next source is a relevant short remark of the Vilna Gaon, which comes down to us in a well-known homily delivered by his disciple, Rav Chaim of Volozhin, during the High Holiday season, on the subject of repentance:

It is therefore worthwhile, during these Days of Awe, for every Jew to pray mainly for his miserable soul, that it not perish, Heaven forbid. Unfortunately, in our many sins, the evil inclination blinds the eyes of the masses of people, and puts a retort in their mouths in the form of a platitude which everyone repeats: "This world is also a world, and it also needs attention." In fact, such a statement may be appropriately made by men of great piety, who serve God with love, with no extraneous intention. I have heard so several times from the holy mouth of our master, the saintly Gaon Eliyahu of blessed memory: "What importance does the World-to-Come have? One cannot serve God with love there, nor do anything to please our Creator and Maker. This world is the main one. That is why the Rabbis said, 'One moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is worth more than all the life of the World-to-Come.'" [This I heard from the Gaon,] but as for us, lowly of worth, how could we presume to abandon the spiritual life in favor of the corporeal?

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/olam-ha-ba>

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/olam-ha-ba-2>

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/olam-ha-ba-3>

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/olam-ha-zeh-olam-ha-ba-world-and-next>

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/olam-ha-zeh-olam-ha-ba-world-and-next-2>

*<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/afterlife-jewish-thought>

*https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9A_%D7%94%D7%90%D7%99%D7%93%D7%99%D7%90%D7%95%D7%AA_%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C

OUTLINE

Goal: Students will be familiar with the major views in Jewish tradition about the nature of Olam Haba and will consider how the existence of Olam Haba impacts how they live their lives in Olam HaZeh.

Notes:

Sefer Ha-Ikarim 4:30 – two camps: Rambam – some material reward in this world, but mostly spiritual reward. Ramban/Raavad/Yad Ramah – physical and spiritual reward, after resurrection.

Nekudat Ha-Machloket #1: Do we interpret Chazal literally or non-literally? [Provide source about Olam Haba?]

Nekudat Ha-Machloket #2: Are the laws of nature (which entail deterioration) unchanging?

Nekudat Ha-Machloket #3: Are we fundamentally souls, or fundamentally souls with bodies?

Side Issues: What is the punishment for the wicked? Hell (Ramah), spiritual punishment in “fire” and in recognition of failure (Ramban), or disappearance/excision (Rambam)

Side Issue: Where do souls go after death? Olam Haba (Rambam), a waiting room (Ramban/Rasag), or Gilgul (Ramban)

Side Issue: Why isn't it in Tanakh? It's obvious (Rasag, Ramban), it was already traditional (R' Hai Gaon), it's hard to understand by the masses (Ibn Ezra/Chovot HaLevavot), emphasize provable phenomena (Kli Yakar), it's not practical for that generation (Rasag), there was nobody else claiming an afterlife to compete against (Abarbanel), we should serve Hashem Lishma (Abarbanel), emphasis on collective reward instead of individual reward (Sefer HaIkarim), emphasis on perfecting the physical world (Maharal)