

**Olam Ha-Ba, the World-to-Come:  
Messianic and Other Worldly Hopes**

Parshat Ki Tavo

Deuteronomy 26:1 – 29:8/ Isaiah 60:1 - 22



*Dedicated by Frances and Buddy Brandt  
in memory of their grandson, Oren Jacob Brandt-Rauf.  
"He was the perfect child."*

The sixth Haftarah of consolation which we read between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah continues the theme of renewal and rebirth. God has caused light to shine upon Israel and Israel in return will become a light unto the other nations of the world who live in darkness: "The nations shall walk by your light." The prophet promises the people that they will not only return to their land but they will also be the recipients of gifts from the other nations of the world. In words which reverberate in our own time, the prophet promises the nation that "The cry, 'violence' shall no more be heard in your land."

Toward the end of the Haftarah we find a well known verse in which the prophet promises the people, entirely righteous, shall possess the land forever. This verse appears in the opening passage of Pirke Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, which appears in the traditional prayer book. While the rabbinic interpretation of this verse parts ways with its literal meaning, the sages expanded the message of salvation and hope which are so important to the prophecies of Isaiah. We are left to wonder whether this verse is speaking about messianic or other worldly hopes.

**Isaiah 60:20 - 22**

Your sun shall set no more, your moon shall no more withdraw; for the Lord shall be a light to you forever, and your days of mourning shall be ended. And your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land for all time; they are the shoot that I planted, the work of My hands, in which I glory. The smallest shall become a clan; the least a mighty nation. I, the Lord, will speed it in its time.

**Sanhedrin 10:1 (also the introduction to Pirke Avot)**

All Israel have a portion in (Olam Ha-ba) in the world-to-come, as is said, "And your people, all of them righteous, shall possess the land for all time; they are the shoot that I planted, the work of My hands, in which I glory." (Isaiah 60:21).

**Encyclopedia Judaica, Olam Ha-Ba**

The term *Olam ha-Ba* (literally, "the coming world") in contrast to *Olam ha-zeh* (literally "this world") refers to the hereafter, which begins with the termination of man's earthly life. This meaning of the expression is clearly implied in the statement of R. Jacob, quoted in *Avot* (4:17): "One moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than the entire life of the world to come." ...Often also "the days of the Messiah" are contrasted with the life of this world. An example is the comment by the colleagues of Ben Zoma (1:5) on the phrase "all the days of thy life" (Deut. 16:3) that it includes in addition to this world the era of the Messiah.

**Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a**

R. Yohanan said further: [Messiah] son of David will come only in a generation that is altogether righteous or altogether wicked. In a generation altogether righteous, for it is said, "Thy people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the Land forever" (Isaiah 60:21). Or altogether wicked, for it is written, "And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no intercessor," etc. (Isaiah 59:16), and elsewhere it is written, "Then for Mine own sake, for Mine own sake will I do it" (Isaiah 48:11).

## **Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, Ateret Tzvi**

The verse in Isaiah states, “Shall inherit the earth...the shoots of my planting.” The achievement foretold in this verse concerning the ethical perfection and all-encompassing happiness is not as a fruit which ripened, unnoticed and fell, perfect, into the bosom of the ingatherer. Until the people might reach this culmination God planted them again and again. Only at the end of history will the nation come to maturity for the future redemption and be a people representing the harmonious unity of the work of God’s hand, for the glory of God. ...The statement “All Israel” is not an integral part of the tractate Avot. It is a section of the Mishnah which serves as an introduction to the last chapter of tractate Sanhedrin (Chapter 10, Mishnah 1). This statement was introduced before Pirke Avot insofar as the saying delineates that the lofty goal toward which the sayings of these chapters intend to urge and educate us. The saying “all Israel” encourages all to devote themselves with trust and diligence to the abovementioned goal – whose achievement is “near to the mouth and heart of everyone.”

## **Chafetz Chaim on Pirke Avot**

The People Israel all has a portion in the world-to-come. Difficulties are obvious: Why does a wicked person deserve a share of life in the World-to-come? And besides if he is certain of his share, he will never repent and change his ways! Note however that the sage does not say, “will have a share,” which would mean that their portion is assured and guaranteed for them in the Afterlife but rather, simply “has a share.” This means that the wicked man’s portion exists but there is still great doubt if it will be given to him.

## **Questions to Ponder:**

1. What does Isaiah seem to be promising the people in the verses above? Is it possible to speak about all the people being righteous? In what way has God planted us? What does this say about the relationship between God and Israel?
2. How is the interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 60, verse 21 in the passage from Sanhedrin different from the literal meaning of the verse? What do the two interpretations have in common?
3. What led the sages to conclude that this verse contains a reference to Olam Ha-Ba, the world-to-come? What are some of the different meanings of the term Olam Ha-Ba?
4. The statement in Sanhedrin suggests that all Israel has a portion in the world to come? But the very next statement in the Mishnah (not quoted here or in Pirke Avot) goes on to tell us that there people who do not have a portion in the world to come. Why is this statement quoted out of context here? How do we reconcile the two halves of the statement?
5. If all Israel has a portion in the world-to-come, why should anyone attempt to live a righteous and worthy life? Doesn’t this statement suggest that he will be rewarded even if he has not done so?
6. Do you believe in Olam Ha-Ba? Why do you believe or not believe in this concept? What does this term mean to you? What contemporary meanings might this concept have for us today?
7. What role should we play in bring about Olam Ha-Ba?

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