

Every Jew has a portion in the World to Come, [as Hashem told the Prophet,] “And all your people are righteous; they will inherit the land forever. They are the outgrowth of My plantings, the work of My hands, of which to be proud” (*Yeshayahu* 60:21).

Consider the following questions:¹

1. Why does the Mishnah say לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, literally, “to the World to Come,” instead of the expected בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, “in the World to Come?”²
2. What is the significance of the word *portion* (חֵלֶק)? Wouldn’t it have been better to say simply, “Every Jew merits the World to Come?”
3. The Mishnah seems to interpret the first half of the verse from *Yeshayahu* as a matter of unconditional fact: *All your people are righteous* (and therefore they **will inherit the land**—i.e., the World to Come). But in the context of *Yeshayahu*’s prophecy, the verse seems to be conditional: “If your people will all be righteous, then they will inherit the land forever!” Moreover, the statement that *all your people are righteous* (taken as unconditional fact) seems to contradict the principle of free will, according to which people have

1. This teaching, which serves as the introduction to *Pirkei Avos*, is the first Mishnah in *Perek Chelek*, the tenth chapter in the Mishnayos of *Masechet Sanhedrin*. See *Tiferes Yisrael* ad loc. [S2] for an explanation why this Mishnah has been included with *Pirkei Avos*.

The Alshich explains this Mishnah in his commentary to *Vayikra* 9:5–6.

2. The Alshich, following the majority view among the commentators, understands the Mishnah’s term “World to Come” to refer to the post-Resurrection world, when human beings will come back to life and inhabit the earth again.

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁנֵאמַר וְעַמּוֹךְ כָּלָם
צְדִיקִים לְעוֹלָם יִרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ, גִּצְר מִטְעֵי, מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי לְהַתְּפַאֵר:

free choice to be righteous or wicked.

4. There is an even greater problem with both the Mishnah and the verse, however. After all, there are many wicked people in every generation. The Mishnah's assertion that **all** Jews have a share in the World to Come—which is predicated on their being *tzaddikim*—would thus seem to be untrue.
5. The verse continues with the phrase, *They are the outgrowth of My plantings* (גִּצְר מִטְעֵי). What does this phrase mean, and how is it connected to the first part of the verse?
6. Initially, Hashem calls the Prophet's people, *the outgrowth of My plantings*, which implies that the people were not created directly by God (they were rather an "outgrowth" of things that He **did** "plant," or create, directly). But then Hashem calls them, *the work of My hands*, which implies that He made them directly. Now, it is possible that the phrase *the work of My hands* does not refer to the same thing as the phrase *the outgrowth of My plantings*. If so, to what does it refer? And what does it have to do with the rest of the verse?
7. The verse closes with the phrase *of which to be proud*, which apparently alludes to some future time when Hashem will take pride in them.³ What is the nature of that pride? And when will this take place?

3. Indeed, Rashi, the Radak and the Ibn Ezra interpret this phrase in the future tense: "of which I will be proud."

≡ A Portion in the World to Come ≡

THE MISHNAH BEGINS with the statement: *Every Jew has a portion in the World to Come.* It is crucial for every Jew to understand that he should never despair of gaining a place in the World to Come. This is because every Jew has a portion within that can gain him this reward. This portion is his *nefesh*, his soul.

A soul is, as it were, a part (חֵלֶק) of God from above.⁴ And the soul works within Man to perfect him so as to gain him entry to the Next World. That is the חֵלֶק referred to in the Mishnah. Every Jew has within him a “portion” — that portion being the soul — that brings him to the World to Come. This explains why the Mishnah says that all Jews have a portion לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, literally, to the World to Come. [This answers Questions 1 and 2.]⁵

Another explanation of the “portion” referred to in the Mishnah is as follows: There are many different kinds of Jews in the world, with different preferences and predilections. Some have an innate love for learning Torah; others have an

Answer to
questions
1 and 2

4. The soul is referred to in kabbalistic literature as a חֵלֶק אֱלֹהִים מִמַּעַל (see *Iyov* 31:2). While this phrase literally means *a part of God from above*, the soul is not an actual part of God. In *Bereishis* 2:7 it says that Hashem blew into [Adam's] nostrils the spirit of life (see Onkelos *ibid.*). Just as human breath comes from the body but is not an actual part of it, Hashem's “breath” comes from Him but is not an actual part of Him.

5. The Alshich adds: The Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* goes on to list the exceptions to the rule of *Every Jew has a portion in the World to Come*, e.g., the heretic. The heretic has corrupted his soul in such a way that it no longer relates to him as a *part of God from above* and therefore does not bring him to the World to Come.

instinctive love for giving charity; still others, for doing acts of kindness; and so on for all the other mitzvos. Breaking it down further, among those who study Torah there are those who are drawn to studying Scripture; others are attracted to Mishnah or Gemara; yet others are drawn to Midrash, or to Kabbalah. Why is this?

Midrash Tanchuma (Nitzavim 3) states that all the souls that were ever going to come to this world, until the end of all time, were present at Mount Sinai. Each soul has a connection to a particular aspect of Torah; this is why one person is attached to one particular mitzvah while another person will “connect” to a different one. It is through each soul’s particular share in the Torah that a person is brought to the World to Come.⁶ This is how the Rabbis (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 8:15) explain the words in *Tehillim* (68:13): “*The beauty of the house divides the prize.*” *The beauty of the house* refers to the Torah, which divides itself among all Jews, allotting each soul its portion.

In summation, the Tanna of our Mishnah is telling us that a person should not consider it difficult to gain entry to the World to Come, because it is like a city with numerous paths leading toward it. Each person is drawn automatically to that part of Torah which was “acquired” by his soul (as it were) and

6. That is, a person need not be perfect in all aspects of Torah; his perfection in one area of Torah suffices to bring him to the World to Come. Indeed, the Alshich writes, it is for this reason that Hashem gave us so many different mitzvos: to give each person the opportunity to earn the World to Come. As the last Mishnah in *Makkos* states: *The Holy One, Blessed is He, desired to confer merit upon Israel; therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundance.*

Another
answer to
questions
1 and 2

it becomes his path — his passport, so to speak — to Heaven. With the words, כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, the Mishnah means that through each person's **individual portion of Torah**, he will come to the World to Come. [This is another answer to Questions 1 and 2.]

As to how both the Mishnah and verse in *Yeshayahu* can assert that all Jews are righteous (Question 4), the answer is that even if there are wicked Jews in every generation, it is not at all impossible that in the future all Jews will be righteous. For, as the verse continues, Israel is *the outgrowth of My plantings, the work of My hands, of which to be proud*. The phrase *outgrowth of My plantings* refers to the soul, which comes from God and is inherently pure. And the phrase *the work of My hands* refers to the physical body, which also has the potential to be perfected, for Adam was created from the earth by God Himself. The verse is thus to be read: [Israel is] *the outgrowth of My plantings and the work of My hands, of which to be proud* — for body and soul together are destined to become purified from whatever spiritual ailments they contracted as a result of sin, and God's handiwork will then indeed become something "of which to be proud." Some bodies and souls will achieve such righteousness in the course of a single lifetime, while others will do so only over the course of many lifetimes (incarnations); but ultimately all will become *tzaddikim*. [This answers questions 4–7.]

Answer to
questions
4–7

The *pasuk* in *Yeshayahu* is thus able to state as a matter of fact — as a promise — that *all your people are righteous*, meaning that all Jews will **eventually** become righteous and worthy of the World to Come. When this happens, both body and soul will be perfected (something *of which to be proud*); and the Mishnah's opening line is saying that all this will come

about through the “portion”⁷ that “every Jew has that brings him to the World to Come.” [This answers Question 3.]⁸

✚ *The Outgrowth of My Plantings — The Roots of the Soul* ✚

A DIFFERENT APPROACH to our Mishnah emerges from an analysis of the Gemara in *Kiddushin* 40b:

To what are the righteous compared in this world? To a tree that is rooted in a pure place but whose branches extend into an impure place. When those branches are cut off, the entire tree is situated in a pure place.

There are three parts to the soul of Man. In ascending order, they are *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*.¹⁰ The higher parts

7. Namely, their soul (first explanation above) or their portion in Torah (second explanation above).

8. In short: The reward of “inheriting the land” is indeed conditional (i.e., on Israel’s being righteous). But God promises that that condition will eventually be fulfilled.

An apparent difficulty remains: How can the verse guarantee righteousness, even if it comes after many lifetimes? What happened to mankind’s free will? Perhaps the answer is that although each individual has complete free will, Hashem’s omnipotent power directs the world (and influences free will) so that ultimately, over many lifetimes, all who remain will recognize His sovereignty (see *Da’as Tevunos*, section 40 [R’ Chaim Friedlander edition]). Every Jew is guaranteed to have a part in this future world (assuming he is not among those who have lost their share in the World to Come; see the continuation of the Mishnah in *Sanhedrin* 10:1 and footnote 5, above).

9. The approach that follows is presented by the Alshich both in his commentary to *Vayikra* 9:5–6 and in his commentary to *Yeshayahu* 60:21.

10. These correspond respectively to the worlds of *asiyah*, *yetzirah*, and *beri’ah*. There are actually two more parts, or levels, of the soul that are higher

of the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah* always remain in Heaven, while the lower parts are placed in Man's body for the duration of his life.

Man's **soul** (that is, its higher parts) is like a tree, rooted in the place of ultimate purity and sanctity, namely Heaven. Man's **body**, on the other hand (including the lower parts of the soul), is like the branches of a tree, extending into a place of impurity, namely this world. When a person dies (the "branches" are "cut off"), his entire soul is located "in a pure place." For the part of the person's soul that was in his body is then reunited with its source, i.e., with its "roots" that had remained in Heaven.

Returning to our Mishnah: The verse in *Yeshayahu* states that *all Your people are righteous*. This is a promise made by God that He will not rest until all of Israel is righteous — for He desires that all should have a share in the World to Come.¹¹ How will He accomplish this? He will purify the body and the lower parts of the soul, preparing them for Resurrection — but only after they die (see further).¹² [This answers Questions 3 and 4.]

Answer to
questions
3 and 4

still: *chayah* and *yechidah*. But these levels belong to supernal realms (the world of *atzilus* and *etzem haneshamah*) and remain completely in Heaven.

11. Note: According to this approach (unlike the first one), it seems that the Mishnah's statement *Kol Yisrael yeish lahem chelek la'Olam HaBa*, means simply that all of Israel has a share in (not to) the World to Come. (For according to what follows, it is not the Jew's soul or his portion in Torah that brings him to *Olam HaBa*; rather, it is Hashem Who prepares his body/soul for *Olam HaBa*.)

12. This is in contrast to the first approach, according to which *all your people are righteous* means that during their lifetimes all Jews will be *tzad-dikim* who observe the entire Torah, etc.

After stating that the righteous Jews *will inherit the land forever* (when they are resurrected), the verse states: *They are the branch of My plantings, the work of My hands of which to be proud.* The *branch* refers to the body (along with the lower parts of the soul that dwell in it); while *My plantings* refers to the (upper parts of) the soul. (They are called *My plantings* because they are “planted” by God in the heavens, where their roots are located.) [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
question 5

Now, the body is Hashem’s handiwork, as God said in *Be-reishis* 1:26, *Let us make man.* Because of this, even when a person dies and his body disintegrates in the ground, the body will not be lost forever. To the contrary: It is purified and refined in the ground, just as gold is purified and refined in a furnace. The effects on Man of the serpent’s actions in the Garden of Eden are being eradicated, as the body becomes readied to return to Earth at the time of the Resurrection, as a being more spiritual than physical.¹³ (The lower parts of the soul which leave the body at the time of death are purified more easily, for they simply return to and merge with their “roots” in Heaven.) The *work of My hands*, i.e. the body of man (along with the lower parts of the soul), will thus become something *of which to be proud!*¹⁴ [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to
question 6

13. For further explanation see R’ Moshe Chaim Luzatto, *Derech Hashem* 1:3:9 and R’ Chaim Volozhiner, *Nefesh HaChaim, Sha’ar 1*, Ch. 6.

14. According to this approach, the verse is to be read: [*Israel*—i.e., the body of Israel, including the lower parts of the soul that are joined with the body—is] *the outgrowth of My plantings*, i.e., an extension of the higher parts of the soul that are rooted in Heaven. By virtue of the fact that the body is *the work of My hands*, it is destined to become something *of which* God will be proud.