Israel’s Inheritance: Olam Haba

By: ASHER BENZION BUCHMAN

A Righteous Nation

In discussing the laws of conversion (Hilchos Issurei Biab 14:4), Rambam writes that a convert is told that the “World to Come” (olam haba) is for “the Tzaddikim (righteous), and they are Israel.”

In Hilchos Teshuva (3:13) he explains further that, “All of Israel has a portion in the World to Come, even if they have sinned, for it says ‘your nation is all righteous, they will always inherit the land’—this

1 I include sources in footnotes either in their original Hebrew or in the best available Hebrew translation. The reader is asked to refer to them and carefully analyze them. Careless and inaccurate readings of the primary sources have caused some academic scholars to mislead their readers on important issues such as these.

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land is a parable, i.e., the land of life, which is the world to come—and so too the Chassidim (saintly) amongst the nations of the world.” In Hilchos Melachim (8:11) he tells us that these “Chassidim amongst the nations” are those who have accepted the seven Noachide laws in a formal act of conversion by a Jewish court. Thus, Israel is the nation in which all have a portion in the world to come. To join this nation of Israel and thus immediately gain olam haba, one must do a formal act of conversion. Although neither the native Jew nor the convert is an outstanding scholar, he is still guaranteed a portion in olam haba. Even the righteous amongst the nations who keep their seven mitzvos and formally recognize Revelation are also guaranteed a portion in the World to Come, because they become an auxiliary contingent of the nation of Israel.

The Acts that Divide Us

Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 8:1) identifies the loss of olam haba with the Divine halachic punishment of kares (חרס). Rav Soloveitchik...
"That soul will be cut off from its nation," should be taken literally—meaning that the perpetrator of these severe sins cuts himself off from the Jewish nation. It is being cut off from the Jewish nation that results in the loss of a portion in the World to Come.

This explains why Rambam states both in Perush HaMishnah and in Mishneh Torah (Hilchos Teshuva 3:7) that those who reject the fundamentals of our faith, the ikkarei emunah, forfeit their portion in olam haba only when they openly state their denial, and hence proclaim themselves as apostates. It is he who "says" there is no G-d... who says there is a single unique master but that he has a body and a form... [who] is a heretic. Generally, even those who have noted that this is explicitly what Rambam states, claim that "says" here really means thinks, because of their assumption that these are all issues of belief. What this overlooks is that the 13 Ikkarim are clearly not all matters of belief. The fifth ikkar is defined both in the Perush HaMishnah and in Mishneh Torah as "He who worships" idols. In this case it is absolutely clear that the ikkar is defined not by belief of the heart but by concrete action. Likewise for the other ikkarim,
it is not the lack of belief that is the failing but the act of proclaiming to others that one does not believe, by which one cuts himself off from the community of faith that constitutes Israel.

Thus Rambam explains with regard to one who denies any of the 13 *Ikkarei emunah* that he has “left the group,” наук מחל, hacen. Such a person has placed himself outside the community of Israel. In *Hilchos Avodah Zara* (2:2) Rambam makes this very clear, first with regard to idol worship: “A *Yisrael* who worships idols is like a gentile in all ways,”16 then with regard to heretics (مينיס) “And so too the *minim* amongst Israel are not like *Yisrael* in any respect.”17

**Knowledge and Doubt**

Some have been misled to believe that Rambam required absolute certainty, perhaps rising to the level of clear knowledge rather than of mere faith, to acquire *olam haba*. In Menachem Kellner’s *Must a Jew Believe Anything*, he “quotes” Rambam as writing (after listing the 13 *ikkarim*), “anyone who doubts any of these basics has no part in the world to come.” This “quote” is based on an understanding of *Perush HaMishnah* that is obviously inaccurate. In Kappach’s translation the word that Kellner translates as “doubts” is translated as פאפק and in the most recent Hebrew translation the word is מעער.20 As these words imply, forfeiture of *olam haba* is for action designed to ensure that G-d’s nature not become obscured in the minds of the people. See *Hilchos Avodah Zara* chapter 1.

15 *Perush HaMishnah* after listing the 13 *ikkarim*.

16 כשר תימנה בעבודה והיה כפר בכל התורה וכל משלו, תימנה בעבודה והיה כפר בכל התורה וכל משלו, תימנה בעבודה והיה כפר בכל התורה וכל משלו.

17 כשר המינים מישראל, אינן כי רстроен דבדר מדברם. אינני מקבלין את התשובות, ועליו נאמר "כל תימנה, אינני מקבלין" (משלי ב, ט).

18 The meaning is not that he is not halachically Jewish—in fact we recognize his marriage to another Jew—but rather that he has theologically left the nation of Israel and does not share with them in *olam haba*.

19 נאמר פאפק אם שוד משלו החביר, כמו נרוס מי כדברם, תימנה פאפק עביד, ועליו נאמר "כל תימנה, אינני מקבלין" (משלי ב, ט).

20 See also Mordechai Rabinowitz’s translation in the *Rambam le’Am* edition. Dr. Kellner also misrepresents Rambam’s position on the issue of error and on what qualities are necessary to earn *olam haba*. On page 138
tively arguing against these fundamentals of Judaism and putting oneself outside the boundaries of our religion.  

In Moreh Nevuchim (1:35), Rambam explains that children must be taught “that G-d is incorporeal, that He cannot be compared with His creatures, that He is not subject to external influence; these are things that must be explained to everyone according to his capacity, and they must be taught by way of tradition to children and women, to the stupid and ignorant, as they are taught that G-d is One, that He is eternal, and that He alone is to be worshipped... When persons have received this doctrine, and have been trained in this belief, and are in consequence at a loss to reconcile it with the writings of the Prophets, the meaning of the latter must be made clear and explained to them by pointing out the homonymity and the figurative application of certain terms discussed in this part of the work so that they may reach perfection in proper knowledge of G-d’s Unity and the truth of the prophetic books.” One starts out life with acceptance of the fundamentals of Judaism—faith—and spends a lifetime in pursuit of deeper knowledge. But all of Israel, who have begun this quest with an act of faith, are guaranteed eternal life.

This is consistent with what Rambam explains in Mishneh Torah with regard to the nature of the first two mitzvos, knowledge of his book, he does note that “in not a few places Maimonides speaks as if he accepted a traditionalist account of reward and punishment.” But he chooses not to try to resolve the sources he uses with the many sources that show that his interpretations are impossible. He instead explains that Rambam was merely conning us. He justifies this approach with yet another misreading of the Moreh Nevuchim, perhaps his most offensive. (When Rambam speaks of “necessary” beliefs, he certainly does not mean that they are not true as Dr. Kellner claims.) See also David Berger’s review of Kellner’s book in Tradition 33/4 (1999) where he takes issue with other elements of the book. Dr. Kellner responds to Dr. Berger in the 2nd edition of his work.

21 That no other reading is possible will become obvious as we continue. The original Arabic reads: 

22 As well as in Sefer HaMitvos (Aseh 1, 2) where one must use Rav Kappach’s translation so as not to be misled by the faulty translation of לאהמי in place of ליהו.
of G-d’s existence and unity, in that they are fulfilled not via faith but via knowledge. In his explanation of these mitzvos, Rambam does not suffice with a few perfunctory phrases, but elaborates on the philosophical ideas that must be mastered and come to be "known." As he explained in the Moreh, the fulfillment of this mitzvah comes gradually over a lifetime—and each individual is limited in its fulfillment by the degree of his application and by the depth of his intellect.

As for doubt, which is of course natural, there is a halacha (Hilchos Avodah Zara 2:2-3) addressed to it specifically. Let us look at Rambam’s presentation of it: “Do not turn toward the gods’... do not inquire after their modes of worship, even though you do not worship, for this [inquiry] will cause you to be turned to follow it and imitate those practices... and if one transgresses this actively he receives lashes.” The study of idolatry, and contemplation of its efficacy, is specifically prohibited. While only idol worship itself carries the penalty of kares, the consideration of the possibility of its efficacy is also prohibited, and if some act is taken to further this

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thought, it is punishable with lashes. To create doubt is indeed prohibited:

And not only is it prohibited to consider the efficacy of idolatry but we are forbidden to consider any thought that causes one to uproot one of the ikkarei haTorah, nor to contemplate it and let our minds and hearts dwell upon it... for men’s minds are limited, and not all minds are capable of reaching the truth clearly, and should each individual follow the thoughts of his heart, he will destroy the world because of his limited mind. How so? At times he will stray after idolatry, and at times will contemplate whether Unity is true, [thinking] about what is above and what is below, and what is behind, and at times about whether prophecy is a true concept, and at times if the Torah is from heaven or not. And he does not know the means by which one can arrive at these truths and thus is driven out to heresy.25

While man is required to delve into philosophical thought in order to attain the highest certainty about G-d’s unity and the proper way to worship Him, we are bound by the traditions of our religion and the commitment to the ikkarei emunah. They are indeed articles of faith. Moreover, in our approach to them, there is no difference between our relationship to the concepts we are required to come to know—the first five philosophical principles—and the others, such as Torah MiSinai whose knowledge is handed down to us by way of tradition. We may not doubt them. We may not consider the possibility that they are not true; we must be prejudiced in our philosophical analysis, not because these things are not provable, but because the average person is not intellectually equipped to come to the truth of this knowledge. This halacha is based on the premise that most intellects are not capable of reaching

25 ולא עבדה ויהי בלבך ולא תนะר אם שפחת חיצון בברית, כאלא כל מהשפתנ갓 אין
כמם תפוך יќור מעריק תורה–וה토픽 אנא שיש להפלות לע לטון, ולא כסה תענה
וכל נחשב יניסך אער הרוחיandr; מדפיIGGER: סוי ופקד של פאצ צזגיה, אלא כל הכתוב מכל
לימים יאמרי לע מרי; ואך ימעט כי 만א אואר מחשפת ילב, פגעא מתורא ואינו
לפי קרב עתת בכר; פנימם חינר אואר בטובה; הפשפש יובהיח ב腑ך יברא, אעמא
הוא למקד עתאני, מים מלקחה מים דלדי, מכם לפליסים אואר; ועטניפס הבנאה, שמא כי אומ
שמא אניא; הפשפש תכרך, שמא איה פלוסים שמא אניא, ואפיייגו המריאים שירוק בך
עד שידין האמה על ברורי, זוכאת אום לדי מות.
these truths. By not allowing the mind to go too far—mah lifnim mah l'achor—one preserves his olam haba. This halacha was given to protect the Jew from coming to heresy.

"With regard to this the Torah warned, 'Do not stray after your heart'... and though this prohibition causes one to be dragged from olam haba, there are no lashes for it" (ibid.) 26 Though Rambam makes clear that, in following one’s own insufficient intellect, one follows a path that eventually arrives at heresy, nevertheless the punishment for this unlimited contemplation and consideration of all types of heresy is not even lashes. Rather, the punishment is inherent in the act in that it "causes man to be dragged from olam haba.”

The Road to Hell

Rambam continues, “The heretics (minim) are those who foolishly stray after the thoughts of their heart... until they find themselves transgressing over the essentials of the Torah with intent to defy, with hands uplifted in rebellion, saying there is nothing wrong in so doing (ibid.) 27 Here Rambam makes clear what we explained above, that one is a heretic only when he has followed his errant mind and willfully committed sins, “and says” there is nothing wrong in so doing. 28 Only at the end of the process of the violation of straying

26 על עניין זה והוויה זה הדעת, מאמר ב "אל תחרור אתח ללבכסם אהרן עיניים טרף אדם
וירושלים חסידי" (ברוך צלע)--כּלנָר לא י абсолютно פל אתח מסך אהרן תמה הקדשה, וודמה
שפחתת משנת האמה. כּל אהרן חכמה "ירה ללבכסם", ו מינתה "ירה חכמה". ואתה
וניח נהנהrepos השבוי ויתם, לא במלכות.
וניה, ולא, זה, את פ שמחה פסיד לאדם לחודדין מיתום מעשה, אינ במלכות
27 והמינימין, הם החטאים ארא המסכת לובב בכסות, מבחרי סאירן, דע מפרץ רעים על
נופי חרב הלכתי, נשאו בכס בד רמה; וזהו, ישן ביניו. ואמר למטה עימיו
והשנה ולט שמה וכלי, מְשַמֶר"א חרב, לא פחה בשיה" (משל). הושברת ד_FONT
לעבה שמה
The last phrase that the thoughts of the minim are to idolatry is consistent with the grouping of avoda zara with the other four ikkaraim that include atheistic thoughts as well—in halachic terms his thinking is that of an idol worshipper. For example should he slaughter for a sacrifice, we would consider his thoughts as directed to idolatry.

28 The acts that he describes are acts that themselves independently cause the sinner to forfeit olam haba (Hil. Teshuvah 3:6: והמשה עשה ויי רמה בפרשים חמשים). Here Rambam is describing the expected trajectory of a min, but
does one become a min. While doubt diminishes olam haba and endangers one’s soul, it is only when one removes himself from Israel that all is lost.

Similarly, after Rambam lists the twenty-four people who have no portion in olam haba, he tells us (Hilchos Teshuva 3:14) that there are other sins such as “embarrassing a friend in public, taking joy in the humiliation of a friend... denigrating the holidays” that when “habitually done” will cause one to lose his olam haba. Each act diminishes the portion, and repetition constitutes a path to total loss.29 So too Rambam writes (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:10), “Anyone who thinks that he can engage in Torah study and not work, and get support from charity, profanes the Name... and causes evil to himself, and removes his life from olam haba...The chachamim said anyone who benefits from the words of the Torah takes his life from the world” (נחל חייו מנילויו).30 In the words “ונטל חייו מנילויו,” he again describes a path that has at its end the total loss of olam haba and that in its practice diminishes that which it seeks to build.

**Error**

What of a Jew who has accepted a corporeal conception of G-d (הגשמה) via an errant mesora? Can he attain a portion in olam haba?

We have explained that a denial of the 13 ikkarim means to cut oneself off from Judaism, thus if one lives in the bosom of Israel but in a community where this is taught as the normative belief, then we should assume that this should not be a source of kares. Especially if his belief in corporealisism is sophisticated, like that of a personage

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29 ישibirah kohat makol, oshu la fer kavamim seminim shehuratyn bekhay mii la halolim baven. Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 3:14, and in Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:10.

30 כל המושחים על לזר الشريف חורו, ולא ישועו מהלאה, והפרמיסין ודוד–כי זה חלילה הוא ונשל, בתחיל הלוחיות, מביך מהאומרים, כי יורה עולם. אמרו חכמים, כל הנ.lineEdit מהבילים, כו. ולא יירא מהול לא יברא, כי שומם, ובחי הלוחיות, מביך מהאומרים, כי יורה עולם. אמרו חכמים, כל הנ_LINEAR מהבילים, כו. ולא יירא מהול לא יברא.
such as Rav Moshe Taku, we should assume that though this errant belief lessens his portion, his portion might still be great. Here is what Rambam says of these people:

Those who are in the country, but have their backs turned toward the king’s palace, are those who possess religion, belief, and thought, but happen to hold false doctrines, which they either adopted in consequence of great mistakes made in their own speculations, or received from others who misled them. Because of these doctrines they recede more and more from the royal palace the more they seem to proceed. These are worse than the first class, and under certain circumstances it may become necessary to slay them, and to extirpate their doctrines, in order that others should not be misled. (Moreh Nevuchim 3:51)

By *kefira* I mean that one has a belief that is different from reality... The *kofrim*, however, though believing in the existence of the Creator, attack the exclusive prerogative of G-d, namely, the service and worship that was commanded, in order that the belief of the people in His existence should be firmly established... By transferring that prerogative to other beings, they cause the people, who only notice the rites, without comprehending their meaning or the true character of the being that is worshipped, to renounce their belief in the existence of G-d. They were therefore punished with death: ‘Thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth’ (Deut. xx. 16). The object of this commandment, as is distinctly stated, is to extirpate that false opinion, in order that other men should not be corrupted by it any more... They are called ‘enemies,’ ‘foes,’ ‘adversaries’; by worshipping idols they are said to provoke G-d to jealousy, anger, and wrath. How great, then, must be the offense of him who has a wrong opinion of G-d Himself, and believes Him to be different from what He truly is, i.e., assumes that He does not exist, that He consists of two elements, that He is corporeal, that He is subject to external influence, or ascribes to Him any defect whatever. Such a person is undoubtedly worse than he who worships idols in the belief that they, as agents, can do good or evil.

Therefore bear in mind that by the belief in the corporeality or in anything connected with corporeality, you would provoke G-d to jealousy and wrath, kindle His fire and anger, become
His foe, His enemy, and His adversary in a higher degree than the worship of idols. If you think that there is an excuse for those who believe in the corporeality of G-d on the ground of their training, their ignorance or their defective comprehension, you must make the same concession to the worshippers of idols: their worship is due to ignorance, or to early training; ‘they continue in the custom of their fathers’ (TB Chullin, 13b). You will perhaps say that the literal interpretation of the Bible causes men to fall into that doubt, but you must know that idolaters were likewise brought to their belief by false imaginations and ideas. There is no excuse whatever for those who, being unable to think for themselves, do not accept [the doctrine of the incorporeality of G-d] from the true philosophers. I do not consider those men as *kofrim* who are unable to prove the incorporeality, but I hold those to be so who do not believe it, especially when they see that Onkelos and Jonathan avoid [in reference to G-d] expressions implying corporeality as much as possible. (*Moreh* 1:36)

Certainly, the impression we get from this is that an errant corporealists has no part in the World to Come. But in fact, Rambam never says it, nor could he mean it. While in fact he does say that such a person may have to be killed, he explains consistently that this is because he misleads others and endangers society. Rambam is talking about the imperative on other Jews to kill him, but his status with regard to *olam haba* is dependent upon the status his soul has reached. Just as the idol worshipper he speaks of can have a status of “unintentional sinner” (שוגג), as the Torah makes quite clear, the same is true of this person. He distances himself from

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31 In *Mishneh Torah* (*Hil. Avodah Zara* 10:2) he also makes clear that the reason for killing *minim* is because of the harm they cause to society: *לתצייר את הסדר אשת הנפש מאחרי אשת.*

32 Consistent with this, Rambam is quite emphatic in *Hilchos Teshuva* that the *minim* can do teshuva. Yet he says in *Hilchos Avodah Zara* that “we do not ever accept them in *Teshuva.*” He answers the apparent contradiction in a *teshuva* by explaining that while G-d certainly accepts all repentance, the community that he endangers must forever treat him with scorn and skepticism.
the palace but he still has a place in the “country,” the *eretz ha-
chayim* surrounding the palace.

**The Reward of the Wise Man**

All of Israel has a portion in *olam haba*, but it is not necessary to be part of Israel in order to gain *olam haba*.

Let us return to what we learned in *Hichos Melachim*. After explaining how one converts and becomes one of the “*chassidim* amongst the nations,” hence earning a place in *olam haba*, Rambam explains:

עַבְרֵּל אֶם עַשֵּׂה מִפְּנֵי הַדָּעַת—אֵין זוֹ הַגָּר הַתֹּשֲׁב, אֵין מַחְסִידֵי אֲוָרוֹת

*He who does not accept revelation* and hence does not qualify as a convert of any sort, is not guaranteed a portion in *olam haba*, but in having come on his own to observe the seven Noachide laws, he is labeled a Chochom. In *Moreh Nevuchim* Rambam explains that the word “Chochom” applies to one who intellectually understands the rationale behind the mitzvos—which constitutes true knowledge:

A person that has a true knowledge of the whole Law is called wise in a double sense; he is wise because the Law instructs him in the highest truths, and secondly, because it teaches him good morals. But as the truths contained in the Law are taught by way of tradition, not by a philosophical method, the knowledge of the Law, and the acquisition of true wisdom, are treated in the books of the Prophets and in the words of our Sages as two different things; real wisdom demonstrates by

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33 See *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:51 cited just above.
34 Other texts read “ולא מחכמיהם” but the reliable texts read as quoted.
35 Certainly not formally and in all probability not at all.
36 Especially but elsewhere also.
proof those truths that Scripture teaches us by way of tradition. It is to this kind of wisdom, which proves the truth of the Law, that Scripture refers when it extols wisdom, and speaks of the high value of this perfection, and of the consequent paucity of men capable of acquiring it, in sayings like these: “Not many are wise” (Job xxxii. 9)... When man comes to the trial [to determine if he will enter olam haba], he is first asked, ‘Hast thou fixed certain seasons for the study of the Law? Hast thou been engaged in the acquisition of wisdom? Hast thou derived from one thing another thing?’ This proves that our Sages distinguished between the knowledge of the Law on the one hand, and wisdom on the other, as the means of proving the lessons taught in the Law by correct reasoning. (Moreh Nevuachim 3:54)

With this, what Rambam is saying in Hilchos Melachim becomes clear. The person who has arrived at the truth via deduction is one of the rare people who are true chachomim. This person is certainly eligible for olam haba. He will pass the three-question entry exam given on judgement day. In fact, in Hilchos Deos (chapter 1) Rambam describes the middle road as the path of the wise, derech cha-chamim, and contrasts it with derech chassidim which is inferior to it, for it is derech chachamim that is also called “G-d’s path” (ד"ר) (ה). The chochom of the nations of the world is greater than the Chassid of the nations. Rambam concludes his description of derech chachamim with these words: “It is that which Avraham Avinu taught his sons... and he who follows this derech brings good and blessing to himself.”38 The gentle who emulates what Avraham did and finds G-d on his own is a Chochom and certainly earns olam haba.39

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38 והיה שאלו אברכים אבות בניינו, שיאמרו ‘כי ידעתי, עוד שנה ישנה וגו’ (וטרתם דרור לי, ולאmıştır אהרן וגו’) (ברשראית, ו.ז) והקהל ודרכו, ומאש פซอוה

39 Rambam makes this clear again at the end of Hilchos Shemittah:
Olam Haba

The most famous Rambam on Olam Haba is in Hilchos Teshuva (8:2):

The righteous people sit with their crowns on their heads and enjoy the radiance of the Divine Presence... When they said that the righteous people sit they meant it figuratively, i.e., the righteous people are there, without labor or effort. Similarly, when they said that the righteous people have crowns on their heads they were referring to the knowledge because of which they inherited a place in the World to Come. This knowledge is always with them, and is their ‘crown’... When they said that they will benefit from the radiance of the Divine Presence they meant that they will know and understand the existence of G-d in a manner that they couldn’t while in their gloomy and paltry bodies. Whenever the word ‘soul’ is mentioned, it does not mean the soul-body combination but the actual soul itself, which is the understanding given by the Creator and which causes other understandings and actions. This is the form that was explained in the fourth chapter of the Laws of The Basic Principles of The Torah.

Rambam uses the term כל באי עולם to refer to all men, not Jews. This is clear from the halacha preceding the definition of חסידי אומות העולם (Melahim 8:10):

וכן ציווה משה רבנו מمير הגבורה, לנקה את כל חלקי עוד תלמד כמצווה ש toastrתה, כל זה יכול, ירה. הממלך זמחו–הוא הנקר ו举行 בכל מוקד, עצרו כל אחד עליך בsetDisplay שתרשים המבירה.

40 אלא ד��יבין יושבי גן рай והראשים רואים עץ השכינה... העתיד ליה יתברך כּל מקורות והרי יושבי הגן והראשים יורה. על דרך ההודיה–כלומר פגון המפרים ירצו, שבל עמו אל עזה, אך זה الشريف והראשים בחרו באומר גEnumerable הדעות בברアイプライ–לפיו יש עדות שבנה ראה פגון העם באומר: "יהיו עננים כרננים. והרי את העתים, חכמים אמרו שמה "עשתה, שषשמה, שסיימה, לא יאדו" (שר השירוב, א). והרי את העתים, חכמים אמרו שמה "עשתה, שषשמה, שסיימה, לא יאדו" (שר השירוב, א). והרי את העתים, חכמים אמרו שמה "עשתה, ש�שמה, שסיימה, לא יאדו" (שר השירוב, א). והרי את העתים, חכמים אמרו שמה "עשתה, ש�שמה, שסיימה, לא יאדו" (שר השירוב, א).

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Based on this statement and other statements in the Moreh and Perush HaMishnah that equate Olam haba with attained knowledge, some claim that Rambam would deprive all but the greatest philosophers of the World to Come. Such a conclusion, however, would render meaningless the principle that all of Israel has a portion in the World to Come. Rambam’s meaning is more complex than some philosophers would have us believe.

The Faith and Reward of the Ger Toshav

Let us return to the conversion process of the ger tzedek (Hilchos Issurei Biah 14:4):

We inform him of the ikkarei hadas (fundamentals of the religion), which are Unity of the Name and the prohibition of idolatry, and we deal with this at length, and we inform him of some of the easier and more difficult laws ... just as we tell him of the punishment of mitzvos, so too we tell him of the reward of mitzvos, and we tell him that with the performance of these mitzvos, he will merit the world to come.”

The conversion process of a Ger Toshav follows:

Who is a ger toshav?... a gentile who accepted not to worship idols, along with the other mitzvos that the sons of Noach were commanded... we accept him and he is one of the chassidim of the nations of the world.

From the halacha we quoted above in Hilchos Melachim, we know that this “acceptance” must be based on the fact that these laws are commanded by the Torah. But nowhere is it stipulated that
this ger toshav need accept all the 13 ikkarim in order to be accepted. Clearly Rambam does not insist that we explain to him ikkarei badas. The “Chassidim of the nations” have appended themselves to Israel by accepting the authority of the Torah, but their acceptance is not contingent upon their understanding the intricacies of G-d’s Unity—certainly they need not commit themselves to the belief in Resurrection (תחיית המתים), and yet all of them are ensured olam haba.

There can be no doubt that a portion in the World to Come is not contingent on the philosophical mastery of the 13 ikkarei emunah, nor even on an allegiance to them. Factors other than deep philosophical understanding are the determinants. What are they?

Olam Haba and Kares

We can learn a lot about what olam haba depends on by examining the Torah punishment of kares. As we mentioned earlier, the concept of losing olam haba is found in the Torah’s declaration of kares:

The punishment of the wicked is that they will not receive this life, but are cut off (כרתין) and die. Anybody who does not receive this life dies without receiving an eternal afterlife, and is cut off on account of his wickedness and is lost like an animal. This is the cutting-off (כרת) that is mentioned in the Torah, such as when it is written, “...that soul shall be utterly cut off” (ויכרתו הבתר המש היא). According to a tradition we learn that the words ‘cut off’ refer to being cut off from this world, and that the word ‘utterly’ comes to include [being cut off from] the World to Come, i.e. that soul which was separated from its body in this world will not merit life in the World to Come, but is cut off from there as well... The ultimate revenge and punishment is the cutting off of the soul so that it won’t enter the World to Come, as it is written, ‘...that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.’ (Hilchos Teshuva 8:2, 5)
Rambam seems to be saying that all who are subject to the punishment of kares lose their portion in olam haba. In the Sefer Hamitzvos he is explicit on this point (Shoresh 14). There he writes of the punishment of kares: “Kares means that the transgressor who dies while still standing in his sin (עומד בחטא) will have no portion in the World to Come, as we explained in chapter chelek.”

Suddenly we learn that a host of sinners who have given in to their physical desires are also cut off not only from Israel but from olam haba. If this is so, what is the uniqueness of the twenty-four

This statement alone is not conclusive. This verse is speaking about the unbridled contemplation leads to kares, in which one cuts himself off from Israel and G-d in one fell swoop in his public blasphemy, that we say the sin of kares results in a loss of olam haba. However, we would assume that he who performed one of the dozens of acts that are subject to the kares stated in the Torah would be cut off only from this world.

Once we know this equation, we would seem to have another proof that gentiles can earn olam haba. As we quoted above, the convert is warned that had he previously eaten חלב he would not be punished, but now he will receive kares. Had he no portion in the World to Come previously, what is his loss by being subject to kares? One could suggest that this statement is directed only at one who is already a ger toshav, but this is unlikely.
people that Rambam lists in the third chapter of *Hilchos Teshuva*? In fact he seemingly contradicts himself by saying that an apostate with regard to a single command—is affected but not one who sins because he cannot control his desires (لغזר). We have a quandary; if every transgression of a *kares* violation causes a loss of *olam baba*, why did Rambam list only twenty-four such categories in *Hilchos Teshuva*, coupled with a clear implication that all others sins if not done “in spite,” הכהנים, are not to be included? The answer must lie in the words Rambam adds about the *kares* violations: “והוא עומד בחטאו,” and he stands in his sin.”

We must explain exactly what Rambam means by this phrase.

The Sinner and Repentance

But first let us examine the Rambam’s list of twenty four:

The following have no share in the World to Come, and instead are cut off, destroyed and excommunicated forever on account of their very great sins and wickedness: an infidel; a heretic; one who denies the Torah; one who denies that there will be a Resurrection; one who denies that there will be a Redemption; one who is an apostate from Judaism; one who causes a lot of people to sin; one who withdraws from communal ways; one who publicly sins in a defiant way as Yehoia-kim did; an informer [against Jews]; one who instills fear in the congregation but not in the Name of G-d; murderers; relaters of *loshan ho'arah*; and one who pulls back his foreskin [in order to cover his *bris milah*].

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47 In fact the *Kesef Mishneh* (*Hilchos Teshuva* 8:2) raises this problem and turns to Ramban’s reinterpretation of Rambam for an answer.
48 The Arabic is נבע ועומד בלא תשובה.
49 We might have thought Rambam emphasized that in one of these sins it is only if he did not do *teshuva*, שימות ובProstitות, while the twenty-four are not so. However, Rambam closes his listing by saying בשמת בלא תשובה.
50 ואלו שנינינו--אף על פי שאיננו ישראל, אין להם חלק לעולם הבא.
After speaking of “all of Israel,” כל ישראל, having a portion, Rambam here explains that there is a class of people who are indeed technically Yisrael but have placed themselves outside of what we shall call “the sanctity of Israel (קדושת ישראל)—this is not as a result of a sin, but of a way of life. These people are defined by their sins; they are “murderers” (not people who have murdered), “relaters of lashon hara” (not people who have spoken evil). This is what Rambam characterizes in his list of twenty-four.

As he closes, Rambam tells us how these individuals can remove themselves from this list.

People who do any of these things do not have a share in the World to Come if they died without having repented, but if they returned from their wickedness and repented before dying, they will receive a share in the World to Come, for there are no sins for which repentance does not atone. Even if one denied everything throughout his life but in the end repented, he will still get a share in the World to Come... even if one... repented privately and not publicly, one will enter the World to Come and is accepted in repentance.

With repentance one has attained a new identity, and has become a penitent (בעל תשובה); no longer is his identity that of one who has lost “the sanctity of Israel.”

Sin and Its Consequences

By contrast, the punishment of kares is for individual sins and is activated precisely at the moment of the sin. Whenever we speak of a punishment meted out by G-d—such as kares—we mean that G-d has placed this punishment into nature, and in this case it is into the

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51 Literally “masters of lashon hara.”
52 A Brisker would say there is a "חולה שעה אחד." This is not as a result of sin, but of a way of life.
53 With repentance, even if one repented privately, one will enter the World to Come and is accepted in repentance.
nature of man. The immortal soul is distanced from G-d by sins punishable by kares, and in this way the sin is its own punishment. When the state of sin has passed, the punishment of kares has passed as well. “And when one believes all these fundamentals... he enters into the community of Israel... even if he did his fill of sins because of his lusts, and because of the ascension of his weaker nature (yetzer hara)... he is punished for his sins, but has a portion in the World to Come, and he is one of the sinners of Israel” (Perush HaMishnah, Introduction to Chelek). The sinner has had a momentary lapse, and only while in the sway of his sin is he subject to being “cut off” from Israel and G-d. This is similar to what Rambam explains in the famous law in Hilchos Gershin (2:20), that as long as one “wishes to be part of Israel” we attribute his sin to weakness and judge his inner will as desiring to fulfill the mitzvos. Here too, we say that when the influence of his yetzer hara has passed, his soul returns from its state of sin.

If a man committed adultery in a state of passion, the sin is punishable by kares—but only if he escapes man’s law. Should he receive the death penalty he is freed from kares and thus retains his portion in olam baba. Even thought the death penalty is administered in conjunction with confession (וידוי), with the intention that the perpetrator hence earn olam baba—still it cannot be expected that in the average case the adulterer has become what the Rambam calls a “penitent,” בעל תשובה, who has conquered his desire for this sin. Nevertheless, any break with the state of sin that accompanied...
the act is enough to free him from kares. For this same reason, sins associated with kares that do not carry a death penalty receive lashes if the courts become involved. The Torah’s intention with corporeal punishment is to break the hold of the sin. Even should one escape the court’s punishment, should one’s will (רצון) return to that of a Jew who considers himself bound by the Torah laws—even though he is driven sometimes by his desires—he frees himself from the sin’s grip and removes the kares obligation, חיוב הכריתות. Only “one who stands in his sin” (עומד בחטאו) loses his olam haba.

Interestingly, there are two mitzvos punishable by kares that stand out from the rest. While all other kares punishments are for the violation of a command, lo saaseh, there are two positive commands, mitzvos aseh, where the failure to perform does bring kares. Discussing the first of these, circumcision (מילא), Rambam comments: “Anyone who annuls the covenant of Avraham Avinu, and left his foreskin... even if he has Torah and good deeds, he has no portion in olam haba.”58 The kares in this case is identical with losing olam haba, for such a person annuls the covenant of Avraham Avinu and has failed to join the people of Israel.

The other mitzvos aseh is korban pesach. The Midrash tells us that the angels asked G-d why Israel should be spared on the night of the plague of the first born, for after all, “both groups are idol worshippers.” The answer was, “By thy blood you shall live,” בדמייך חיים: the blood of circumcision and Pesach establish the identity of the Jewish people.59 These two acts constituted the reaffirmation of the covenant of Avraham Avinu. Likewise, a failure to perform these mitzvos cuts one off from the inheritance of Avraham—olam haba.60

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58 כל המפר ברוחו של אברום אבינו, והניח עורלו, או משכה—אף על פי שיש בו德育,
משתנה טוביה ורבח, או בל כל מעילו הנא

59 Rambam quotes this in Iggeres Teman. Rashi on Chumash quotes Chazal’s ההוה אמינא that anyone who converts would immediately bring a korban pesach. This supports its identification as a korban gerus.

60 Actually we can assume that if one fails to perform Pesach one year but does it the next year, the kares edict is annulled. With regard to Milah see Hilchos Milah 1:2 and in the Raavad. Only when the person fails to do milah his whole life is the obligation of kares in place.
In every case Olam haba is lost by the continued state of sin.

**Hilchos Deos—Character and Knowledge**

We explained above that the gentile chochom earns a portion in the World to Come just as the gentile chassid does. Yet while the gentile chassidim are universally guaranteed a portion in olam haba, with a chochom there is no such guarantee. The act of conversion, commitment to the G-d of Revelation, is a transformation of the person that is sufficient to earn the ger toshav some portion. But those who observe without commitment earn their portion according to their degree of chochmah, which Rambam explains is one’s understanding of “the highest truths, and... good morals” (Moreh Nevuchim 3:54). This status of chochom requires perfection of character as well as perfection of knowledge, and in the Introduction to Perush HaMishnah he explains that the lack of character, i.e., failure to perform “Walking in G-d’s way” (והלכתבדרכיו), is a greater failing than a lack of intellectual sophistication. This chochom who has not linked himself to Sinai will not necessarily merit the World to Come—his practice must be in harmony with his knowledge—over and above the seven mitzvos, there must be a sterling character in order to acquire a portion of the World to Come.

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61 P. 23 in the Kapach edition.
62 חסיד, without intellectual understanding one cannot reach the level of chassid embodying proper character.
Rambam calls the laws of perfecting character “The Laws of Deos” (הלכות דעות). This section of laws is built around the mitzvah of “Walking in G-d’s ways,” והלכת בדרכי, and emulating G-d’s traits is called going in “G-d’s path,” דרך, also known as derech chachamim and as the “Middle road” (דרך בינונית). In fact a careful reading of the Moreh Nevuchim (1:2) reveals the source for Rambam’s usage of the term דעות (literally “types of knowledge”) for character traits. Eating from the “The tree of knowledge of good and evil,” כ alanında, is the source of sin, for man being led by his physical desires falls into a state of imbalance with his “internal will” (רצה), no longer desiring to do what is objectively good, but instead what he finds subjectively pleasing. When the intellect, the “image of G-d,” צלם אלקים, regains full control of man’s decisions, he returns to “G-d’s path.” Perfect character is a function of perfect evaluation and understanding. One “understands” that he must be modest and curb his anger and physical wants.

The following halacha demonstrates this idea: “The Chachamim said that three sins are punished in this world, and deprive one of olam haba: idolatry, promiscuity, and murder, yet loshon hora is equal to all of them... the chachamim also said that one who speaks loshon hora is as if he denied the essential [belief of Judaism]” (Hilchos Deos).

We of course understand that Avodah Zara is antithetical to olam haba. This forfeiture is also the consequence for murder and promiscuity. Murdering is one of the twenty-four categories listed traits, and notes that Aristotle thought so as well. “The words of the greatest of philosophers are sufficient for us: ‘G-d’s purpose for us is that we be righteous and intelligent.’”

Those who claim that Rambam values only intellect, claim that this is because of Aristotilean influence. In fact Rambam values character above all and tells us that Aristotle agrees.

All others use the term דעות.

אמרו חכמים, על שלוש עבירות רעיםנן – עבודה זרה, עולות אריות, ושפיכות דמים; ולשון הרע, כנגד כאלו... אמרו חכמים, כל העבירה שנאמר: אשר אמרו,inus, עולות אריות, ושפיכות דמים, כנSignup to continue reading...
in *Hilchos Teshuva*, and the reference is to one who has developed the character of a murderer. Although promiscuity (עריות) is not on the list, many of the sins punishable by *kares* are for promiscuity, and what the *chachamim* are speaking of is one who has become infused with this sin and cannot separate from it. For man’s soul (צלם אלים) to become immortal it must reject not only the ignorance of *avoda zara* but also the hatred of murder and the lust for promiscuity. “Relaters of *loshon hora*” is the last of the twenty-four categories in *Hilchos Teshuva*. This corruption of character that the Torah explicitly associates with leprosy, and that Rambam relates to the decay of society and of one’s humanity itself, incorporates all the faults of soul and body associated with the three major sins of Judaism.

Rambam’s commentary on “those things of which one eats their fruits in this world while the source remains intact for *olam haba*” (*Perush HaMishnah Peah* 1:1) explains the relationship between the entire spectrum of mitzvos and *olam haba*. On the one hand, the mitzvos between man and G-d perfect the soul—the intellect. But laws between man and his neighbor accomplish even more.

68 See also, for example, *Hilchos Teshuva* 9.
mitzvos and hence is brought by them to olam baba. Rambam’s everpresent message is that in performing acts of kindness (גמילות חסדים) whereby one internalizes the thirteen middos of G-d’s mercy and goodness, one earns olam baba. It is difficult to comprehend how this has been missed by some academics.

“The more one chooses and accustoms himself to the pleasures of the flesh, and despises the truth (אמת) and loves falsehood, to that degree he is cut off (נכרת) from above, and remains material that has been cut off (נכרת) (Introduction to Chelek).” In referring to the need to choose “truth,” Rambam is referring to man before the fall, who evaluated decisions based on his perception of their “truth” or “falsehood” rather than on his subjective measure of “good” and “bad” (Moreh 1:2). Rambam is clear that olam baba is a function of reversing the sin of Adam HaRishon and overcoming one’s physical desires. Indeed, olam baba is a function of knowledge, but that knowledge is reaching the level of knowledge of what is “true” and “false” that was lost when man lost himself to his subjective will.

Rambam’s Last Words

Rambam closes his final work, the Moreh Nevuchim, by summing up the purpose of existence. Indeed he explains in this chapter that the mitzvos have the effect of creating the environment where man

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70 Mitzvos between man and G-d are also intended to form the proper character traits (רעות):

Learning Torah is the path to Olam Haba, but it will direct one there only if he sustains himself in the present world.
will be free to pursue knowledge and perfecting of the soul—sblemus\_hanefesh, the highest attainment of man—but then Rambam closes with the explication of a verse in Yirmiyahu.

The prophets have likewise explained unto us these things, and have expressed the same opinion on them as the philosophers. They say distinctly that perfection in property, in health, or in midos\(^\text{72}\) is not a perfection worthy to be sought as a cause of pride and glory for us: that the knowledge of G-d, i.e., true wisdom, is the only perfection which we should seek, and in which we should glorify ourselves... “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, for I am G-d who does Mercy, Righteousness and Judgment in the earth, for this is My will” (Jer. ix. 22, 23). The object of the above passage is therefore to declare, that the perfection, in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired—as far as this is possible for man—the knowledge of G-d, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek mercy, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of G-d. We have explained this many times in this treatise.\(^\text{73}\)

\(^{72}\) This word מידוע is used and is what חכמתו refers to in the pasuk, including both intelligence and character – yet even this is not sufficient.

\(^{73}\) כבר ביארו לנו הנביאים עניינים אלו אתה ולשון עם פירשינוếm שפירושו הוא מידעו ו_traitsים. The underlined words are crucial. One is intended to think about these ideals constantly – character and thought are merged together in attaining perfection.

I include Kappach’s translation. The underlined words are crucial. One is intended to think about these ideas constantly – character and thought are merged together in attaining perfection.
The final perfection that brings olam haba transcends the wisdom of the chacham. It is the deepest knowledge one can have of G-d, an internalization of Mercy, Righteousness, and Judgment—חסד צדקיהו משפט. The portion one has in olam haba is commensurate to the degree in which one possesses these qualities.

Indeed Rambam states that true perfection in these areas requires high intellectual attainment. He tells us that those who consider themselves “spiritual” without true knowledge cannot guarantee that it is G-d they are clinging to rather than some figment of their imagination.74 Certainly Rambam considered Christians, who needed not only to envision a corporeal god but to worship him, as lacking in the knowledge necessary to attain true knowledge of G-d. Is it possible as well that one whose kindness dominates his personality will not merit eternal life? The qualities that earn this privilege are Mercy, Righteousness, and Judgment in the proper mixture. Those whose compassion prevents them from fighting evil have no part in the inheritance of Israel. Many a gentile has spoken disparagingly of the fearful G-d of Justice of the Old Testament that their religion has rejected. A simple Jew raised in the knowledge of this fearful G-d will have a portion in the World to Come, and a sophisticated gentile who eschews the G-d of the Old Testament for something better, does not.

Rambam’s Last Days

There is a question75 to be asked on the Rambam, not on a Rambam, not on a specific halacha in Mishneh Torah, but on the life of Rambam. He explained, in the introduction to Perush HaMishnah, that the whole world exists only for the sake of a person who may live once in several generations—the ultimate inhabitant of olam haba. Yet Rambam’s final days do not find him immersed in study,

74 “Those, however, who think of G-d, and frequently mention His name, without any correct notion of Him, but merely following some imagination, or some theory received from another person, are, in my opinion, like those who remain outside the palace and distant from it” (Moreh Nevuchim 3:51).
75 חשא.
but rather he describes a day filled with treating the sick, not only the Sultan and his household, but all the rich and the poor, Jew and gentile alike who are within traveling distance to his home. His day left him in total exhaustion, and when it ended he collapsed in sleep. How could the man who was one in a millennium not choose to spend his precious time immersed in the study of maaseh bereshis and maaseh merkavah? The explanation to the end of his life is found in the final words of the Moreh Nevuchim that we quoted above. His search for understanding brought him to immerse himself in chessed, tzedaka and mishpat during the day, and at night his dreams of G-d’s transcendence filled a mind reaching out for prophecy and olam haba.

76 See Igros HaRambam, Sheilat ed. 550-551.
77 I wish to thank Eliyahu Krakowski for reviewing an earlier draft of this essay and making valuable comments.