

What Is the Jewish Belief About Moshiach (Messiah)?

By Nissan Dovid Dubov

What is the “End of Days”?

The term “End of Days” is taken from Numbers 24:14. This has always been taken as a reference to the **messianic era**. Here we shall explore—albeit briefly—the Jewish belief in the coming of **Moshiach (Messiah)**.



What does the word *Moshiach* mean?

Moshiach is the Hebrew word for “messiah.” The word *messiah* in English means a savior or a “hoped-for deliverer.” The word *moshiach* in Hebrew actually means “anointed.” In Biblical Hebrew, the title *moshiach* was bestowed on somebody who had attained a position of nobility and greatness. For example, the high priest is referred to as the *kohen ha-moshiach*.

In Talmudic literature the title Moshiach, or Melech HaMoshiach (the King Messiah), is reserved for the Jewish leader who will redeem Israel in the End of Days.

What is the belief in Moshiach?

One of the principles of Jewish faith enumerated by Maimonides is that one day there will arise a dynamic Jewish leader, a direct descendant of the Davidic dynasty, who will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and gather Jews from all over the world and bring them back to the Land of Israel.

All the nations of the world will recognize Moshiach to be a world leader, and will accept his dominion. In the messianic era there will be world peace, no more wars nor famine, and, in general, a high standard of living.

All mankind will worship one G-d, and live a more spiritual and moral way of life. The Jewish nation will be preoccupied with learning Torah and fathoming its secrets.

The coming of Moshiach will complete G-d's purpose in creation: for man to make an abode for G-d in the lower worlds—that is, to reveal the inherent spirituality in the material world.

Is this not a utopian dream?

No! Judaism fervently believes that, with the correct leadership, humankind can and will change. The leadership quality of Moshiach means that through his dynamic personality and example, coupled with manifest humility, he will inspire all people to strive for good. He will transform a seemingly utopian dream into a reality. He will be recognized as a man of G-d, with greater leadership qualities than even Moses.

In today's society, many people are repulsed by the breakdown of ethical and moral standards. Life is cheap, crime is rampant, drug and alcohol abuse are on the increase, children have lost respect for their elders. At the same time, technology has advanced in quantum leaps. There is no doubt that today man has all the resources—if channeled correctly—to create a good standard of living for all mankind. He lacks only the social and political will. Moshiach will inspire all men to fulfill that aim.

Why the belief in a human messiah?

Some people believe that the world will “evolve” by itself into a messianic era without a human figurehead. Judaism rejects this belief. Human history has been dominated by empire builders greedy for power.

Others believe in Armageddon—that the world will self-destruct, either by nuclear war or by terrorism. Again, Judaism rejects this view.

Our prophets speak of the advent of a human leader, of a magnitude that the world has not yet experienced. His unique example and leadership will inspire mankind to change direction.

Where is Moshiach mentioned in the Scriptures?

The Scriptures are replete with messianic quotes. In [Deuteronomy 30:1](#) Moses prophesies that, after the Jews have been scattered to the four corners of the earth, there will come a time when they will repent and return to Israel, where they will fulfill all the commandments of the [Torah](#). The gentile prophet Balaam prophesies that this return will be led by Moshiach (see [Numbers 24:17–20](#)). Jacob refers to Moshiach by the name Shiloh ([Genesis 49:10](#)).

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel and Hosea all refer to the messianic era. (For full references, the reader is referred to the book [Moshiach by Rabbi Dr. J.I. Schochet](#).) It is interesting to note that the wall of the United Nations Building in New York is inscribed with the quote from [Isaiah \(11:6\)](#), “And the wolf shall lie with the lamb.” Furthermore, it is clear from the prophets, when studied in their original Hebrew, that Moshiach is a Jewish concept, and his coming will entail a return to Torah law, firmly ruling out any “other” messianic belief.

What sort of leader will Moshiach be?

Moshiach will be a man who possesses extraordinary qualities. He will be proficient in both the written and oral Torah traditions. He will incessantly campaign for Torah observance among Jews, and observance of the seven universal Noahide laws by non-Jews. He will be scrupulously observant, and encourage the

highest standards from others. He will defend religious principles and repair breaches in their observance. Above all, Moshiach will be heralded as a true Jewish king, a person who leads the way in the service of G-d, totally humble yet enormously inspiring.

When will Moshiach come?

Jews anticipate the arrival of Moshiach every day. Our prayers are full of requests to G-d to usher in the messianic era. Even at the gates of the gas chambers, many Jews sang “*Ani Maamin*”—I believe in the coming of Moshiach!

However, the Talmud states that there is a predestined time when Moshiach will come. If we are meritorious, he may come even before that predestined time. This “end of time” remains a mystery, yet the Talmud states that it will be before the Hebrew year 6000. (The Hebrew year at the date of this publication is 5772.)

This does not rule out the possibility of Moshiach coming today and now, if we merit it. It should be noted that many Torah authorities are of the opinion that we are in the “epoch of the Moshiach,” and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, stated on numerous occasions that the messianic redemption is imminent.

Could Moshiach come at any time, in any generation?

Yes. In every generation there is a person who potentially could be the Moshiach. When G-d decides that the time has arrived, He will bestow upon that individual the necessary powers for him to precipitate that redemption.

Any potential Moshiach must be a direct descendant of King David, as well as erudite in Torah learning. It should be noted that many people living today can trace their lineage back to King David. The chief rabbi of Prague in the late 16th century, Rabbi Yehuda Loew (the Maharal), had a family tree that traced him back to the Davidic dynasty. Consequently, any direct descendant of the Maharal is of Davidic descent.

Maimonides, a great Jewish philosopher and codifier of the 12th century, rules that if we recognize a human being who possesses the superlative qualities ascribed to Moshiach, we may presume that he is the potential Moshiach. If this individual actually succeeds in rebuilding the Temple and gathering in the exiles, then he is the Moshiach.

What exactly will happen when Moshiach comes?

Maimonides states in his *Mishneh Torah*—a compendium of the entire halachic tradition—that Moshiach will first rebuild the Temple and then gather in the exiles. Jerusalem and the Temple will be the focus of divine worship, and “from Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem.”

The Sanhedrin—the supreme Jewish law court of 71 sages—will be re-established, and will decide on all

matters of law. At this time, all Jews will return to full Torah observance and practice. It should be noted that in this present age of great assimilation and emancipation, an unprecedented return of Jews to true Torah values has taken place. This “*baal teshuvah*” phenomenon is on the increase, and paves the way for a full return in the messianic era.

Will miracles happen?

The Talmud discusses this question and again arrives at the conclusion that, if we are meritorious, the messianic redemption will be accompanied by miracles. However, the realization of the messianic dream, even if it takes place naturally, will be the greatest miracle.

According to some traditions, G-d Himself will rebuild the third Temple. According to others, it will be rebuilt by Moshiach; still others suggest a combination of the two opinions. Some suggest that there will be two distinct periods in the messianic era: first a non-miraculous period, leading into a second, miraculous period.

Maimonides writes, “Neither the order of the occurrence of these events nor their precise detail is among the fundamental principles of the faith . . . one should wait and believe in the general conception of the matter.”

What will become of the world as we know it?

Initially, there will be no change in the world order, other than its readiness to accept messianic rule. All the nations of the world will strive to create a new world order, in which there will be no more wars or conflicts. Jealousy, hatred, greed and political strife (of the negative kind) will disappear, and all human beings will strive only for goodness, kindness and peace.

In the messianic era there will be great advances in technology, allowing a high standard of living. Food will be plentiful and cheap.

However, the focus of human aspiration will be the pursuit of the “knowledge of G-d.” People will become less materialistic and more spiritual.

What are the “birthpangs” of Moshiach’s arrival?

The Talmud describes the period immediately prior to the advent of Moshiach as one of great travail and turmoil. There will be a world recession, and governments will be controlled by despots. It is in this troubled setting that Moshiach will arrive.

There is a tradition that a great war will take place, called the war of Gog and Magog, and there is much speculation as to the precise timing of this war in relation to Moshiach’s arrival.

There is a tradition that Elijah the Prophet will come to the world and announce the imminent arrival of Moshiach. However, according to other opinions, Moshiach may arrive unannounced. Elijah would then

arrive to assist in the peace process. Some suggest that if the Moshiach arrives in his predestined time, then Elijah will announce his arrival; but if Moshiach comes suddenly, then Elijah will appear after Moshiach has come.

As mentioned before, it is unclear as to exactly how these events will unfold. However, this uncertainty does not affect the general matter of Moshiach's arrival.

When will the resurrection of the dead take place?

One of the principles of Jewish faith is belief in the resurrection of the dead. According to the Zohar—an early Kabbalistic text—the resurrection will take place forty years after the arrival of Moshiach. However, certain righteous individuals will arise with the coming of Moshiach. All the dead will be resurrected in the Land of Israel.

There is a small bone in the body called the *luz* bone (some identify this bone as the coccyx), from which the body will be rebuilt at the time of resurrection. Our daily prayers are replete with requests for the resurrection, and there are many customs connected with it. (See the book *To Live and Live Again* by the present author, published by S.I.E. Publications.)

What can be done to bring Moshiach?

In general, mankind must strive to perform more acts of goodness and kindness. The Jew is mandated to learn and be aware of the messianic redemption, and strengthen his or her faith in Moshiach's ultimate and imminent arrival.

Charity is a catalyst for redemption. And every day in our prayers, we sincerely plead many times for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the ingathering of the exiles and the return to Torah observance under the leadership of Moshiach. The Lubavitcher Rebbe mounted a worldwide Moshiach campaign to heighten the awareness of Moshiach's imminent arrival. The Rebbe constantly urged every Jew to prepare on a personal, family and community level for the arrival of Moshiach. This can best be achieved by “living with Moshiach”—that is, by learning about Moshiach and yearning for his coming.

Summary

In conclusion, the Jew always was and remains the eternal optimist. Even in his darkest hour, he hopes and prays for a brighter future—a world of peace and spirituality.

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