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# THE MESSIAH I

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## The Concept of the Messiah, His Necessity, and Qualifications

Belief and yearning for the coming of the *Mashiach* (literally, “the anointed one,” the Messiah) is one of the fundamental principles of Judaism. When the concept of the Mashiach is appreciated, history is no longer viewed as a random series of events, but rather a planned destiny leading to a utopian goal.

Throughout history, civilization has undergone, and will continue to experience, paradigm shifts which require the world to adapt to new realities. For example, the world progressed from an agricultural society to an industrialized civilization. Today, we are in transition to a new internet-driven eco-geo-political “Flat World.” These transitions mark the world’s changes from tribal societies to organized countries with governments, from agrarians to hi tech, mega-industrial producers.

Jewish history, too, has transformational historical markers, but they do not measure social or technological progress. Rather, these periods reflect changes in the spiritual environment that God offers humanity to exercise its free will and achieve perfection. Examples are life in Gan Eden and afterwards, the First and Second Temple Periods, and after the destruction of the Second Temple. It is in this context that we can understand the Jewish concept of the Mashiach and the Messianic age.

In this first class on the Mashiach we will demonstrate that belief in the concept of a messiah is central to Judaism. We will discuss who the Mashiach will be, his qualifications, and what he is expected to accomplish. The second class on the Mashiach will explore the phase of history known as the Messianic Era, when that will occur, and what we can do to hasten its arrival.

This class will address the following questions:

- ❧ What role does belief in Mashiach play in the Jewish religion?
- ❧ Our free choice will be greatly diminished after Mashiach’s arrival. Since the purpose of life is to use our free will for the good, why do we hope for an era when we won’t be able to use it?
- ❧ Who will the Mashiach be, and how will we know that he is the Mashiach?

## Class Outline:

### Section I. World History and the Necessity for Mashiach

Part A. Overview of Jewish Eschatology

Part B. Why Do We Need Mashiach?

Part C. The Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge

Part D. *Tikun Olam*

Part E. What Then?

### Section II. The Centrality of Belief in the Mashiach

### Section III. Who is the Mashiach?

Part A. Basic Qualifications

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## SECTION I. WORLD HISTORY AND THE NECESSITY FOR MASHIACH

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In this section we will explore the purpose of the Messianic Age and develop an understanding of the Mashiach in the context of God's eternal plan for humanity. We will also see how the Messianic period is an integral part of "This World," yet is the bridge to the "World to Come" and *Techiat HaMaitim*, the Resurrection of the Dead.

### PART A. OVERVIEW OF JEWISH ESCHATOLOGY

#### 1. **Rabbi Yaakov Astor, *Soul Searching*, pp. 93-95 – There are three main components of Jewish eschatology.**

The word eschatology is defined in the dictionary as a branch of theology concerned with the final events of the history of the world. The truth is that eschatology is not exclusively the domain of religion. The most striking example of a secular eschatology would be Marxism: the convulsions and agonies of the class war, its evils resolving themselves into the classless society, the withering of the state and the blissful existence ever after.

Jewish eschatology is made up of three basic pieces:

- 1) "The Era of the Messiah."
- 2) "The Afterlife."
- 3) "The World of Resurrection."

The Messiah, according to traditional Jewish sources, will be a human being born of a flesh and blood mother and father, unlike the Christian idea that has him as the son of God conceived immaculately.

In fact, Maimonides (Rambam) writes that the Messiah will complete his job and then die like everyone else. (See Morasha class on Comparative Religions).

What's his job? To end the agony of history and usher in a new era of bliss for humanity at large. The time period in which he emerges and completes his task is called the Messianic Era ...

The Afterlife proper is called in the traditional sources Olam Haba , or the World to Come. However, the same term, "Olam Haba ," is also used to refer to the renewed utopian world of the future – the World of Resurrection, Olam HaT'chiah (as explained in the next paragraph). The former is the place righteous souls go to after death – and they have been going there since the first death. That place is also sometimes called the World of Souls. It's a place where souls exist in a disembodied state, enjoying the pleasures of closeness to God ...

The World of Resurrection, by contrast, "no eye has seen," the Talmud remarks. It's a world, according to most authorities, where the body and soul are reunited to live eternally in a truly perfected state. That world will only first come into being after the Messiah and will be initiated by an event known as the "Great Day of Judgment," (Yom HaDin HaGadol). The World of Resurrection is thus the ultimate reward, a place where the body becomes eternal and spiritual, while the soul becomes even more so.

## PART B. WHY DO WE NEED MASHIACH?

Judaism maintains that the purpose of man in this world is the correct deployment of his free will in choosing good over evil. In the Messianic era, however, God's Presence will become clearly apparent to the world, all but eliminating the necessity to choose between seemingly conflicting alternatives. With the revelation of God and diminution of the inclination toward evil, making the "correct" choice will come more naturally. It seems strange to hope for a time when the opportunity to exercise full free choice will be greatly diminished.

### 1. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 1:2:1-1:3:2 – Man must earn his perfection through the correct application of his free will, which can only happen in a physical world.**

God's purpose in Creation was to bestow of His good to another ... His wisdom therefore decreed that the nature of this true benefaction be His giving created things the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible for them.

God's wisdom, however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must be its master. That is, he must earn it for himself ... man must earn his perfection through his own free will and desire ... It was necessary, therefore, for man to be given free will, to be balanced between good and evil and not compelled toward either.

In order that God's goal best be achieved, the Highest Wisdom decreed that man should

הנה התכלית בבריאה היה להטיב מטובו ית' לזולתו...  
על כן גזרה חכמתו שמציאות הטובה האמיתית הזאת  
יהיה במה שינתן מקום לברואים לשיתדבקו בו ית',

באותו השיעור שאפשר להם שיתדבקו... ואולם גזרה  
חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי שיהיה הנהגה בו  
בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו...  
ואולם צריך שיהיה זה בבחירתו ורצונו... על כן הוכרח  
שיונח הדבר לבחירתו, שתהיה נשיתו שקולה לשני  
הצדדין ולא מוכרחת לאחד מהם...

ואולם להיות הדבר הזה נשלם כראוי, גזרה החכמה  
העליונה שיהיה האדם מורכב משני הפכים, דהיינו

consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual.

The two are then in constant battle. If the soul prevails, it not only elevates itself but the body as well, and the individual thereby attains his destined perfection.

מגשמה שכלית וזכה, וגוף ארצי ועכור, שכל אחד מהם יטה בטבע לצדו, דהיינו הגוף לחומריות והגשמה לשכליות,

ותמצא ביניהם מלחמה, באופן שאם תגבר הגשמה, תתעלה היא ותעלה הגוף עמה, ויהיה אותו האדם המשתלם בשלימות המעותד ...

The age of Mashiach, a time of great spiritual awareness and diminution of physical drives, seems to deny us the purpose of our existence.

2. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:6 – In the era of Mashiach there will be no reward for choosing good because there will be no desire for evil left to overcome.**

In the days of the Mashiach a person will not have a desire [for evil]; rather, he will naturally do what is right. And therefore there will be no merit and no demerit [for his actions], because merit and demerit are a function of desire.

בימי המשיח לא יהיה באדם חפץ אבל יעשה בטבעו המעשה הראוי, ולפיכך אין בהם לא זכות ולא חובה, כי הזכות והחובה תלויים בחפץ:

The new state of affairs ushered in by Mashiach seems to contradict the very purpose of this world. Since it is neither a time of earning reward nor of receiving it, what then is the purpose of the Messianic era?

3. **Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, Shem MiShmuel, Parshat Eikev 5666 (Devarim 7:12) – If there is no chance to earn reward, what is the purpose of the era of Mashiach?**

This raises a fundamental question: since there will be no opportunity to earn reward once the Messianic Era begins, and yet the time for receiving reward for the mitzvot we do today will also not have arrived [since the World to Come is another stage after the Messianic Era] ... what then is the point of the era of Mashiach, since it is neither a time to earn nor a time to receive reward?

ויש כאן שאלה מאחר שלימות המשיח לא יהי במה לזכות, וקיבול שכר של מצוות דהאידנא נמי לא יהא בו... א"כ כל עצמן של ימות המשיח למה הן באין, שהרי אין אנו קוראים בהם לא לעשותם ולא לקבל שכרם...

4. **Rabbi Nosson Weisz, Do We Want Mashiach Now? Aish.com – Judaism does not subscribe to being “saved.”**

We need a little background to fully appreciate the oddity of considering the coming of Mashiach fundamental to Jewish faith. Judaism does not subscribe to the belief that man can be redeemed or “saved” by anyone, including God. God put us in this world to redeem ourselves by exercising our own free will and choosing the good and rejecting the evil. The whole point of our existence in this world is that the conditions prevailing here make it a suitable environment for human independence. God’s Presence is not manifest here; consequently, we are able to choose freely without being overwhelmed by its oppressive weight and earn our reward in the World to Come by perfecting ourselves through our own efforts.

By the way, according to Jewish thought the arrival of the Mashiach has nothing to do with the World to Come or with the concept of reward. The maxim “Mitzvot cannot be rewarded in this world” (Kiddushin 39b) applies to the days of the Mashiach as it applies to any other historical era in this world. For the post-Messianic world as described in the prophets and in Jewish literature seems ill-suited to the exercise of free will that is the sole point of living in this world.

But if the historic period ushered in by the Mashiach does not provide a suitable environment for the continuing struggle between good and evil, which is the purpose of life in this world, why is it tacked on to human history at all? When the task of exercising human free will has been performed to a sufficient degree to meet God’s purpose, why doesn’t He simply usher in the World to Come instead of prolonging earthly existence for the duration of the Messianic era when the possibility of free choice is at least diminished and there is no potential for profit?

## PART C. THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to understand where Mashiach will take us, we first need to understand where we came from: the Garden of Eden. Adam and Chavah’s (Eve) decision to eat from the Tree of Knowledge caused them to leave the Garden of Eden, ultimately requiring a Messianic period to establish a universal cognizance of God.

### 1. Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:3:6-8 – Adam’s sin disrupted the balance of good and evil.

When Adam was first created ... he was composed of two equal opposites, the body and the soul. His environment contained both good and evil, and he was balanced between the two to choose whichever he wished.

The appropriate thing for him to have done would have been to choose the good. Had he done so, his soul would have overcome his body, and the spiritual would have dominated the physical. He would then have immediately attained perfection and it would have remained with him forever ...

When Adam sinned, however, things were changed greatly ... By virtue of his sin, he caused evil to increase, both in himself and in all of Creation. It subsequently became harder for him to reach perfection than it had been before.

הנה אדה"ר בעת... הוא היה מורכב משני החלקים  
ההפכיים שאמרנו שהם הנשמה והגוף, ובמציאות היו  
שני הענינים הטוב והרע, והוא עומד בשיקול ביניהם  
להדבק במה שירצה מהם.

והנה היה ראוי לו שיבחר בטוב, ויגביר נשמתו על גופו  
ושכלו על חומר, ואז היה משתלם מיד, ונח בשלימותו  
לנצח:

וכיון שחטא נשתנו הדברים שינוי גדול... ע"י חטאו  
נוספו ונתרבו חסרונות בעצמו של אדם ובבריאה כולה  
ועוד נתקשה התיקון ממה שהי' קודם.

### 2. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. III, pp. 210-11 – The sin created the false perception that reality is physical.

Before his transgression, Adam was on the level of living in Gan Eden, which was, as we have explained elsewhere, a state of awareness of the reality that Creation is spiritual and that physicality is a mere clothing that hides the true nature of reality. He literally received his life’s

אדם הראשון היה קודם חטאו בדרגת גן-עדן. כבר  
הסברנו שהוא הכיר שהרוחניות היא היא המציאות,  
והגשם הוא אך לבוש שמסתיר את המציאות  
האמיתית. הוא קבל את מזונו וכל חייתו מעולם  
הרוחני, בלי הסתר הגשמיות, כאמרם ז"ל: "מלאכים

sustenance from the spiritual world without any of the obfuscation of physicality, as the Sages say, “Angels would roast meat and pour wine for him” (Avot d’Rabbi Natan 1:8).

But when Adam sinned, he brought the Evil Inclination into his being ... and brought the world down into a state of spiritual obscurity wherein it appears as if physicality is the true nature of existence. Such is the curse he received, “By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.” That is, he entered a world that hides behind nature – cause and effect – a world that hides the hand of God beneath the veil of physicality.

היו צולין לו בשר ומסננים לו יין” (עי’ אבות דרבי נתן פ”א, ח’).

כיון שחטא אדם הראשון, נכנס בו היצר הרע... והוריד את כל העולם למצב של הסתר, עד שנדמה כאילו הגשם הוא המציאות האמיתית. זוהי הקללה של “בזעת אפיך תאכל לחם”, כלומר, שנעשה הסתר של טבע, הסתר של סבה ומסובב, שמסתיר את יד ה’ מתחת מעטה של חומריות.

### 3. **Rabbi Nosson Weisz, Do We Want Mashiach Now? Aish.com – Eating from the tree was an affirmation of the physical nature of existence.**

The sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge testifies to a belief that physical creations have the power to increase the human life force. Man can become more intelligent by imbibing the fruit of a physical entity such as a tree. If physicality is merely the outermost layer of reality this is clearly an absurd proposition. There can be no potential in physical things that does not flow into them through the spiritual medium of the soul. The soul can never increase its spiritual powers through the medium of a physical input.

Eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge with the expectation of increasing some capacity of human intelligence thereby amounts to a redefinition of man’s essential self-awareness. Obviously man must be primarily a physical being. His physical self must be the source of his life force and of his intelligence if he can increase his capacity by simply ingesting a part of the physical world. Only if reality is physically based can it be conceivable that there may be hidden potentials in plants and herbs that have the capacity of improving human intelligence.

## PART D. TIKUN OLAM

The purpose of our existence in the post-Eden world is to bring both ourselves and the world back to its original state of spiritual sensitivity.

### 1. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem 1:3:8 – We must bring ourselves back to the state that existed before Adam’s sin.**

The effort required to earn perfection is twofold: first man must bring himself and the world back to the state in which they existed before the first sin. Only then can he raise himself from that state to his destined level of perfection.

השתדלותו המצטרך עתה להגיע לשלימות, הנה הוא כפול, כי יצטרך תחלה שישובו האדם והעולם אל המצב שהיו בראשונה קודם החטא, ואחר כך שיתעלו מן המצב ההוא אל מצב השלימות שהיה ראוי לאדם שיעלה:

2. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. III, pp. 210-11 – The way to get back to Eden is by cultivating the awareness that reality is spiritual.**

The way to fix the sin of Adam HaRishon is for man to exert effort to rise above the concealment of nature, the “my power and strength of my hand” attitude by which man sees himself as ruling over nature. He must come to the clear and internal recognition that the real nature of existence is spiritual, that without it physicality has no true existence of its own, that it was only created as a test.

תיקון חטא אדם הראשון הוא שהאדם ישתדל לצאת ולהתעלות מעל הסתר זה של הטבע ושל “כחי ועוצם ידי”, שבו חושב האדם להשתלט על הטבע, עד שיבחין ברור בהכרה פנימית שהרוחניות רק היא המציאות, וכלפיה אין לגשם ממשות אמיתית, ונוצר אך לניסיון.

3. **Rabbi Nosson Weisz, Do We Want Mashiach Now? Aish.com – Mashiach brings us back to the clarity of the Garden of Eden and gives us another chance to correct Adam and Chavah’s transgression.**

The fact that man failed the test did not alter the definition of his task. Reaching the World to Come still involves passing this same original test and reconciling himself to an eternity as God’s dependant. But Adam’s sin created a major obstacle. In order to face this test, man must first return to the sort of self-awareness he had in the Garden of Eden before his sin.

It is the achievement of this sort of self-awareness that is the function of the Messianic age. The awareness of God that was the hallmark of human consciousness in the Garden of Eden before Adam’s sin is precisely equivalent to the clarity of man’s vision of God in the post-Messianic era.

4. **Ibid. (based on Maharal, Ner Mitzvah, Section 1) – The spiritual challenges of Jewish history mark the process of bringing the world back to the state prior to Adam’s sin.**

To fix the world we must somehow manage to free ourselves of the notion that there is any sort of reality in which we are fully independent of God and in full control of our own destiny. We must recognize that the choice to define ourselves as physical creatures failed in its objective. The historic process of the Four Diasporas, also referred to in the prophetic vision of Bilaam (Bamidbar/Numbers 24:17-24), was designed to accomplish this.

The first Diaspora, Babylon, was about the power of conquest. Babylon conquered the civilized world through force of arms. When this power simply rotted away, it became clear that simple military strength cannot suffice to make man independent.

The next Diaspora was Persia. The Persians attempted to achieve world hegemony through the power of wealth. Ever increasing the size of the social pie would make man independent. When this empire fell to Greek conquest, the power of wealth was exposed as insufficient. When the Greek empire collapsed in turn, the power of culture was also recognized as limited.

Finally we come to our present Diaspora, the Roman Empire and its offshoots. This Diaspora is about the power of technology and ingenuity. Man the problem solver is endlessly creative. There is no problem that is beyond his capacity to solve. If we combine the strengths of every portion of the human race, the advances we will attain through ever increasing development in the areas of the humanities and the sciences cannot fail to bring us to full independence and thus to Utopia. Our job is to set up a world environment that allows for the free flow and interchange of ideas. The exposure of the fallacy of this final hope for human independence will usher in the Mashiach.

## PART E. WHAT THEN?

We have learned that the Messianic era will give us the chance to correct the sin of Adam, but then what? What will be the purpose of existence in a perfected world?

1. **Ramchal, Da'as Tevunos (The Understanding Heart) 44 – Reward and punishment are not God's ultimate objective; universal perfection of the world is.**

As is proven from Scripture and the words of our Sages, there will come a time when man is divested of his free will and there will no longer be evil in the world ... If so, it is not reward and punishment that is the goal of Creation, but rather the universal perfection of existence.

כמו שהוכחנו מן המקראות, וכמבואר לנו בדברי חז"ל, שסוף כל סוף תסור הבחירה מן האדם, ולא יהיה עוד רעות בעולם... אם כן, אין סוף הכונה על השכר ועונש, אלא על התיקון כללי.

2. **Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, Ch. 27 – The era of Mashiach completes and perfects Creation.**

“The last 2,000 years [of the 6,000 years of history] are the days of the Mashiach” [Avodah Zarah 9a] – This means that toward the end of time is the most appropriate time for the [the arrival of the Mashiach] and for the Messianic Era to take place, because the end is the completion.

[In other words] anything which happens at the end of a process is the completion and perfection of that process. Therefore, the end of time is designated for the arrival of the King Mashiach, for he will bring the entire world to completion. The entire world will be united to the point where the whole world will be complete and perfect. Therefore, it is fitting that the King Mashiach, who will complete and perfect everything, will come at the end of time, which is the most appropriate time for completion and perfection.

ושני אלפים ימות המשיח, פירוש הזמן האחרון הוא מיוחד לימות המשיח, כי הזמן האחרון הוא השלמה,

שכל אשר הוא באחרונה הוא השלמה, ולכך הזמן האחרון מתייחס אל מלך המשיח, כי המלך המשיח יהיה משלים את כל העולם, כאשר יהיה כל העולם אחד, עד שיהיה העולם בשלימות, ולכך ראוי שיהיה מלך המשיח שהוא המשלים בסוף הזמן, שאז מסוגל אל השלמה ביותר.

3. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Jerusalem – Even though the arrival of the Messianic Era will curtail our free will and entails a sacrifice in the growth that we can still achieve, nevertheless we want it for the sake of God's glory and honor.**

After redemption, there will be no challenge since the clarity will be so great. It seems that asking for redemption is the opposite to the purpose of life. It seems a complete cop-out, as if we're saying: “Enough of this business of making these hard choices!”

We're not asking for Messiah to cover our overdraft, or to settle all of our dilemmas. The answer is that when we ask for redemption, we ask for “redemption for the sake of Your Name, גאולה למען שמך” (as we say in the Rosh HaShanah prayers). So that everyone will recognize You, and get rid of the greatest desecration of Godliness there is: man's lack of awareness of his Creator.

In fact, asking for the Mashiach has an element of sacrifice for us: we will be giving up all the joy of choice, challenge, and self-growth for the sake that the redemption should reveal Him.

Therefore, the ultimate goal of the Messianic era is for the entire world to recognize that it is God Who created, supervises, and directs the world and that we are dependent upon Him for our existence.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ∞ The era of Mashiach seems to contradict the basic tenets of free will and the view that spiritual merit is gained by correctly using one's free will to serve God. What is the purpose of a world in which the revelation of God is so clear that we will no longer be able to use our free will?
- ∞ Before we can answer that question, we must develop a perspective of the meaning of world history. Initially, Adam was created with the awareness that Creation is spiritual and that physicality is a mere clothing that hides the true nature of reality. Then, Adam and Chavah transgressed by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, at which point they were banished from the spiritual existence of the Garden of Eden.
- ∞ The course of human history is an attempt by man to get back to the state of spiritual awareness that he was on before this transgression. History teaches us that we are not the masters of nature and our fate, and that we are dependent on God.
- ∞ Mashiach brings us back to the clarity of the Garden of Eden and gives us another chance to correct Adam and Chavah's transgression.
- ∞ The ultimate goal of the Messianic era is for the entire world to recognize that it is God Who created, supervises, and directs the world and that we are dependent upon Him for our existence.

## SECTION II. THE CENTRALITY OF BELIEF IN THE MASHIACH

In this section we will explore the basic belief in the coming of Mashiach, which is one of the cornerstones of Judaism.

### 1. **Rambam, Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle 12 – Belief in the coming of the Mashiach is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith.**

I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Mashiach, and even though he may delay, nonetheless I anticipate every day that he will come.

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה, בביאת המשיח, ואף על פי שיתמהמה, עם כל זה אֶתְקַהּ לוֹ בְּכֹל יוֹם שֶׁיָּבוֹא.

### 2. **Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction to Sanhedrin, Ch. 10 – Belief in the imminent coming of the Mashiach and the greatness of his stature is firmly rooted in the Torah.**

One must believe that the Mashiach will be better and greater and more honorable than all the kings who have ever been, based on the prophecies of all the prophets

ושיאמין שיהיה לו יתרון ומעלה וכבוד על כל המלכים שהיו מעולם כפי מה שנבאו עליו כל הנביאים ממושה רבינו ע"ה עד מלאכי ע"ה, ומי שהסתפק בו או נתמעט

from Moshe (Moses) until Malachi. One who doubts this, or does not appreciate his greatness, denies [what is written in] the Torah. The Torah testifies about Mashiach explicitly in the prophecy of Bilaam [Bamidbar 25:17, with Ramban] and in Parshat Netzavim [Devarim 30:1-10, with Ramban].

אצלו מעלתו כפר בתורה, שיעד בו בתורה בפירוש  
בפרשת בלעם ופרשת אתם נצבים.

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Melachim (The Laws of Kings) 11:1 – So central is Judaism's belief in the coming of the Mashiach that one who denies it, or does not wait for his arrival is considered to have denied the entire Torah.**

Anyone who does not believe in the Mashiach, or anyone who does not wait for his arrival is denying the validity of the Torah and the Prophets (Nevi'im).

וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו, או מי שאינו מחכה לביאתו--  
לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר, אלא בתורה ובמשה  
רבנו.

Why should someone who rejects the concept of the Messiah be viewed as denying the validity of Judaism?

4. **Rabbi Yisroel Miller, What's Wrong with Being Happy? Mesorah Publications, p. 70 – What makes belief in the Messiah a fundamental principle?**

The Chasam Sofer asks: Mashiach will certainly come, as the prophets and the Gemara tell us, and denying Mashiach's coming is as great a transgression as denying the existence of Shabbat. But Shabbat, or any other specific commandment, is *not* on Rambam's list! If Rambam's thirteen principles are those beliefs without which Judaism cannot stand, why include Mashiach as one of them? In theory, if there were no Mashiach, no ultimate redemption, *chas veshalom*, and if we would remain among the nations, serving God and fulfilling His mitzvot forever – if someone mistakenly believes that to be true, has he left the core of Judaism? Mashiach is a truth, and an important part of Torah (like Shabbat) and so many other parts of Torah which Rambam omitted from his list; but what makes it an *ikkar*, a fundamental principle?

5. **Ibid. p. 72 – Our actions fit into the two levels of God's plan: as an individual, and as part of humanity.**

The general principle is that all of us live life on two different levels. We are tested each day to see if we choose to do what is right, and we each pass or fail the tests to a greater or lesser extent. And each day, regardless of what we do, God takes what we have created, and what we've done and what we are, and He finds a way to use it all to further His plan of goodness for the world. We don't know all the details. But we *do* know that no human life is totally wasted, no suffering is meaningless, and everything that happens is somehow fitted into God's plan.

6. **Ibid. p. 74 – Mashiach is the culmination of God carefully orchestrating and guiding each detail of World history. To believe the opposite undermines the principle of Divine Providence, and hence Judaism.**

Even if you recognize that you are here on earth to perform mitzvot and pass tests, if you mistakenly believe that life in itself has no ultimate purpose, that it's only a game and there is no other reason for suffering and death, no plan or purpose in all that occurs, then you may be performing mitzvot, but what you are doing is not Judaism. Consider the enormity of the Holocaust, followed by the emergence of the State of Israel.

Contemplate the resurgence of anti-Semitism even in countries without Jews, like Poland and Japan. Follow the amazing career of Yasser Arafat, who came to power and lost power a half a dozen times, each time miraculously making a comeback. Look at all the ups and downs of the past generation, like Vietnam, Watergate, Iran, Soviet collapse, intifada, hippies, race riots, energy crisis, and a million other changes. Do you believe *all that* has no purpose, that God just lets it happen without any reason? If so, Rambam tells us, you missed the boat. “I *believe* – I know – it is all part of the plan; and though I know not the details, and it has taken longer than I anticipated, I know it is all but a series of steps leading to the coming of Mashiach.”

Belief in Mashiach is expressed in our daily prayers. As will be described, the Mashiach will be a direct descendant of King David (907-837 BCE), who was king over the Land of Israel. Hence the Mashiach is referred to in the following prayer as “the offspring of David.”

**7. Shemoneh Esrei Prayer, fifteenth blessing (Siddur) – Every day, every Jewish person prays three times a day for the Mashiach to bring the Redemption.**

May You speedily cause the offspring of Your servant David [i.e. the Mashiach] to flourish, and enhance his pride through Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day long. Blessed are You, God, Who causes the pride of salvation to flourish.

את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה תצמיח. וקרנו תרום  
בישועתך. כי לישועתך קוינו כל היום. ברוך אתה ה',  
מצמיח קרן וישועה:

**8. Kaddish Prayer (Siddur Nusach Edot HaMizrach and Sefard) – Every Kaddish contains a prayer for Mashiach.**

Exalted and sanctified is God's great Name. In the world which He has created according to His Will, may He establish His kingdom, may His salvation blossom and may He bring soon his anointed one [Mashiach].

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. (אמן): בעלמא די ברא  
פרעותיה. וימליך מלכותיה. ויצמח פריה. ויקרב  
משיחה. (אמן):

Since the coming of the Messiah is described to us in the Torah (see source 2 above), our belief in his coming is based on the veracity and truthfulness of the Torah in general (see Morasha classes on *Evidence for Torah M'Sinai*). The following source elaborates:

**9. Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon, Emunot ve-Deot 8:1 – Trust in God's word and faith in His goodness demand belief in a future redemption.**

The fact of our redemption [by the Mashiach] is undeniable for various reasons.

One such reason is that it was confirmed by the miracles performed by Moshe, who informed us [of the Mashiach's future arrival], as well as by the miracles later performed by Yeshayahu [who also informed us of the Mashiach's future arrival], and by the many other prophets who announced [the future arrival of the Mashiach.] God, Who sent these prophets to perform these miracles in the

שרש הגאולה הוא חייב מפנים רבים:

מהם קיום אותות משה אשר החל ובשר בהם,  
והאותות אשר יתקיימו לישעיה, וזולתו מהנביאים  
אשר בשרו בהם, ושהשולח אותם משלימם בלי ספק,  
כמו שאמר (ישעיה מ"ד כ"ו) מקים דבר עבדו ועצת  
מלאכיו ישלים.

first place, will surely fulfill the message He sent with them as well, as it is said, “He confirms the word of His servant and performs the council of his messengers” (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 44:26).

Also, we believe that God is “just and will do no wrong.” Yet, having inflicted upon our people heavy and prolonged suffering – some as punishment and some as a test – each one in its kind must have a limit. It cannot be fathomed that it will go on like this ad infinitum ...

ומהם שהוא צדיק לא יעול, וכבר הביא על האומה הגולה הגדולה הזאת אצלנו הארוכה, ובלי ספק כי קצתה לענש, וקצתה לנסיון, ולכל אחד משני העניינים מדה בתכלי, ולא יתכן שיהיה באין תכלית...

## KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ∞ Rather than being a side concept, belief in the coming of the Mashiach is absolutely central to Judaism. Every day, Jews around the world pray for the arrival of the Mashiach. A person who does not believe in his arrival or does not anticipate it, is considered to be denying the entire Torah.
- ∞ Why is someone who denies the coming of the Messiah viewed as denying the Torah? Messiah is the culmination of God carefully orchestrating and guiding each detail of world history. To believe otherwise undermines the Jewish understanding of God's direct involvement in the world.

## SECTION III. WHO IS THE MASHIACH?

In this section we will learn who the Mashiach will be, what he will be like, and what we expect him to accomplish.

### PART A. BASIC QUALIFICATIONS

#### i. Leader and King

The term *mashiach* refers to someone anointed with oil, and is the general term for someone in a position of leadership, as the next source indicates.

#### 1. Rashi, Yeshayahu 61:1 – The term *mashiach* refers to leadership.

The word *mashiach* refers to leadership and greatness.

אין משיחה זו אלא לשון שררה וגדולה:

In the next source, we see that the Mashiach will be the greatest leader and political genius the world has ever seen. He will put these extraordinary talents to use to precipitate a worldwide revolution, which will bring perfect social justice, and influence all men to serve God with a pure heart.

2. **Rambam, Sanhedrin 10:1 s.v. *aval yemot ha'mashiach*; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah (Laws of Repentance) 9:2 – The Mashiach will be a world leader of unprecedented proportions. He will lead mankind back to the way of God.**

**Rambam, Sanhedrin 10:1**

During the Messianic Era, kingship will return to the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. The Messiah, who will be a king, will establish his place of leadership in Tzion [Jerusalem]. His fame will spread and reach the ends of the earth, even more so than during King Shlomo's (Solomon) reign. Additionally, the nations of the world will establish a peace pact with him.

**Hilchot Teshuvah 9:2**

The Messiah, who will be a king descended from King David, will be even wiser than King Shlomo. His level of prophecy will approach that of Moshe's. Therefore, he will instruct the entire Jewish people in the way of God. Furthermore, the world's nations will come to hear him speak, as predicted by the prophet: "At the End of Days the mountain of God's house [the Temple in Jerusalem] shall be set over all other mountains and lifted high above the hills [and all nations will come streaming to it. Many shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to God's mountain, to the house of Israel's God. He, the Messiah, will teach us his way, and we will walk in His paths]...'" [Yeshayahu 2:2-3].

רמב"ם על משנה מסכת סנהדרין פרק י משנה א ד"ה אבל ימות המשיח: אבל ימות המשיח הוא זמן שבו תחזור המלכות לישראל, ויחזרו לארץ ישראל, ויהיה אותו המלך העומד מקום מלכותו ציון, ויתגדל שמו ויגיע לקצו תבל יותר וגדול על ממלכת שלמה, ויכרתו עמו העמים ברית שלום ...

**רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ט הלכה ב**

... המלך שיעמוד מזרע דוד בעל חכמה יהיה יתר משלמה, ונביא גדול הוא קרוב למושה רבינו, ולפיכך ילמד כל העם ויורה אותם דרך ה', ויבואו כל הגוים לשומעו שנאמר "וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים נִכּוֹן יְהוָה הַר בֵּית ה' בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים [וְנִשְׂא מִגְבְּעוֹת וְנִהְרָו אֵלָיו כָּל הַגּוֹיִם. וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לָכֵן וְנַעֲלָה אֵל הַר יְקִיָּץ אֵל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִהְיֶה מְדֻרְכָּיו וְנִלְקָה בְּאַחֲרֵיתוֹ...]"

**ii. Descendant of King David**

1. **Bereishit (Genesis) 49:10, with Targum Yonasan – The Mashiach will be descended from the tribe of Yehudah (Judah) since all future Jewish kings will be born from descendants of this tribe.**

The sceptre shall not depart from Yehudah, or the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the arrival of Shiloh [Mashiach]; and to him shall the obedience of the peoples be.

**Targum Yonasan**

There will never cease to be kings and rulers from the house of Yehudah, and teachers of Torah to thousands from his children until the King Mashiach comes [who will also be one of his descendants].

לא-יסור שבט מיהודה, ומחקה מבין רגליו, עד בן-יבא שילה, ולו יקחה עמים.

לא פסקין מלכין ושלטיין מדבית יהודה וספרין מאלפי אוריתא מזרעה עד זמן די ייתי מלכא משיחא.

## 2. **Abarbanel, Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 34:24 – The Mashiach will be a descendant of King David or a reincarnation of him.**

“My servant David” – The Mashiach will be a descendant of David ... However, the Kabbalists regard reincarnation as a fundamental principle of Judaism. They therefore say that the Mashiach will be a reincarnation of King David himself.

ועבדי דוד – ...מלך המשיח יהיה מזרע דוד ... אבל בעלי הקבלה שקיימו וקבלו דעת גלגול נפשות, אמרו שמלך המשיח יהיה דוד עצמו כי הגה נפש דוד תתגלגל במלך המשיח.

There are numerous Jewish families today that can trace their ancestry back to King David. For example, the Maharal of Prague (1512-1609) was able to trace his lineage to Rav Hai Gaon (939-1038), who in turn traditionally was a descendant of King David. There are numerous families that still trace their lineage to the Maharal (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. II, 25:3).

In the next source, we discuss the deeper meaning of the Mashiach being a reincarnation of King David.

## 3. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Mashivat Nefesh on Nefesh HaChaim 1:20 (Gloss) – Mashiach will embody the ideal creation of man, and will therefore be a reincarnation of King David.**

What is being explained here is that Mashiach is the embodiment of the ideal creation of man. This is not something that can be said about just any individual. Even though every person was created in line with the original ideal, nevertheless that ideal is not actualized (remains in a stage of “root”) in them. As such, there is no one who so much resembles the ideal creation of man that one would be able to recognize it by studying him. But David HaMelech completed and sanctified himself in actual practice to such an extent that one could look at him and understand God’s purpose in the creation of man. As such, one could say that he brought to the fore the ideal of “Adam.” Our righteous Mashiach will actualize the root of this soul to the fullest extent ...

נתבאר כאן שמושיח הוא התגשמות הרעיון של בריאת האדם, וזהו דבר שבדרך כלל אי אפשר לומר על אדם פרטי. כי אע“פ שכל בני האדם נבראו מכח אתו רעיון, עדיין הרעיון הוא הרבה יותר נעלה מהאדם בפועל, ואין בן אנוש שהרעיון משתקף בו עד שניתן להכיר על ידי התבוננות בו מה היה הרעיון בבריאת האדם. אבל דוד המלך השלים וקידש את עצמו, והוציא את שורש הנשמה שלו לפועל, עד שמהתבוננות בו היה אפשר להכיר ולהבין מה היה הרעיון של הקב“ה בבריאת האדם. לכן אפשר לומר שהוא הוציא לפועל את הרעיון של ‘אדם’. ומשיח צדקינו יוציא את שורש נשמתו לפועל לגמרי...

### iii. Personal Qualities of Greatness

#### 1. **Yeshayahu 11:2 – Mashiach will possess six qualities of personal greatness (cf. Sanhedrin 93b; Rashi s.v. v’nacha).**

God’s spirit will rest upon him, (1) the spirit of wisdom and (2) understanding, (3) the spirit of counsel and (4) might, (5) the spirit of knowledge and (6) fear of God.

וְנָחָה עָלָיו רוּחַ ה' (א) רוּחַ חֵכְמָה (ב) וְיָבִינָה (ג) רוּחַ עֲצָה (ד) וְיִגְבֹּרָה (ה) רוּחַ דַּעַת (ו) וְיִרְאַת ה':

Among the tasks that will be assigned to Mashiach is the adjudication of national issues such as determining Jewish lineage, tribal lineage, and settling seemingly unsolvable legal problems. As the next source describes, he will be able to accomplish these tasks with exceptional powers of insight.

2. **Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:3 – Mashiach will have Divine Inspiration, which will help him to determine a person's lineage.**

In the days of the King Mashiach, when his kingdom will be established and all of Israel will gather to him, he will determine the lineage of each one by virtue of the Divine Inspiration that shall rest upon him ...

He will determine to which tribe each person belongs, proclaiming: "This one to that tribe," etc.

בימי המלך המשיח כשתתיישב מלכותו ויתקבצו אליו כל ישראל יתייחסו כולם על פיו ברוח הקודש שתנוח עליו ...

ואינו מייחס ישראל אלא לשבטיהם שמודיע שזה משבט פלוני וכו'.

In the next source we will see that the Mashiach will have the power to sense a person's spirit, thereby knowing his entire spiritual record, and judge whether a person is guilty or not.

3. **Yeshayahu 11:3; Sanhedrin 93b – Mashiach will be able to judge people with a supernatural sense of "smell."**

And he shall be animated [*va'haricho*] by the awe of God, and neither with the sight of his eyes shall he judge, nor with the hearing of his ears shall he chastise.

**Sanhedrin 93b**

[The Talmud identifies the linguistic anomaly of the word for "animated," *va'haricho*, noticing its similarity to the Hebrew word *meriach*, smell.] Rava said: He will smell a person and judge him, as it is written [immediately afterward], "Neither with the sight of his eyes shall he judge [nor with the hearing of his ears shall he chastise]."

והריחו בריאת ה' ולא למראה עיניו ישפוט ולא למשמע אזניו יוכיח:

**סנהדרין צג:**

רבא אמר: דמורח ודאין דכתיב (ישעיהו י"א) ולא למראה עיניו ישפוט [ולא למשמע אזניו יוכיח]:

**PART B. HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The identity of the Mashiach will be determined if he accomplishes the specific goals that his mission requires. In the next source, we differentiate between accomplishments that will allow us to believe that he *could* be the Mashiach, versus those accomplishments that *confirm* his identity beyond a shadow of a doubt.

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:4 – Only when the Mashiach rebuilds the Temple in Jerusalem and returns the entire Jewish people to the Land of Israel will his identity be confirmed with certainty.**

If a king arises from:

1. the house of David who is
2. learned in Torah; and
3. is involved with mitzvot like David his ancestor, according to both the Written and Oral Torah; and
4. if he persuades all of Israel to follow the path [of Torah and mitzvot] and strengthens their observance; and

ואם יעמוד מלך:

1. מבית דוד
2. הוגה בתורה
3. ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו,
4. וכופף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה,

5. if he fights the wars of God – then he is *presumed* to be Mashiach.
6. If he continues and is successful and defeats all the surrounding non-Jewish nations; and
7. builds the Beit HaMikdash (Temple) at its location; and
8. gathers all the Jews exiled around the world to the Land of Israel – then he is *certainly* Mashiach.

5. וילחם מלחמות ה'--הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח:

6 אם עשה והצליח, וניצח כל האומות שסביביו,

7. ובנה מקדש במקומו,

8. וקבץ נדחי ישראל--הרי זה משיח בוודאי.

How will the Mashiach manage to reach every single Jewish person and inform him of his arrival? The answer is alluded to in the following prophecies.

## 2. **Yeshayahu 11:12 – The Mashiach will bring all Jews back to the Land of Israel.**

And it shall come to pass on that day, that the descendant of Yishai [i.e. the Mashiach] who stands as a banner for the peoples, to him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass that on that day, the Lord shall continue to apply His hand a second time to acquire the rest of His people, that will remain from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Sumeria, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He shall raise a banner to the nations, and He shall gather the lost of Israel, and the scattered ones of Judah He shall gather from the four corners of the earth.

והיה ביום ההוא שרש ישי אשר עמד לנס עמים אליו גוים ידרשו והיתה מנחתו כבוד: והיה ביום ההוא יוסף אדני שנית ידו לקנות את שאר עמו אשר ישאר מאשור וממצרים ומפתרום ומכוש ומעילם ומשנער ומחמת ומאיי הים: ונשא נס לגוים ואסף נדחי ישראל ונפצות יהודה יקבץ מארבע כנפות הארץ:

## 3. **Ramban, Bamidbar 24:17 – He will make himself visible to the whole world, as if he were a star flashing across the sky.**

Because Mashiach will gather all the lost of Israel from the ends of the earth, he is therefore compared to a star flashing across the heavens, from one end of the sky to the other [visible to the whole world, as it were, to gather in Jews from their dispersion]. As the verse states “[I was watching night visions] and with clouds of heaven one like a man came” (Daniel 7:13).

בעבור כי המשיח יקבץ נדחי ישראל מקצה הארץ, ימשילנו לכוכב הדורך ברקיע מקצה השמים, כמו שנאמר בו (דניאל ז' ג): וארו עם ענני שמיא כבר אנש אתה וגו'.

As the following source describes, once the Mashiach's identity is known throughout the world, he will clarify the truth for the nations of the world.

## 4. **Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:4 – Mashiach will clarify the truth for all.**

When the true King Mashiach arises and succeeds, and will become elevated and exalted

וכשיעמוד המלך המשיח באמת, ויצליח וירום וינשא-- מיד הם כולך חוזרין ויודעים ששקר נחלו אבותיהם,

– immediately all of them [the non-Jewish nations] will return to the truth, and know that their ancestors gave them falsehood [a false Mashiach], and that their prophets and leaders misled them.

ושנביאיהם ואבותיהם הטעוים.

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ⇒ The Mashiach will be a king directly descended from King David, from the tribe of Yehudah. He will possess extraordinary qualities of personal greatness, wisdom, strength, and closeness to God. He will have supernatural powers of judgment and sensitivity.
- ⇒ But personal qualities will not be enough to convince the Jewish people of his status as Mashiach until he accomplishes the specific goals that were established by the prophets. He is presumed to be the Mashiach if he is learned in Torah, performs mitzvot, inspires the Jewish people to return to God, and defends God's honor. However, his identity will only be confirmed when he rebuilds the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem and returns all the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### WHAT ROLE DOES BELIEF IN MASHIACH PLAY IN THE JEWISH RELIGION?

Rather than being a side concept, belief in the coming of the Mashiach is absolutely central to Judaism. Every day, Jews around the world pray for the arrival of the Mashiach.

The course of human history is an attempt by man to get back to the state of spiritual awareness that Adam and Chavah were on before eating from the Tree of Knowledge. History teaches us that we are not the masters of nature and our fate, and that we are dependent on God. Mashiach brings us back to the clarity of the Garden of Eden and gives us another chance to correct Adam and Chavah's transgression. The ultimate goal of the Messianic era is for the entire world to recognize that it is God Who created, supervises, and directs the world, and that we are dependent upon Him for our existence.

### FREE CHOICE WILL BE GREATLY DIMINISHED AFTER MASHIACH'S ARRIVAL. SINCE THE POINT OF LIFE IS TO USE OUR FREE WILL FOR THE GOOD, WHY DO WE HOPE FOR AN ERA WHEN WE WON'T BE ABLE TO USE IT?

The ultimate purpose of Creation, beyond the reward and accountability for how we lived our lives in this world, is the perfection of all existence and revelation of God's Presence. Mashiach will usher in the period when all of humanity will recognize and bring honor to God.

### WHO WILL THE MASHIACH BE AND HOW WILL WE KNOW?

The Mashiach will be a king directly descended from King David, from the tribe of Yehudah. He will possess extraordinary qualities of personal greatness, wisdom, strength, and closeness to God. He will have supernatural powers of judgment and sensitivity. But personal qualities will not be enough to convince the Jewish people of his status as Mashiach until he accomplishes the specific goals that were established by the prophets, which include rebuilding the Temple and gathering the entire Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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Maharal, *Ner Mitzvah*, Section 1

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought*, Vol. II, pp. 372-378

Rabbi J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, pp. 595-618

Ner Le'Elef Books, *This World and the Next*, pp. 74-85

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