

Fundamental Questions of Jewish Theology: What does it mean to “yearn for *mashiah*”?

Part III – Consciousness vs. Belief

I. DEFINING THE TERMS

1. Rambam, *M.T. Laws of Kings 11:1*

In the future, the Messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. ... Anyone who does not believe in him or does not await his coming, denies not only the statements of the other prophets, but those of the Torah and Moses, our teacher.

1. רמב"ם משנה תורה הלכות מלכים פרק י"א הלכה א'

הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ עֲתִיד לְעֹמֵד וּלְהַחְזִיר מַלְכוּת דָּוִד לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
לְמַמְשָׁלָהּ הָרִאשׁוֹנָה. ... וְכֹל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מֵאֲמִין בּוֹ, אוֹ מִי
שֶׁאֵינוֹ מַחְכֶּה לְבִיאָתוֹ – לֹא בִשְׂאֵר נְבִיאִים בְּלִבַּד הוּא
בּוֹפֵר. אֲלֵא בַתּוֹרָה וּבַמֹּשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ. ...

2. David Shatz, “The Muted Messiah,” *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 274

By messianic consciousness I refer to the adoption of one or more of five ways of thinking and acting:

1. Interpreting contemporary events as components of a messianic process, such as realizations of prophecies and rabbinic dicta.
2. Calculating when the Messiah will come.
3. Devoting substantial thought to how the messianic age will unfold.
4. Acting with the conscious intention of bringing the Messiah and/or the messianic age, while believing that the Messiah and the age have not yet arrived.
5. Having, at the forefront of one’s consciousness, the hope for the Messiah’s coming.

3. *Siddur (Nusah Ashkenaz)*

And return in mercy to Jerusalem, Your city, and dwell therein as You have spoken; and rebuild it soon, in our days, as an everlasting structure, and may You speedily establish the throne of David therein. Blessed are You, HASHEM, Builder of Jerusalem.

Speedily cause the sprout of David, Your servant, to flourish and exalt his power with Your deliverance. We hope all day for Your deliverance. Blessed are You, HASHEM, Who causes the power of salvation to sprout.

3. סידור (נוסח אשכנז)

וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עֵירְךָ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב וְתִשְׁכַּח בְּתוֹכָהּ כְּאֲשֶׁר
דִּבַּרְתָּ וּבִנְיָה אוֹתָהּ בְּקִרְוֹב בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּנֵן עוֹלָם וְכֹסֵא דָּוִד
מְהֵרָה לְתוֹכָהּ תִּכְיֶן: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם:

אֲתַצְמַח דָּוִד עַבְדְּךָ מְהֵרָה תִצְמַיֵחַ וְקִרְנּוֹ תִרוּם בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ
כִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִינּוּנוֹ כֹּל הַיּוֹם: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מִצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן
יְשׁוּעָה:

II. REASONS TO FAVOR BELIEF

4. Rambam, *M.T. Laws of Kings* 12:2

Similarly, one should not try to determine the appointed time for *Mashiah's* coming. Our Sages declared: "May the spirits of those who attempt to determine the time of *Mashiah's* coming expire!" (*Sanh.* 97b) Rather, one should await and believe in the general conception of the matter as explained.

5. Ramban, *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, Vol. I, p. 259

Thus the statement "May the spirits of those who attempt to determine the time of *Mashiah's* coming expire!" is nullified. For they knew that it would be a long time until redemption and did not want to reveal that, lest it diminish the masses' weak hope. But nowadays this problem is no longer relevant since we are in the end of days. And further, we speak only of that which is maybe and possible, we do not declare absolute statements.

6. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "On Appropriate Religious Responses to Hurricane Sandy" *Pages of Faith*

As you probably know, I come from a school of thought which reacts very strongly against statements, assertions, defamations, made by people who claim to have, or who speak as if they think they have, some direct hotline to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, so that they are able to contemplate events, and interpret the events in accordance with their philosophic orientation, their spiritual stance, and say: "ah hah, I told you so."

I take my tact from a different world, particularly the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (105b) – the *gemara* says with regard to Bilam – "who obtains knowledge from the Most High" (Num. 24:16) is the way he described himself, and *Chazal* comment: "He had knowledge from the Most High?! The message the donkey communicated to him, that he couldn't understand; the will of the *Ribbono Shel Olam* he could understand? This is partly a problem of folly – and it would be foolish of me to pretend to read cuneiforms or picture languages, and it's folly for a person to imagine that he possess knowledge from the Most High.

Apart from the folly, there's a certain arrogance involved in this, and a certain self-confidence, which one finds very repugnant. ...

4. רמב"ם משנה תורה הלכות מלכים פרק י"ב הלכה ב'

וְכֵן לֹא יִחְשַׁב הַקְּצִיץ. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים, תִּפְּח רֹחֶם שְׁל מְחַשְׁבֵי הַקְּצִיץ. אֵלֶּא יַחֲכֶה וַיֵּאֱמִין בְּכֹלֵל הַדְּבָר כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּאֲרָנוּ:

5. רמב"ן ספר הגאולה (בספר כתבי רמב"ן חלק א' עמוד רנ"ט)

וכן בטל מה שאמרו: "תִּפְּח רֹחֶם שְׁל מְחַשְׁבֵי הַקְּצִיץ". כי הם יודעים אריכות הקץ ולא רצו שיתגלה פן יהיה זה רפיון להמון בחלישות תקוותם. ועכשיו בטלו הטענות הואיל ואנחנו באחרית הימים. ועוד כי דברינו אינן אלא דברי שמע ואפשר, ואינם מאמר מוחלט.

7. David Shatz, “The Muted Messiah,” *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 307 (n. 41)

I have occasionally mused over an ilronic result of naturalistic messianism: that if one adheres to Maimonides’ assertion that there will be no more miracles in the messianic age, and one believes that Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War was miraculous, one will have to say *automatically*, without gleaning other evidence, that 1967 was not messianic, since for Maimonides the messianic age contains no miracles! (I am mostly facetious, but there may be a kernel of a serious question here.)

8. Avraham Walfish, “When Theology Knocks,” *Tradition* 39:3 (2006), p. 80

The Rav’s view staked out an intermediate position. The divine knock on the door recognizes the enormous value and theological significance of the establishment of the State of Israel, without according it irrevocable redemptive standing. The Rav avoids portraying the return of the Jewish people to their sacred land as a sign of redemption: it is not included among the Rav’s six divine knocks. He does relate to the sanctity of the land—a topic on which he expanded profoundly on other occasions—in his chapter on the obligation of Torah Judaism to *erets Yisra’el*. Consonant with the general thrust of *Kol Dodi Dofek*, the sanctity of the land is portrayed as an obligation directed toward man: The return to the land has thrust upon the Jewish people the imperative of widespread settlement, and—not uncharacteristically—the Jewish people, including the religious community, have failed to rise to the challenge.

9. Dov Schwartz, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*: A Religious-Zionist Alternative,” *Tradition* 39:3 (2006), pp. 67–68

In many respects, R. Soloveitchik’s philosophy stands in stark contrast to religious-Zionist thought, which takes metaphysics as its *grundnorm* [fundamental principle]. An imaginary meeting between Rav Kook and R. Soloveitchik would probably consist of lack of dialogue and mutual misunderstanding. The two expressed their ideas in completely different modes of thought and in terminology foreign to the other. The formative element of Rav Kook’s philosophy is metaphysical, causal, and teleological historical philosophy and historiography. Rav Kook himself, his son, Rabbi Tsevi Yehuda Kook, his students, and his students’ students to this very day expound on history as a progressive march towards redemption. ...

Rav Kook and his son adhered fanatically to this kind of metaphysical theory of history; but explanations of this kind were in the vogue in general religious-Zionist philosophy as well. This is exactly the kind of explication that R. Soloveitchik quietly struggles against. As far as he was concerned, these reasons are a pointless and superfluous guess as to the mysterious ways of God. His great message was to the call to focus on the question of meaning, and on the *halahkic* answers to this question.

10. Shalom Carmy, “Soloveitchik the Zionist,” *First Things*, May 2018

“Rabbi, if only I knew our suffering was paving the way for the Messiah,” cried a Jewish refugee to R. Hayyim Soloveitchik of Brest-Litovsk shortly before his death in World War I-era Warsaw. R. Hayyim rebuffed him, questioning whether it was self-evident that the advent of the Redeemer justified the mass carnage and horrific suffering that came with the war. ...

R. Soloveitchik liked to recount the exchange between R. Hayyim and his fellow Jew in Warsaw because he realized it provided the key to his decidedly mundane brand of Zionism. If divine providence is irrevocably committed to cosmic redemption through politics, and if being on the right side of that history is the highest moral imperative, then the price to be paid in blood and suffering is a secondary consideration. For the Rav and the tradition he continued even as he diverged from it, the human cost cannot be ignored. This led him to insist upon the distinction between judgments of political prudence and theological claims about the working out of the divine plan. He was a religious man who was a Zionist, not someone who wanted Zionism to become a religion.

11. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Be-Sod ha-Yahid ve-hayahad*, 404–405

This term *meshihiyut*, “messianism,” is an alien growth in my garden. ... In summary, the term *meshihiyut* does not find favor in my eyes and has never been on my table.