

MASHIACH UNPACKED

THE 3 MESSIANIC VISIONS IN TORAH

MIZRACHI - BOREHAMWOOD, MAY 2025

• There are 3 major vision of Mashiach in Jewish thought:

(i) Rambam (Maimonides) and the rationalists: The time of Mashiach involves a non-miraculous natural process, the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael and an era of world peace. It is completely separate from Olam Haba, which is the purely spiritual soul world after death.

(ii) Ramban (Nachmanides) and the mystics: The time of Mashiach is the supernatural era at the end of history which combines the spiritual and physical worlds. At that stage, it is the same as Olam Haba.

(iii) According to many other commentators (rationalist and mystic) there is a pre-messianic period called the time of Mashiach ben Yosef. This is a physical preparation for the coming of Mashiach ben David.

• Note there are also other concepts that we will not be able to address in this shiur, including:

- a pre-messianic (or possibly entirely non-messianic) concept of 'Geula' - redemption. In this, the Jewish people are restored (at least to some extent) to their homeland and personal autonomy.
- Reincarnation - Gilgul Neshamot
- The Resurrection of the Dead - Techiyat HaMetim

A] MAIMONIDES AND THE RATIONALISTS

1. א המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד, ולהחזיר מלכות בית דוד לישנה הממשלה הראשונה, ובונה מקדש, ומקבץ נדחי ישראל. וחוזרין כל המשפטים בימי, כשהיו מקדם: מקריבין קרבנות, ועושין שמטין ויובלות ככל מצותן האמורה בתורה. וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו, או מי שאינו מחכה לביאתו - לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר, אלא בתורה ובמשה רבנו: שהרי תורה העידה עליו, שנאמר 'ושב ה' אלהיך את-שבותך, ורחמך; ושב, וקבצך מכל-העמים ... אם-יהיה נדחך, בקצה השמים - מושם יקבצך ה' אלהיך ומושם יקחך. והביאך ה' אלהיך ...' (דברים לג-ה). ואלי הדברים המפורשים בתורה, הם כוללים כל הדברים שנאמרו על ידי כל הנביאים

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק יא הלכה א'

In the future, the Messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel. Then, in his days, the observance of all the statutes will return to their previous state. We will offer sacrifices, observe the Sabbatical and Jubilee years according to all their particulars as described by the Torah.

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. The Torah testified to his coming, as Deuteronomy 30:3-5 states: "God will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will again gather you from among the nations ... Even if your Diaspora is at the ends of the heavens, God will gather you up from there... and bring you to the land...." These explicit words of the Torah include all the statements made by all the prophets. Maimonides Mishne Torah - Laws of Kings 11:1

The Messianic Era for the Rambam involves: (i) restoration of the dynasty of David; (ii) re-building the Temple; (iii) the ingathering of exiles; (iv) the restoration of the halachic system to its full application

2. ז אבל טובת חיי העולם הבא, אין לה ערך ודמיון, ולא דמוה הנביאים, כדי שלא יפחתו אותה בדמיון. הוא שישעיהו אומר "עין לא-ראתה, אלהים זולתך--געשה, למחכה-לו" (ישעיהו סד, ג) כלומר הטובה שלא ראתה אותה עין נביא, אלא עשה אותה האלהים לאדם שמחכה לו. אמרו חכמים, כל הנביאים כלן לא נתנבאו אלא לימות המשיח, אבל העולם הבא, "עין לא-ראתה, אלהים זולתך."

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ח"ז

However, the good of the life of the World to Come has no comparison or likeness, nor was it described by the prophets, lest with such a description, they diminish it. This was implied by Isaiah's (64:3) statement: "No eye has ever seen, O God, except for You, what You will do for those who wait for You;" i.e. the good which was not perceived by the vision of a prophet and is perceived by God alone, this was created by God for those who wait for Him. The Sages declared: "All the prophets only prophesied about the Messianic Age. However, regarding the World to Come — 'No eye has ever seen, O God, except for You.'" Maimonides Mishne Torah - Laws of Repentance 8:7

We have almost no understanding of the nature of Olam Haba. The prophecies in Tanach refer to the Messianic Age which is part of this world.

3. ג אל יעלה על דעתך שהמלך המשיח, צריך לעשות אותות ומופתים, ומחדש דברים בעולם, או מחיה מתים, וכיוצא בדברים אלו שהטפשים אומרים; אין הדבר כן--שהרי רבי עקיבא חכם גדול מחכמי משנה היה, והוא היה נושא פלוי שלבן כוזבא המלך, והוא היה אומר עליו, שהוא המלך המשיח. ודמה הוא וכל חכמי דורו שהוא המלך המשיח, עד שנהרג בעוונות; כיון שנהרג, נודע שאינו משיח, ולא שאלו ממנו חכמים, לא אות ולא מופת.

ועיקר הדברים, ככה הו': שהתורה הזאת אין חקיה ומשפטיה משתנים לעולם, ולעולמי עולמים, ואין מוסיפין עליה, ולא גורעין מה; וכל המוסיף או גורע, או שגלה פנים בתורה והוציא הדברים שלמצוות מפשוטן--הרי זה בודאי רשע ואפיקורוס.

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק יא הלכה ג'

One should not presume that the Messianic king must work miracles and wonders, bring about new phenomena in the world, resurrect the dead, or perform other similar deeds. This is definitely not true.

Proof can be brought from the fact that Rabbi Akiva, one of the greater Sages of the Mishnah, was one of the supporters of King Bar Kozibah and would describe him as the Messianic king. He and all the Sages of his generation considered him to be the Messianic king until he was killed because of sins. Once he was killed, they realized that he was not the Mashiach. The Sages did not ask him for any signs or wonders.

The main thrust of the matter is: This Torah, its statutes and its laws, are everlasting. We may not add to them or detract from them. Maimonides Mishne Torah - Laws of Kings 11:3

4. א אל יעלה על הלב שבימות המשיח, יבטל דבר ממנהגו שלעולם, או יהיה שם חדוש במעשה בראשית; אלא עולם כמנהגו הולך. וזה שנאמר בישעיה "וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם-כֶּבֶשׂ, וְנִמְר עִם-גְּדִי יִרְבֹּץ" (ישעיהו יא,ו), מְשַׁל וְחִידָה. עֵנִן הַדָּבָר - שִׁיחֵיו יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹשְׁבֵין לְבֶטֶח עִם רִשְׁעֵי הָעוֹלָם, הַמְשׁוּלִים בְּזֶאֵב וְנִמְר: שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "זֶאֵב עֲרֻבֹת יִשְׁדָּדִם--נִמְר שֹׁקֵד עַל-עֲרִיקָם" (ירמיהו הו,ו). וְיִחְזְרוּ כָלֶם לְדַת הָאֱמֶת, וְלֹא יִגְזְלוּ וְלֹא יִשְׁחִיתוּ, אֲלֵא יֵאָכְלוּ דָבָר הַמֵּתָר בְּנִחַת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וְאֵרִיָּה, כִּבְקָר יֵאָכֵל-תֵּבֶן" (ישעיהו יא,ו); וישעיהו סה,כה). וְכֵן כָּל כְּיוּצָא בָּאֵלֹו הַדְּבָרִים הַכְּתוּבִין בְּעֵנִן הַמְּשִׁיחַ, מְשָׁלִים הֵם; וּבִימֹות הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ יִנָּדַע לְכָל לְאִיזָה דָּבָר הֵיוּ מְשָׁל, וְיִמָּה עֵנִין רְמוּז בָּהֶן.

ב אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים, אִין בֵּין הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה לִימֹות הַמְּשִׁיחַ, אֲלֵא שְׁעֲבִיד מַלְכוּת בְּלָבָד

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק יב הלכה א-ב'

1. Do not presume that in the Messianic age any facet of the world's nature will change or there will be innovations in the work of creation. Rather, the world will continue according to its pattern.

Although Isaiah 11:6 states: "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the young goat," these words are a metaphor and a parable. The interpretation of the prophecy is as follows: Israel will dwell securely together with the wicked gentiles who are likened to a wolf and a leopard, as in the prophecy Jeremiah 5:6: "A wolf from the wilderness shall spoil them and a leopard will stalk their cities." They will all return to the true faith and no longer steal or destroy. Rather, they will eat permitted food at peace with Israel as Isaiah 11:7 states: "The lion will eat straw like an ox." Similarly, other Messianic prophecies of this nature are metaphors. In the Messianic era, everyone will realize which matters were implied by these metaphors and which allusions they contained.

2. Our Sages taught: "There will be no difference between the current age and the Messianic era except the emancipation from our subjugation to the gentile kingdoms." Maimonides Mishne Torah - Laws of Kings 12:1-2

The Rambam sees the Messianic Age very much as part of this world - a non-miraculous continuation of our current existence, but ushering in an era of world peace. He emphasizes in particular that the halachic system will not change.

5. ה וּבָאוּתוֹ הַזֶּמֶן, לֹא יִהְיֶה שָׁם לֹא רָעַב וְלֹא מִלְחָמָה וְלֹא קִנְיָה וְתַחֲרוּת - שֶׁהַטּוֹבָה תִּהְיֶה מְשֻׁפָּעֶת הָרָבָה, וְכָל הַמַּעֲדָנִים מְצוּיִין כְּצֶפֶר

רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק יב הלכה ה'

In that era, there will be neither famine or war, envy or competition for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know God. Maimonides Mishne Torah - Laws of Kings 12:1-2

The Rambam sees the Messianic Age very much as part of this world - a non-miraculous continuation of our current existence. The Messianic era will also be one in which there is no world hunger. Taken together with the Rambam's picture of a non-miraculous Messianic era, this is a pointed social comment on the cause of poverty and starvation today - not that there are insufficient resources to go around but that there is an unwillingness to share the resources that we have.

B] NACHMANIDES AND THE MYSTICS

6. ומל ה' אלהיך את לבבך - ... ונראה מן הכתובים ענין זה שאומר, כי מזמן הצריחה היתה רשות ציד האדם לעשות כללנו לדיק או רשע, וכל זמן התורה בן, כדי שיכיר להם זכות צדקתם בטוב ועונש זריותם ברע. אבל לימות המשיח, תהיה הצחירה בטוב להם טבע, לא יתאוו להם כלל למה שאינו ראוי ולא יחפון בו כלל. והיא המילה הנזכרת כאן. כי החמדה והתאווה ערלה ללב, ומול הלב הוא שלא יחמוד ולא יתאוה. וישוץ האדם בזמן ההוא לאשר היה קודם חטאו של אדם הראשון, שהיה עושה בטבעו מה שראוי לעשות ולא היה לו זרעו דבר והפכו, כמו שפירשתי בסדר בראשית (ט:3). וזהו מה שאמר הכתוב צירמיה (לא:3), הנה ימים באים נאם ה' וכרתי את בית ישראל ואת בית יהודה צרית חדשה לא כצרית אשר כרתי את אבותם וגו', כי זאת הצרית אשר אכרות את בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נחתי את תורתם בקרבם ועל לבם אכתובנה. וזהו בטול ילך הרע ועשות הטוב בטבעו מעשהו הראוי

רמב"ן דברים לו

AND THE ETERNAL YOUR GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE THY HEART. This following subject is very apparent from Scripture: Since the time of Creation, man has had the power to do as he pleased, to be righteous or wicked. This [grant of free will] applies likewise to the entire Torah-period, so that people can gain merit upon choosing the good and punishment for preferring evil. But in the days of the Messiah, the choice of their [genuine] good will be natural; the heart will not desire the improper and it will have no craving whatever for it. This is the "circumcision" mentioned here, for lust and desire are the "foreskin" of the heart, and circumcision of the heart means that it will not covet or desire evil. Man will return at that time to what he was before the sin of Adam, when by his nature he did what should properly be done, and there were no conflicting desires in his will, as I have explained in Seder Bereshith. It is this which Scripture states in [the Book of] Jeremiah, Behold, days are coming, says the Eternal, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers etc. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Eternal, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it. This is a reference to the annulment of the evil instinct and to the natural performance by the heart of its proper function.

Nachmanides Deuteronomy 30:6

The Ramban's conception of Mashiach was quite different that of the Rambam. Ramban envisages a world which reverts to the pre-Sin state of Gan Eden, where the laws of the natural world as we know them now cease to apply in the same way.

C] MASHIACH BEN YOSEF

7. [בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִגְדַּל הַמִּסְפָּד בִּירוּשָׁלַם בְּמִסְפַּד הַדָּדִרְמֹן בְּבִקְעַת מִגְדּוֹן:] וְסִפְדָּה הָאָרֶץ מִשְׁפָּחוֹת מִשְׁפָּחוֹת לְבָד מִשְׁפָּחַת בֵּית־דָּוִד לְבָד וְנִשְׁיָקֵם לְבָד (וזכריה יב יא-יב) הא הספידא מאי עבדייתה? פליגי בה רבי דוסא ורבנן. חד אמר: על משיח בן יוסף שנהרג וחד אמר: על יצר הרע שנהרג.

סוכה נב.

It is stated: "[On that day there shall be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon.] The land will eulogize, each family separately; the family of the house of David separately, and their women separately, the family of the house of Nathan separately, and their women separately" (Zechariah 12:12). ... What is the nature of this eulogy? Rabbi Dosa and the Rabbis disagreed. One said that this eulogy is for Messiah ben Yosef who was killed [in the war of Gog from the land of Magog prior to the ultimate redemption with the coming of Messiah ben David.] And one said that this eulogy is for the evil inclination that was killed. Babylonian Talmud Succah 52a

8. וְסִרְהָ קִנְאָת אֶפְרַיִם וְצָרֵי יְהוּדָה יִכָּרְתוּ אֶפְרַיִם לֹא־יִקְנָא אֶת־יְהוּדָה וְיְהוּדָה לֹא־יִצָּר אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם: (רש"י - משיח בן יוסף ומשיח בן דוד לא יקנאו זה בזה)

ישעיהו יא"ג

And the envy of Ephraim shall cease, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, nor shall Judah vex Ephraim. (*Rashi* - *Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David will not be jealous of each other*) Isaiah 11:13

9. כי על שני הענינים יחד, ר"ל אם לא נחזור בתשובה ויהיו המאורעים של בן יוסף. ואם נחזור בתשובה ולא יהיו, יראה לנו משיח בן דוד פתאום. ואם יהיה משיח בן יוסף קודם לו, יהיה כשליח לו וכמתקן האומה וכמסקל הדרך

ספר האמונות והדעות מאמר ח

... These two issues go together, meaning if we do not repent then all these events of [Mashiach] Ben Yosef will occur. But if we do repent, they will not and Mashiach ben David will come suddenly. Or if Mashiach ben Yosef does precede him, he will act as a messenger for him and as one who repairs the nation as one paves a road.

Rav Saadia Gaon writes that role of Mashiach ben Yosef is to prepare the way for Mashiach ben David. But the events of his days are contingent and not decreed. If the Jewish people do teshuva there is no inevitability to the calamities of Mashiach.

10. **The Lamentation in Jerusalem** on the death of Dr. Theodor Herzl

On that day the lamentation will be great in Jerusalem, like the lamentation of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon. (Zecharia 12:11)

.....

So it came about that throughout the Exile there is a see-saw effect of these two opposing forces. At times, there is exhibited a drive toward material, worldly success that flows primarily from the foundation of Joseph and Ephraim; other times there is a stirring of the spiritual drive for observance of Torah and spiritual development, for awe and love of God.

Since it is impossible for our nation to attain its lofty destiny other than by actualizing these two components - the universal symbolized by Joseph, and the distinctive symbolized by Judah - there arise in the nation proponents of each aspect. Those who would enhance spirituality prepare the way for Messiah son of David, whose focus is the final destiny. Truly the focus of life is spiritual attainment, except that the spiritual can only develop properly if it is accompanied by all the material acquisitions of which a full-bodied nation is in need. Those who redress the material, general aspects of life prepare the way for Messiah son of Joseph.

When these two forces work at cross purposes as a result of the calamity of exile, shortsightedness and disarray, these are the 'birthpangs of Messiah', or to be more exact, the 'birthpangs of Messiahs' (plural). The Psalmist (89:52) writes: 'That Your enemies have defied, O Lord; that they have defied the footsteps of Your Messiahs' עֲקֻבוֹת מְשִׁיחֶיךָ

Two footsteps of two Messiahs.

Now since the major achievement of Messiah son of Joseph, which is the general advancement of mankind, is accomplished by de-emphasis of the unique Jewish form, Messiah son of Joseph cannot endure, so he is destined to be killed.

When this happens, all will recognize the perversity of the situation. They will realize that it was wrong not to subjugate the universal dimension to the spiritual aspect which is Israel's destiny, to the kingdom of David. 'They will lament him as one laments an only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for the firstborn son.' (Zecharia 12:10) The lamentation for an only child is bereft of hope for future children. Elderly parents who have lost their only son, are totally forlorn. If the verse were to end on that note, it would spell utter doom, but the bitterness is mitigated by intellect. Intellect perceives that the nation has produced the soul of the Messiahs. The nation is not as elderly parents who have lost their only child, but rather as young parents who have lost their firstborn child. Being inexperienced at raising children, they did not attend properly to the child in its state of illness, so the child succumbed.

By the same token, the nation comes to the realization that it did not know how to make proper use of this universalist dimension, did not understand how it could contribute to Israel's unique destiny. In that way, it could have survived. The nation labored under the illusion brought on by the divisiveness of exile that these two forces are truly at odds. The result is that whoever holds up the universal side of the nation becomes unfortunately an enemy of Torah and *mitzvot* (commandments). Contrariwise, whoever focuses on the uniquely Jewish, becomes an adversary of material wellbeing. In the first scenario, the fence of Torah is broken down; in the second, the result is weakness and morosity.

After this latest experience of Messiah son of Joseph's impermanence, let us deduce that truly the two forces are not mutually antagonistic. It is time to bring it all together and to organize the nation's ways. Let every universal perfection serve as a basis for perfecting the uniquely Israelite. Let both parties - those disposed to the material and universal, and those disposed to the spiritual and particularistic - come to the same conclusion.

Then the lamentation will be on both sides; both will recognize their mistake. These two forces were created to be united; once rent asunder, they were mutually injurious.

The Zionist vision manifest in our generation might best be symbolized as the "footstep of Messiah son of Joseph" (*ikva de-Mashiah ben Yosef*). Zionism tends to universalism (as opposed to Jewish particularism). It is unequipped to realize that the development of Israel's general aspect is but the foundation for Israel's singularity. The leadership of the Zionist movement must be greatly influenced by the gifted few of the generation, the righteous and the sages of Israel. On the other hand, the ideal of Israel's national renaissance, including all the material accouterment - which is a proper thing when joined to the spiritual goal - to date has not succeeded, and the lack of success has brought on infighting, until finally, the leader of the movement has fallen, a victim of frustration. It behooves us to take to heart, to try to unify the "tree of Joseph" and the "tree of Judah," to rejoice in the national reawakening, and to know that this is not the end goal of Israel, but only a preparation.

This is the benefit to be gained by remorse over one whom we might consider the "footstep of Messiah son of Joseph" (*ikva de-Mashiah ben Yosef*), in view of his influence in revitalizing the nation materially and generally. This power should not be abandoned despite the wantonness and hatred of Torah that results in the expulsion of God-fearing Jews from the movement. We must develop the courage to seek that any power that is of itself good be fortified, and if it is lacking spiritual perfection, let us strive to increase the light of knowledge and fear of the Lord such that it (i.e. the light) is capable of conquering a powerful life-force and of being built up through it. Then there will be fulfilled in us the prophecy, "I will grant unto Zion salvation, unto Israel My glory." Return (*teshuvah*) must be from our side. Return will be enduring only if all the powers presently found (and possible to be found) in the nation will be vigorous, and directed to good. Then we will be a vessel for the divine will, "a crown of ornament in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God."

The Lamentation in Jerusalem, Rav Kook. Ma'amarei RAYaH 1 (1980) pp94-99¹

1. Translation by R. Bezalel Naor, available at <http://shaalvim.co.il/uploads/files/13-d-10-lamentation.pdf>

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