

What is the Jewish Belief About The End of Days

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The term End of Days is taken from Numbers 24:4. This has always been taken as a reference to the messianic era and therefore we shall explore albeit briefly – the Jewish belief in the coming of Mashiach.

What does the word Mashiach mean?

Mashiach is the Hebrew word for Messiah. The word Messiah in English means a saviour or a hoped-for deliverer. The word Mashiach in Hebrew actually means anointed. In Biblical Hebrew the title Mashiach was bestowed on somebody who had attained a position of nobility and greatness. For example, the High Priest is referred to as the Kohen Hamashiach.

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

What is the belief in Mashiach?

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 recognise Mashiach 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 Mashiach will complete G-d's purpose in creation: for man to make an abode for G-d in the lower worlds; 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 Mashiach 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 recognised as a man of G-d with greater leadership qualities than even Moshe.

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, if channelled correctly, man has all the resources necessary to create a good standard of living for all mankind. He lacks only the social and political will. Mashiach will inspire all men to fulfil 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, the magnitude of whom the world has not yet experienced. His unique example and leadership will inspire mankind to change direction.

Where is Mashiach mentioned in the Scriptures?

The Scriptures are replete with messianic quotes. In Deuteronomy 30:1 Moshe 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 fulfil all the commandments of the Torah. The gentile prophet Bilam prophesies that this return will be lead by Mashiach (see Numbers 24:17-20). Jacob refers to Mashiach by the name Shilo (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 Mashiach by Rabbi Dr.I.Schochet. It is interesting to note that on the wall of the United Nations building in New York is inscribed the quote from Isaiah (Ch.11:6), “And the wolf shall lie with the lamb”. Furthermore, it is clear from the prophets, when studied in their original Hebrew, that Mashiach is a Jewish concept and will entail return to Torah law, firmly ruling out any “other” messianic belief.

What sort of leader will Mashiach be?

Mashiach 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, Mashiach 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 Mashiach come?

Jews anticipate the arrival of Mashiach everyday. 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 Mashiach!

However, the Talmud states that there is a predestined time when Mashiach 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 5763.)

This does not rule out the possibility of Mashiach 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 Mashiach" and the Lubavitcher Rebbe stated on numerous occasions that the messianic redemption is imminent.

Could Mashiach come at any time in any generation?

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

Any potential Mashiach 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 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 recognise a human being who possesses the superlative qualities ascribed to Mashiach we may presume that he is the potential Mashiach. If this individual actually succeeds in rebuilding the Temple and gathering in the exiles then he is the Mashiach.

What exactly will happen when Mashiach comes?

Maimonides states in his Mishnah Torah a compendium of the entire halachic tradition that Mashiach 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-d from Jerusalem.

The Sanhedrin – a supreme Jewish law court of 71 sages – will be 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 realisation of the messianic dream, even if it takes place naturally, will be the greatest miracle.

According to some traditions Himself will rebuild the third

Temple. According to others it will be rebuilt by Mashiach, while others suggest a combination of the two opinions. Some suggest that there will be two distinct periods in the messianic era: the first, a non-miraculous period, leading on to 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 good, 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 Mashiachs arrival?

The Talmud describes the period immediately prior to the advent of Mashiach 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 Mashiach 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 Mashiach arrival.

There is a tradition that Elijah the prophet will come to the world and announce the imminent arrival of Mashiach. However, according to other opinions, Mashiach may arrive unannounced. Elijah would then arrive to assist in the peace process. Some suggest that if the Mashiach arrives in his predestined time then Elijah will announce his arrival, but if Mashiach comes suddenly then Elijah will appear after Mashiach 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 Mashiach'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 Mashiach. However, certain righteous individuals will arise with the coming of Mashiach. 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 SIE Publications)

What can be done to bring Mashiach?

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 faith in Mashiach'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 in-gathering of the exiles and the return to Torah observance under the leadership of Mashiach. The Lubavitcher Rebbe mounted a worldwide Mashiach campaign to heighten the awareness of Mashiach imminent arrival. The Rebbe constantly urged every Jew to prepare himself, his family and his community for the arrival of Mashiach. This can best be achieved by living with Mashiach; that is, by learning about Mashiach 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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