

A Principles Magazine Special Series | Vol. 1

12 PRINCIPLES in PRINCIPLE 12

Belief in Moshiach is the 12th of the 13 Principles of Judaism, yet it remains shrouded in mystery • These 12 “principles” on the principle of Moshiach, culled from Torah sources, are an introduction to a forthcoming 12-part series on Moshiach which will help to solve the puzzle

WHAT & WHY?



Moshiach is a Principle of Jewish Faith

EVERY LETTER OF THE TORAH is central to Judaism, but there are some basic beliefs that are so fundamental that one who rejects them is considered to have rejected Judaism, even if he accepts everything else in the Torah. For example, one who accepts all the *mitzvos*, *Halachos*, and practices of Judaism but does not consider them to be of Divine origin does not believe in Judaism.

There are thirteen such principles of faith as codified by the Rambam. (While this specific enumeration was originally a topic of debate, they ultimately came to be accepted by all Jewish circles.) The twelfth one is the belief in the coming of Moshiach. One who believes in G-d and in the Torah but does not accept that Moshiach will come, in essence denies all of Judaism, even if he is a fully observant Jew.

"היסוד השנים עשר – ימות המשיח. והוא להאמין ולאמת שיבוא ולא יחשוב שיתאחר."

הקדמת הרמב"ם לפרק חלק

Why indeed is Moshiach so central to Judaism?

Moshiach is the Purpose of Creation

“RABBI YOCHANAN SAID: “The world was created solely for Moshiach.” That is to say, G-d had a purpose in creating the world; the era of Moshiach will represent the fulfillment of that

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“אמר ר' יוחנן: לא איברי
עלמא אלא למשיח.”. סנהדרין צח. ב.

purpose. And Torah and *mitzvos* are the tools by which that purpose is achieved.

Moshiach is a Topic in Torah

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THE JEWISH PEOPLE have always been “obsessed” with Moshiach—it has been their national dream and their hope. As is the way with dreams and hopes, many of the facts about Moshiach have become mingled with rich and marvelous folklore. To distinguish between fact and fiction, the stories and traditions must be carefully examined in the light of Torah sources.

Much of the Torah’s discussions about Moshiach are to be found in *aggados* and *Midrashim*. *Midrashic* literature is often cryptic and metaphorical, and one *Midrash* may even appear to contradict a second *Midrash*. As such, a clear picture of the concept of Moshiach will not emerge from an analysis of *midrashic* sources.

For the most part, this is not problematic, for the lack of clarity on most aspects of this subject did not trouble our Torah authorities. Indeed, the Rambam goes so far as to say that many details concerning the coming of Moshiach *cannot* be known until they happen, and one should not delve into them.

Moshiach has a Halachically Defined Role

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THERE ARE SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF MOSHIACH’S COMING that are indeed very important for us to know clearly, so that we will

“וראיתי לחלק חבור
זה הלכות - הלכות
בכל ענין וענין.”

הקדמת הרמבם למשנה תורה

know how to respond when these events come to pass in the period before and during Moshiach’s arrival.

Indeed, there are *Halachos* about Moshiach that are clarified by the *Poskim* (primarily the Rambam, who wrote two entire halachic chapters on Moshiach in his *Mishneh Torah*).

In general, the *Halachos* of Moshiach concern the following issues:

1. The belief in Moshiach;
2. The order of the events surrounding his revelation, and
3. The identity of Moshiach.

All these are based on a halachic definition of Moshiach.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

CAN YOU IMAGINE JUDAISM WITHOUT MOSHIACH?

DELVING DEEPLY INTO PRINCIPLES ONE & TWO



We Must Await Him

ONE OF THE *HALACHOS* concerning Moshiach is that we must not only believe that he will come someday, but we must await and anticipate him. When we understand the halachic criteria of Moshiach, we will appreciate why we must await him, and why we must take an active role in hastening his coming.

"וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו או שאינו מחכה לביאתו. לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר אלא בתורה ובמשה רבינו". משנה תורה, הלכות מלכים פ"א ה"א

We Must Daven for and Demand Moshiach

THERE IS A COMMON misconception that we mustn't "push" G-d to bring Moshiach—G-d will bring Moshiach when He so chooses and we are not to interfere! This error stems from a lack of knowledge concerning what Moshiach is all about and why his coming is so important. When one knows what Moshiach is about, however, he appreciates how much he needs Moshiach—from a physical and spiritual perspective. And given that it is a *mitzvah mi'deoraissa* (a biblically ordained commandment) to ask G-d for one's needs, such a



person cannot but beg G-d to bring him immediately.

"אל תתנו דמי לו עד אשר יכונן ועד אשר ישים את ירושלים תהלה בארץ". ישעיה ס"ז

The prayers established by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* are an outstanding illustration of the need for Moshiach: no less than five of the 19 blessings of the daily *Amidah* prayer are dedicated exclusively to implore G-d to bring Moshiach immediately!

Our Actions Create the Geulah



NOT ONLY MUST WE IMPLOR G-D to bring Moshiach, we must take action to hasten his arrival. Our sages compare the Geulah to *Shabbos* and say that "he who has toiled before *Shabbos* will eat on *Shabbos*." In other words, our *Avodas Hashem* (Divine service) in Galus is what creates the environment for Moshiach. This is because the era of Moshiach will be characterized by G-dly revelation within the physical reality, and it is the *mitzvos* we perform with physical objects in the current—pre-Moshiach—era, that create that Divine revelation.

In this context, it is noteworthy that certain activities are especially conducive to hastening the Geulah, for various reasons given by *Chazal* and by *Gedolei Yisrael* throughout the generations. Some examples include giving *tzedaka*, observing *Shabbos*, refraining from talking *lashon harah*, reciting *Kiddush Levanah*, studying *priniyus haTorah* (*Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*) and most of all, studying about Moshiach.

"תכלית השלימות הזה של ימות המשיח . . תלוי במעשינו ועבודתנו בכל זמן משך הגלות" תניא פרק ל"ז

Our *Avodas Hashem* in Galus is what creates the environment for Moshiach, for when Moshiach comes, G-d's oneness will be evident to all, and using physical objects—of this material world—for *mitzvos*, does exactly that: showing how this object isn't independent of G-d, rather totally dependent on Him by becoming subservient to Him through serving as a means to fulfill His Will, thus becoming a hallowed object.

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(1) Moshiach Could Come Any Moment

FAITH IN THE COMING OF MOSHIACH entails believing that he can arrive at any moment. Nevertheless, history is divisible into three general periods with regard to this belief:

"אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא."

סוּסָה "אֵינִי מֵאֲמִיד"

1. When Moshiach was not expected to arrive;
2. When Moshiach's arrival is to be anticipated; and
3. A time period during which Moshiach must arrive.

Torah sources (R' Yitzchak Abarbanel in *Yeshuos Meshicho* p. 18; see Rashi and Maharsha on *Sanhedrin* 97a) describe the latter as the seventh millennium, corresponding to *Shabbos*, the seventh day of creation. At present, of course, we find ourselves in the sixth millennium — *Erev Shabbos*— when according to *Halacha* we may usher in *Shabbos*.

(2) Opportune Times for the Geulah – (Kitzin)

WE FIND THROUGHOUT TORAH LITERATURE various time periods in which Moshiach could have come: *yetzias Mitzrayim* and *matan Torah*, the Chizkiyahu-Sancheriv crisis, and so on. We also find among the talmudic sages—and later among the *Geonim*, *Rishonim*, and *Acharonim* many who calculated and predicted *kitzin*—auspicious times for Moshiach to arrive. These *kitzin* served to strengthen

"אמר רב: כלו כל הקיצין ואין הדבר תלוי אלא בתשובה". סנהדרין צ"ב.

the people's anticipation of Moshiach, and indeed, many Moshiach-related events—some positive, others not so positive—happened at these times. [These *kitzin* do not fall

under the category of *ketz*—calculating that the sages greatly discouraged for various reasons, as we will discuss in further issues.] These *kitzin* may be likened to the stages of labor a woman experiences when giving birth; they are evidence that a baby is on the way, but the exact time of arrival remains unknown.

There are Signs that Indicate Moshiach is Near

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THE GEMARA GIVES VARIOUS SIGNS that will serve as a prelude to Moshiach's arrival. Most of these indicators describe periods of great physical and spiritual crises on the part of the Jewish people. Recent and present-day *Gedolei Yisrael* of all the various *kehilos* agree that these signs have come to pass and it is therefore a certainty that Moshiach's arrival is imminent.

"בעקבתא דמשיחא חוצפא יסנא וכו'". סוּסָה מֵש. ב.

Many more signs appear in various

Midrashim which seem similar to world events transpiring lately. However, since, as stated above, the *Midrashim* don't always convey a clear and detailed picture, it is only *Gedolei Yisrael* of the highest caliber who can associate these events with those mentioned in the writings of the prophets and *Midrashim*.



Moshiach is a Person

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MOSHIACH IS NOT ONLY AN ERA, but also a person. As

"וַיֵּצֵא הוֹמֵר מִנֹּעַ יְשִׁי..."

שע"י י"א א

mentioned above, the Rambam devotes two chapters of his *Mishneh Torah* to the *Halachos* pertaining to

Moshiach. Following are some pointers about Moshiach distilled from these *Halachos*:

- Moshiach is a human being of flesh and blood; not a deity or an angel.
- Moshiach's role is to redeem the Jewish people from exile.
- Moshiach is a Jewish king and his kingship is a restoration of *Malchus Beis Dovid* (the monarchy of the davidic dynasty), which is a representation of G-d's Kingship in the world.

A Jewish king must be a great *tzadik*, sage and great leader who strengthens observance of Torah and *mitzvos* among the Jewish people. He must also fight the wars of G-d—i.e. he must fight against the physical and spiritual enemies of the Jewish people.

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There is a Moshiach in Every Generation

SINCE MOSHIACH CAN COME AT ANY MOMENT,

there must always be a potential

Moshiach among us—that is, a *tzadik*

from *Beis Dovid*, who, when the moment arrives, will assume the role of Moshiach and bring the Geulah. Indeed, over the course of the generations, we find many *tzadikim* whose disciples considered them to be this potential Moshiach.

"בכל דור נולד אחד מזרע יהודה הראוי להיות משיח לישראל."

פירוש הר"י עובדי" מברטנורא על מגילת דות

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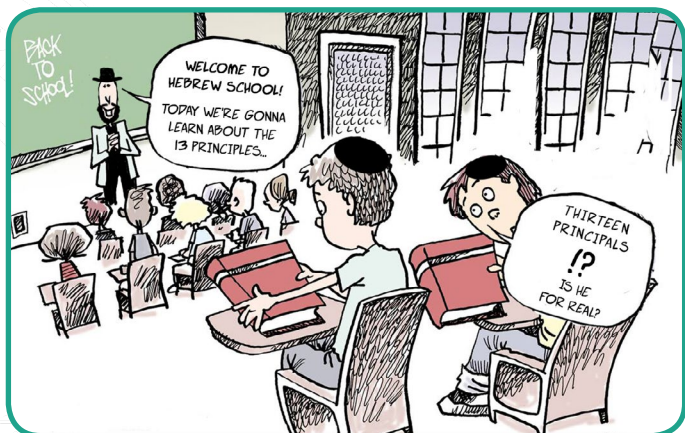
There is an Order of Events Surrounding Moshiach's Arrival

THE PROCESS OF REDEMPTION may unfold in a natural manner; if it does, the following is the sequence of events relating to Moshiach's appearance:

1. The potential Moshiach arises as a great Jewish leader.
2. He influences Jews of all levels of observance to strengthen their commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*.
3. He fights for the physical and spiritual welfare of the Jewish people.
4. At this stage, he is presumed to be Moshiach ("*b'chezkas Moshiach*."
5. He is successful in the above endeavors, and subsequently rebuilds the *Beis HaMikdash* and gathers all Jews to *Eretz Yisrael*.
6. At this stage, we know without a doubt that he is Moshiach ("*Moshiach b'vadai*."
7. He will then focus his attention and influence on the *entire* world, to bring all of its inhabitants to serve G-d in unity, thus creating true world peace.

"המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד ולהחזיר מלכות דוד לישנה וכי."

משנת תורה להרמב"ם הל' מלכים פ"א ד"א



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