

*Understanding the Days of the Messiah*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Shmuel David ben Moshe HaLevy, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam.

What will be the singular characteristics of the “days of the Messiah” (“*yimot hamashiach*”)? Will they literally be like the prophet Yeshiyahu’s famous words as found in the *haftorah* for the last day of Pesach?

And a wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid; and a calf and a lion cub and a fatling [shall lie] together, and a small child shall lead them. And a cow and a bear shall graze together, their children shall lie; and a lion, like cattle, shall eat straw. And an infant shall play over the hole of an old snake and over the eyeball of an adder, a weaned child shall stretch forth his hand. (11:6-8, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Shmuel (165-257 C.E.), one of the greatest of the Babylonian Talmudic Sages, clearly understood the preceding passage in a metaphoric sense. Instead of a world wherein Nature and the instinctual behaviors of the animal kingdom will be radically altered, we will have a world wherein the Jewish people will finally be completely free of the yoke and control of oppressors. Thus he declared: “There will be no difference between our world and the days of the Messiah except for the cessation of the domination of the kingdoms of the world [over the Jewish people].” (*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 99a*, translation and brackets my own) Thus, for Shmuel, *yimot hamashiach* will be a time of complete socio-political freedom for our people and nation.

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) explicated Shmuel’s position in his halachic

*magnum opus, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 11:1 and 12:1 and 2:*

King Messiah will arise in the future and return the kingship of David to its former greatness and glory. He will rebuild the Holy Temple and gather all of the exiles to the Land of Israel. All of the laws will be in effect during his days just as they were in earlier times. We will [once again] offer *korbanot* (animal offerings) and keep the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years just like all of the other laws stated in the Torah.

One ought not to think that in the days of the Messiah anything will change in the nature of the world (*m'minhago shel haolam*), or that there will be some new creation within Nature (*b'maaseh Bereishit*). Rather, the world will continue in its normal fashion. The passage in Isaiah that states “And a wolf shall live with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie with a kid...” is merely a metaphor. Rather, it really means that the Jewish people will live in comfort and without fear with the evil non-Jewish nations who are symbolically represented by the terms “wolf” and “leopard.”

Our Sages stated: “There will be no difference between our world and the days of the Messiah except for the cessation of the domination of the kingdoms of the world [over the Jewish people].” (Translation, underlining, and brackets my own)

One is immediately struck by the purely naturalistic position taken by Maimonides. The reinstatement of the Davidic monarchy “to its former greatness and glory,” in the person of the true Messiah, is the necessary and fundamental criterion for the achievement of all other Jewish eschatological goals. “Former greatness and glory” means uncontested Jewish hegemony over our own G-d-promised and gifted land. Pragmatically, it means that all of the unending political pressures faced by the modern State of Israel will cease. It means, as well, that Israel will one day be perceived as the preeminent nation in the world, since all countries will recognize it as being G-d’s unique dwelling place among mankind. This will take place as a natural result of all of the nations of the world “returning to the true faith” i.e. monotheism (Ibid. , 12:5).

Once we are politically free and no longer beholden to any earthly power, the *Melech Hamashiach* (King Messiah) will be able to “rebuild the Holy Temple and gather all of the exiles to the Land of Israel.” Approximately 1500 years ago, these hopes and

aspirations were given ardent voice by our Sages in two blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei*

(*Amidah* or Silent Prayer):

And may You return to Your holy city in mercy, and dwell therein as You have spoken. And may You build it soon and in our days as a permanent construction. And may the throne of King David rapidly be re-established therein. Blessed are You Hashem, He who builds Jerusalem.

Sound the great shofar [whose clarion call] declares our freedom. And raise up our standard to gather around all of our exiles, and gather us all together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You Hashem, He who gathers the exiles of His people Israel. (Translation and brackets my own)

May this Pesach be the time wherein these prayers will be answered. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *chag kasher v'sameach*

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