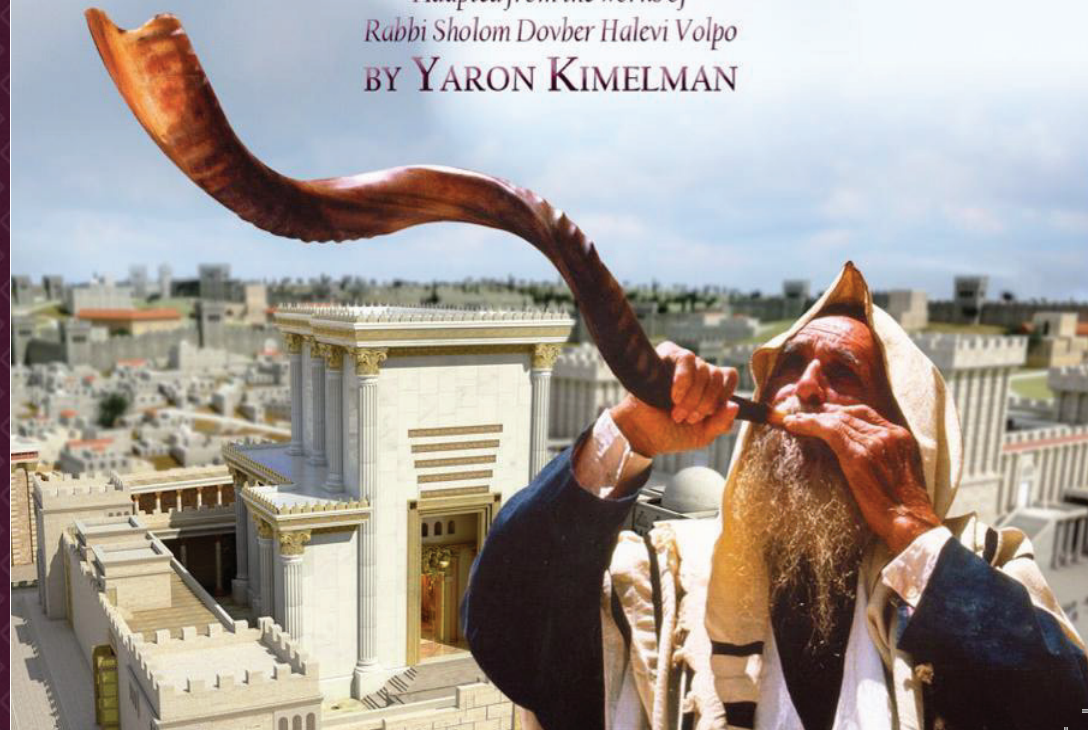


QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON MOSHIACH

— based upon —

RAMBAM'S LAWS OF KINGS

*Adapted from the works of
Rabbi Sholom Dovber Halevi Volpo*
BY YARON KIMELMAN



ב"ה

Dedicated in loving memory of

Lori (Leah) bas Reuven Kaye HY"D

A woman who exemplified the spirit of Redemption

and in loving memory of

Rivka bas Avraham HY"D

A young woman who had just begun

her journey to Redemption

Lori and Rivka were tragically taken from our midst

as this booklet was being prepared

May they arise and sing joyously with the speedy coming of
Moshiach Tzidkeinu!

For inquiries about this booklet email
ykimelman@gmail.com.

Dedicated

In the merit of the imminent revelation of Moshiach Tzidkeinu

Rabbi Chaim Avraham Shlomo Mazal and family

In the merit of

The Cahnman Family

In memory of

Hinda bas Tzvi Hirsch

In memory of

Tzvi Hirsch ben Ben-Tziyon

Rivka bas Tzvi Hirsch

In memory of

Moshe ben Benyomin

By the Feldman Family

In the merit of

Rabbi Yosef Wolf and Family

Introduction

About the author Rabbi Sholom Dovber Halevi Wolpe

As mentioned in the introduction, this booklet is an adaptation of material presented in two of Rabbi Wolpe's books. Rabbi Wolpe is the author of over 40 books in Hebrew whose subject matter spans a wide spectrum of Torah wisdom, including halacha, Rambam, Chassidus, and basic Jewish concepts. He has received approbations for his books from some of the greatest rabbis of our time including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, and Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung. I pray that this booklet be the first of many, for his books are too important to be enjoyed by Hebrew readers alone. May Rabbi Wolpe be blessed with strength and good health in order to continue his holy work.

We are currently witnessing a widespread, sincere, and palpable yearning for the Final Redemption. It seems that many today can hear the call of the shofar resonating within, telling them that Redemption is indeed very close at hand. Every day, we look at the headlines and see more and more wondrous occurrences that indicate that we are surely hearing the footsteps of Moshiach. And so our excitement and anticipation mounts, as do our prayers and actions to hasten the Redemption.

While the emotions surrounding Redemption are very real and powerful, there is nevertheless confusion about how exactly events will unfold. Previous attempts to identify Moshiach or to predict how and when Moshiach will come have been met with physical and spiritual consequences, many of which haunt the Jewish world to this very day. It would be understandable to conclude that we have no business meddling with G-d's affairs. When Moshiach comes he comes; our job is to pray and wait.

But is this truly all that Torah demands of us? As with all our actions we look to halacha to guide us, so it is with the ultimate endeavor of bringing Moshiach. Although G-d alone has designated the soul of Moshiach since the beginning of creation (Rashi Breishis 1:2), according to the Rambam we all play a critical role in identifying Moshiach and establishing his kingship. This partnership with G-d is the ultimate example of "*asher bara Elokim la'asot*" (which G-d created to do), that we literally activate and complete the process of Redemption through our direct involvement. The Arizal says that the soul of Moshiach exists within the leading *tzaddik* of every generation, who stands poised to redeem the people if the generation is worthy. Halacha guides us how to identify him and what to do once we have done so.

Within the canon of halacha, only the Rambam has elucidated for us the process of identifying Moshiach. Upon careful study of these halachos in Laws of Kings, chapters 11 and 12, we will have a clear formula for determining whether an individual is indeed *B'chezkas Moshiach* (presumed to be Moshiach), and in due course, whether he is in fact *Moshiach Vadai* (definitely Moshiach). And since there exists no other halachic authority who rules regarding this subject, the Rambam's *Yad Hachazaka* remains the first and last word on the requirements to identify someone as Moshiach.

We owe a large debt of gratitude to the eminent Torah scholar Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber HaLevi Wolpe, who has applied his astute mind and extensive scholarship to helping us properly understand the complexities of Rambam's Laws of Kings. Rabbi Wolpe has written several groundbreaking and fascinating books on the topics of Moshiach and Redemption, and in this booklet we will be drawing from his books *Yechi HaMelech HaMoshiach* (questions 1-10), and *Hanisayon Ha'acharon* (questions 11-12). The former work received approbations from Torah luminaries including Harav Mordechai Eliyahu, Harav Ovadia Yosef, Harav Shalom Messas, Harav Pinchas Hirschprung, Harav Shmuel Alexander Unsderfer, Harav Meir Mazouze, Harav Moshe Yaakov Weiss, and Harav Moshe Stern.

Through our diligent study and application of these laws, may we merit to properly identify and to joyfully welcome Melech HaMoshiach speedily in our days, Amen!

Let us begin by citing chapter 11 and 12 of the Rambam's Laws of Kings.

already perfect, as it will be by the year 6000, then what would be the purpose for Moshiach to come at that point? Moshiach's lofty personality and leadership is absolutely essential for us to obtain "*Yom she'kulo Shabbos u'menucha l'chayei olamim*" (the Day which is Everlasting Shabbos). In order to journey from exile to Redemption, we must have Moshiach's guidance and intervention while we are still in our "imperfect" state. The perfection of our service to G-d is specifically through our connection to Moshiach, the continuation of the spark of Moshe Rabbeinu, as the Torah says, "Moshe is the first Redeemer and the final Redeemer" (Shmos Rabbah 2:4; Zohar I 253a).

The Rambam defines the king as the very heart of the Jewish people, and as such, all the vitality which we receive is transmitted to us via the king. In turn, the heart receives its vitality by that which the people render unto it. "*Ain melech b'lo am*," there is no king without a people. Our vitality and completion are entirely dependent upon what we receive from the king, and his vitality is likewise dependent upon our total commitment and devotion to him. Mystically speaking, the attribute of malchus, kingship, must be aroused by the speech and deeds of the people, who call forth the leadership of Melech HaMoshiach with their total allegiance and nullification to the king.

May we merit to fulfill this great mitzvah of appointing a king speedily in our days which will hasten the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

Yad Hachazaka where the Rambam is laying down what we can surely expect he does not mention this possibility.

Afterword

There is a prevalent view that once we merit the Final Redemption, Moshiach will somehow appear on the scene and all will immediately recognize him and accede to his kingship. Whereupon, he will rebuild the Temple, gather the exiles, etc.

According to Rambam, identifying Moshiach and subsequently, consolidating his rulership, will not be simple or “automatic”, but rather will involve considerable human effort and halachic discernment. Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya says, “The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel meritorious; therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundant measure, as it is written: ‘The L-rd desired, for the sake of Israel’s righteousness, to make the Torah great and glorious’” (Makkos 23b).

G-d wishes to increase our merit by granting us the vastness of Torah and mitzvot, and appointing Melech HaMoshiach is among these precious mitzvot! G-d may send us Moshiach in potential, but it is incumbent upon us to do the rest. We must follow the dictates of halacha, with careful discernment and bitachon, in order to bring this potential into actuality. We are truly G-d’s partners in actualizing the Redemption! This active involvement on our part to identify and establish Melech HaMoshiach represents the ultimate expression of “*asher bara Elokim la’asot*”.

Another concept which is not well understood is the role which Moshiach will play in the Final Redemption. Moshiach is not a reward or an end per se, but rather he is the means to achieve the end, ie., the completion and perfection of the world. If the world were

Laws of Kings Chapter II

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1. 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: G-d 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, G-d 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. Reference to Moshiach is also made in the portion of Bilaam who prophesies about two anointed kings: the first anointed king, David, who saved Israel from her oppressors; and the final anointed king who will arise from his descendants and save Israel in the end of days. That passage Numbers 24:17-18 relates: “I see it, but not now” - This refers to David; “I perceive it, but not in the near future;” - This refers to the Messianic king; “A star shall go forth from Jacob” - This refers to David; “and a staff shall arise in Israel” - This refers to the Messianic king; “crushing all of Moab’s princes” - This refers to David as II Samuel 8:2 relates: “He smote Moab and measured them with a line, decimating all of Seth’s descendants” - This refers to the Messianic king about whom Zechariah 9:10 prophesies: “He will rule from sea to sea.” “Edom will be demolished” - This refers to David as II Samuel 8:6 states “Edom became the servants of David”. “Seir will be destroyed” - this refers to the

Messianic king as Ovadiah 1:21 prophesies: "Saviors will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau...."

2. Similarly, with regard to the cities of refuge, Deuteronomy 19:8-9 states: "When G-d will expand your borders... you must add three more cities." This command was never fulfilled. Surely, G-d did not give this command in vain. There is no need to cite proofs from the works of the prophets for all their books are filled with mention of this matter.

3. 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 Moshiach. 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.

4. If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor, will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him Moshiach. If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Moshiach. He will then improve the entire world, motivating all the nations to serve G-d together, as Tzeephaniah 3:9 states: "I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose." If he did not

explains among other fascinating points concerning the ultimate Redemption that **"if we have sufficient merit, then Moshiach will be from the dead"**! This is because a Moshiach who returns from the dead (or from a concealed sphere) is certainly more miraculous than a Moshiach who comes from those who are living in the conventional sense.

Also, Abarbanel writes in Yeshuos Meshicho (Jerusalem, 5753, p.104) that it is possible that Moshiach will be taken from this world and brought into the heavenly "Garden of Eden", continuing: "You should not find it difficult [to understand] that the King Moshiach will be among those who arise in the Resurrection," quoting Sanhedrin 98b as proof that this can be so.

Note that Abarbanel (whom the Tzemach Tzedek called "the great sage who is perfect in his opinions" Derech Mitzvosecha, p. 88) wrote this long after the Rambam's ruling concerning the identity and rise of Moshiach, proving that he did not see that ruling as any contradiction to the possibility of Moshiach rising "from the dead".

This premise that there is no disagreement can be further substantiated, by what the Rambam himself writes in Igeres Techiyas Hameisim (chapter 6) regarding his statement in the Laws of Kings that Moshiach's coming will essentially be a natural phenomenon and the world will "continue according to its pattern" and that all the wondrous prophecies are to be "understood as metaphors" is **not final**. In other words, the Rambam himself concedes that Moshiach's coming can very well be supernatural but for halachic purposes it does not have to be that way and therefore he did not include this possibility in the Yad Hachazaka which is devoted entirely to halacha.

In conclusion, like the Abarbanel and the Sdei Chemed, the Rambam can agree that in the event of a miraculous appearance of Moshiach, he may very well be someone whom G-d brings back to life, but in the

writes in the Laws of Fast Days (5:3), “On the Ninth of Av, five tragedies occurred: It was decreed that the Jews in the desert would not enter the Land of Israel; the first and the second Temples were destroyed; a large city named Beitar was captured. Thousands and myriads of Jews inhabited it. They were ruled by a great king whom the entire Jewish people and the leading sages considered to be Melech HaMoshiach. **The city fell to the Romans and they were all slain, causing a national catastrophe equivalent to that of the Temple's destruction...**”

Also, according to the simple reading, by adding “If he did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not the Redeemer promised by the Torah (ie., *Moshiach Vadai*)”, the Rambam is coming to prevent a person from losing faith in Moshiach for if he is *B'chezkas Moshiach* and dies, a person may G-d forbid conclude that Moshiach will never come. To clarify the matter, the Rambam is actually conveying that there is no reason to lose faith since until he succeeds in building the Beis Hamikdash and gathering the exiles “he is not the one the Torah promised.” **And so his passing need not weaken one's faith nor disqualify him as long as he returns to complete the job he began.**

The Gemorah (Sanhedrin 98a) explains that although Moshiach has to come not later than a pre-ordained time (the year 6000 from Creation), nevertheless, if our merit is sufficient, his arrival will be hastened. The Gemorah continues that if our merit is sufficient, then Moshiach will come in a supernatural manner (“with the heavenly clouds”, Daniel 7:13), whereas if our merit is insufficient, then he will come in a natural manner (“a poor man riding on a donkey”, Zechariah 9:9).

Based on this Gemorah, the Sdei Chemed (Pe'as Hasadeh, Maareches Ha'alef, 70) quotes a long letter by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Lipkin (grandson of “Hagahos Ben Aryeh” published in Vilna Shas), where he

succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not the redeemer promised by the Torah. Rather, he should be considered as all the other proper and complete kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. G-d caused him to arise only to test the many, as Daniel 11:35 states: “And some of the wise men will stumble, to try them, to refine, and to clarify until the appointed time, because the set time is in the future.” Jesus of Nazareth who aspired to be the Moshiach and was executed by the court was also alluded to in Daniel's prophecies, as ibid. 11:14 states: “The vulgar among your people shall exalt themselves in an attempt to fulfill the vision, but they shall stumble.” Can there be a greater stumbling block than Christianity? All the prophets spoke of Moshiach as the redeemer of Israel and their savior who would gather their dispersed and strengthen their observance of the mitzvot. In contrast, Christianity caused the Jews to be slain by the sword, their remnants to be scattered and humbled, the Torah to be altered, and the majority of the world to err and serve a G-d other than the Lord. Nevertheless, the intent of the Creator of the world is not within the power of man to comprehend, for His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts, our thoughts. Ultimately, all the deeds of Jesus of Nazareth and that Ishmaelite who arose after him will serve to prepare the way for Moshiach's coming and the improvement of the entire world, motivating the nations to serve G-d together as Tzeephaniah 3:9 states: “I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose.” How will this come about? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of Moshiach, Torah, and mitzvot. These matters have been spread to the furthestmost islands to many stubborn-hearted nations. They discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah, saying: “These mitzvot were true, but were already negated in the present age and are not applicable for all time.” Others say: “Implied in the mitzvot are hidden concepts that cannot be understood simply. The Moshiach has already come and revealed those hidden truths.” When the true

Messianic king will arise and prove successful, his position becoming exalted and uplifted, they will all return and realize that their ancestors endowed them with a false heritage and their prophets and ancestors caused them to err. 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.

Laws of Kings Chapter 12

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

them, to refine, and to clarify until the appointed time, because the set time is in the future."

Although it would seem from the simple reading of the Rambam that Moshiach has to be someone who is currently alive, the Lubavitcher Rebbe in footnote 65 of a talk from 5751 (1991) on Parshas Tazria U'metzora related to the Rambam, writes that once he has exerted leadership over his fellow Jews he can be later resurrected to complete what he began.

Now although the Rambam himself writes that, "if he is killed he surely is not the Redeemer promised by the Torah," upon closer analysis of the Rambam we can see how there is no proof from his words that Moshiach cannot be someone who comes back from the dead.

The first question we might ask is why the Rambam mentions two disqualifying possibilities: "that he did not succeed to this degree or was killed"? Why did he not simply say that if he was killed, then it is proof that he is not the Redeemer promised by the Torah? Secondly, why does the Rambam use the expression "if he is killed" rather than "if he died"?

The answer is that the signs that the Rambam gives are meant to *qualify* someone as *B'chezkas Moshiach* and not to simply *describe* him as such. In other words, an individual becomes *qualified* to be Moshiach if he is a descendant of David, toils in the written and oral Torah, wages the wars of Hashem, and makes significant efforts to compel Jews to become Torah observant. Therefore, the Rambam continues that if such a Jew proves **unsuccessful** in compelling Jews to return to a Torah lifestyle or is **killed** while waging the wars of Hashem, then it is clear that he is not the Redeemer the Torah promised for he failed in the very things that he needs to do to qualify to be Moshiach. Just as we find with Ben Koziva who was killed while fighting the Romans. As the Rambam

Question II

Must Moshiach be someone living or is it possible that Moshiach will be someone who has already passed away?

The Gemorah (Sanhedrin 98B) poses the questions: Who would Moshiach be if it were to be someone living and who would it be if it were to be somebody who has passed away? According to the Rambam, can Moshiach be someone who has passed away?

Answer

The Rambam (Laws of Kings 11:4) writes, "If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law, as David his ancestor did, will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him Moshiach.

If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Moshiach.

He will then improve the entire world, motivating all the nations to serve G-d together, as Tzeephaniah (3:9) states: 'I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose.'

If he did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not the Redeemer promised by the Torah. Rather, he should be considered as all the other proper and complete kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. G-d caused him to arise only to test the many, as Daniel (11:35) states: 'And some of the wise men will stumble, to try

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." The simple interpretation of the prophets' words appears to imply that the war of Gog and Magog will take place at the beginning of the Messianic age. Before the war of Gog and Magog, a prophet will arise to inspire Israel to be upright and prepare their hearts, as Malachi 3:22 states: "Behold, I am sending you Elijah." He will not come to declare the pure, impure, or to declare the impure, pure. He will not dispute the lineage of those presumed to be of proper pedigree, nor will he validate the pedigree of those whose lineage is presumed blemished. Rather, he will establish peace within the world as ibid. 3:24 continues: "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." There are some Sages who say that Elijah's coming will precede the coming of the Moshiach. All these and similar matters cannot be definitely known by man until they occur for these matters are undefined in the prophets' words and even the wise men have no established tradition regarding these matters except their own interpretation of the verses. Therefore, there is a controversy among them regarding these matters. Regardless of the debate concerning these questions, neither the order of the occurrence of these events or their precise detail are among the fundamental principles of the faith. A person should not occupy himself with the Aggadot and homiletics concerning these and similar matters, nor should he consider them as essentials, for study of them will neither bring fear or love of G-d. Similarly, one should not try to determine the appointed time for Moshiach's coming. Our Sages declared: "May the spirits of those who attempt to determine the time of Moshiach's coming expire!" Rather, one should

await and believe in the general conception of the matter as explained.

3. During the era of the Messianic king, once his kingdom has been established and all of Israel has gathered around him, the entire nation's line of descent will be established on the basis of his words and the prophetic spirit which will rest upon him, as Malachi 3:3 states: "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier." He will purify the lineage of the Levites first, stating "He is a priest of defined lineage. He is a Levite of defined lineage." Those whose lineage he will not recognize will be lowered to the status of Israelites. This is implied by Ezra 2:63: "The governor said to them: 'They should not eat of the most holy things until a priest arises who will wear the urim vitumim.'" From this verse, you can infer that the prophetic spirit will be used to define and notify the pedigree of lineage. When he defines the lineage of the Israelites, he will make known their tribal lineage alone, stating: "He is from this tribe and he is from another tribe." He will not, by contrast, state concerning a person who is presumed to be of unblemished lineage: "He is illegitimate or he is of slave lineage." For the law is once a family has become intermingled with the entire Jewish people, they may remain intermingled.

4. The Sages and the prophets did not yearn for the Messianic era in order to have dominion over the entire world, to rule over the gentiles, to be exalted by the nations, or to eat, drink, and celebrate. Rather, they desired to be free to involve themselves in Torah and wisdom without any pressures or disturbances, so that they would merit the world to come, as explained in Hilchot Teshuvah.

5. 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 G-d. Therefore, the Jews will be great sages and know the hidden matters, grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to

should he consider them as essentials, for study of them will neither bring fear or love of G-d." Does the Rambam's warning also extend to the halachic signs of *B'chezkas Moshiach* and *Moshiach Vadai* that he himself enumerates in Chapter 11?

Answer

It is obvious that the Rambam's warning only applies to the prophecies regarding what will happen during the Messianic Era which he discusses in Chapter 12, such as the war of Gog and Magog and the timing of Eliyahu's arrival. The laws of *B'chezkas Moshiach* and *Moshiach Vadai* and the rest of the laws in chapter 11, however, are clear halachic parameters dealing with identifying Moshiach himself and are integral to the faith that we must have in his coming.

One could rightfully ask why then did the Rambam bring up Gog and Magog and the timing of Eliyahu's arrival in a book which he himself said is a compilation of halachos, when in fact no clear halacha can be derived from the discussion?

One could answer by saying that once the Rambam set the clear halachic parameters of what is required to become *B'chezkas Moshiach* and *Moshiach Vadai*, he was concerned that once such a person is identified people may hesitate to accept him because the war of Gog and Magog and Eliyahu's arrival have not yet taken place. Therefore, the Rambam writes as a matter of halacha that these types of concerns should be pushed aside for no one knows how exactly they will come to pass and they should certainly not be an impediment to proclaiming "behold he is Melech HaMoshiach" as Rabbi Akiva did.

Moshiach they understood that the signs were false or done using sorcery and the individuals were dismissed as false messiahs. The Rambam himself writes that one of the proofs that they were false messiahs was that they lacked basic Torah knowledge. In addition, and common to most of the false messiahs throughout history, was their contempt for the principles of our Jewish faith and for the observance of mitzvot. Some, in fact, wished to immediately do away with all the laws and customs pertaining to mourning the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. For these reasons, the Torah giants throughout history fought against them.

Ben Koziva, on the contrary, possessed the qualities that *B'chezkas Moshiach* must have, and this is why Rabbi Akiva felt obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of appointing him as Melech HaMoshiach and getting others to do the same. The same Rambam who tirelessly fought against the false messiahs of his day, also tells us that if a candidate will arise who possesses all the qualities Rabbi Akiva saw in Ben Koziva, we too are obligated to act as Rabbi Akiva did and proclaim that behold, he is the *B'chezkas Moshiach* we have been yearning for.

Question 10

Regarding what specifically does the Rambam write “we will not know how it will be until it will be”?

In the twelfth chapter of the Laws of Kings, the Rambam writes that it is impossible to know how things will be at the time of the Redemption. Furthermore, he writes, “Regardless of the debate concerning these questions, neither the order of the occurrence of these events or their precise detail are among the fundamental principles of the faith. A person should not occupy himself with the Aggadot and homiletics concerning these and similar matters, nor

the full extent of human potential, as Isaiah 11:9 states: “The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.”

פרק יא

א המלך המשיח עתיד לעמוד ולהחזיר מלכות דוד ליושנה לממשלה הראשונה ובונה המקדש ומקבץ נדחי ישראל וחוזרין כל המשפטים בימיו כשהיו מקודם מקריבין קרבנות ועושין שמטין ויובלות ככל מצותה האמורה בתורה וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו או מי שאינו מחכה לביאתו לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר אלא בתורה ובמשה רבינו שהרי התורה העידה עליו שנאמר ושב ה' אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך וגו' אם יהיה נדח בקצה השמים וגו' והביאך ה' ואלו הדברים המפורשים בתורה הם כוללים כל הדברים שנאמרו ע"י כל הנביאים אף בפרשת בלעם נאמר ושם נבא בשני המשיחים במשיח הראשון שהוא דוד שהושיע את ישראל מיד צריהם ובמשיח האחרון שעומד מבניו שמושיע את ישראל [באחרונה] ושם הוא אומר אראנו ולא עתה זה דוד אשורנו ולא קרוב זה מלך המשיח דרך כוכב מיעקב זה דוד וקם שבט מישראל זה מלך המשיח ומחץ פאתי מואב זה דוד וכן הוא אומר ויך את מואב וימדדם בחבל וקרקר כל בני שת זה המלך המשיח שנאמר בו ומשלו מים עד ים והיה אדום ירשה זה דוד שנאמר ותהי אדום לדוד לעבדים וגו' והיה ירשה וגו' זה המלך המשיח שנאמר ועלו מושיעים בהר ציון וגו'.

ב אף בערי מקלט הוא אומר אם ירחיב ה' אלהיך את גבולך ויספת לך עוד שלש ערים וגו' ומעולם לא היה דבר זה ולא צוה הקדוש ברוך הוא לתווה אבל בדברי הנביאים אין הדבר צריך ראייה שכל הספרים מלאים בדבר זה:

ג ואל יעלה על דעתך שהמלך המשיח צריך לעשות אותות ומופתים ומחדש דברים בעולם או מחיה מתים וכיוצא בדברים אלו אין הדבר כך שהרי רבי עקיבא חכם גדול מחכמי משנה היה והוא היה נושא כליו של בן כוזיבא המלך והוא היה אומר עליו שהוא המלך המשיח ודימה הוא וכל חכמי דורו שהוא המלך המשיח עד שנהרג בעונות כיון שנהרג נודע להם שאינו ולא שאלו ממנו חכמים לא אות ולא מופת ועיקר הדברים ככה הן שהתורה הזאת חוקיה ומשפטיה לעולם ולעולמי עולמים ואין מוסיפין עליהן ולא גורעין

מִהֵן וְכָל הַמוֹסִיף אוֹ גּוֹרֵעַ אוֹ שְׂגִילָה פָּנִים בַּתּוֹרָה וְהוֹצִיא הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁל מִצְוֹת מִפְּשׁוּטָן הָרִי זֶה וְדָאִי בְּדָאִי רָשָׁע וְאַפִּיקּוֹרוֹס:

ד ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דויד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצות כדויד אביו כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה וילחם מלחמות ה' הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח אם עשה והצליח ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי ויתקן את העולם כולו לעבוד את ה' ביחד שנאמר כי אז אהפוך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרוא כולם בשם ה' ולעבדו שכם אחד. ואם לא הצליח עד כה או נהרג בידוע שאינו זה שהבטיחה עליו תורה והרי הוא ככל מלכי בית דויד השלמים והכשרים שמתו ולא העמידו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא לנסות בו רבים שנאמר ומן המשכילים יכשלו לצרוף בהם ולברר וללבן עד עת קץ כי עוד למועד. אף ישוע הנצרי שדימה שיהיה משיח ונהרג בבית דין כבר נתבאר בו דניאל שנאמר ובני פריצי עמך ינשאו להעמיד חזון ונכשלו וכי יש מכשול גדול מזה שכל הנביאים דברו שמשיח גואל ישראל ומושיעם ומקבץ נדחיהם ומחזק מצוותן וזה גרם לאבד ישראל בחרב ולפזר שאריתם ולהשפילם ולהחליף התורה ולהטעות רוב העולם לעבוד אלוה מבלעדי ה'. אך מחשבות בורא עולם אין כוח באדם להשיגם כי לא דרכינו דרכיו ולא מחשבותינו מחשבותיו וכל הדברים האלו של ישוע הנצרי ושל זה הישמעאלי שעמד אחריו אינן אלא לישר דרך למלך המשיח ולתקן העולם כולו לעבוד את ה' ביחד שנאמר כי אז אהפוך אל אחד עמים שפה ברורה לקרוא כולם בשם ה' לעבדו שכם אחד. כיצד כבר נתמלא העולם מדברי המשיח ומדברי התורה ומדברי המצוות ופשטו דברים אלו באיים רחוקים ובעמים רבים ערלי לב והם נושאים ונותנים בדברים אלו ובמצוות התורה אלו אומרים מצוות אלו אמת היו וכבר בטלו בזמן הזה ולא היו נוהגות לדורות ואלו אומרים דברים נסתרים יש בהן ואינן כפשוטן וכבר בא משיח וגילה נסתריהם וכשיעמוד המלך המשיח באמת ויצליח וירום וינשא מיד הם כולם חוזרים ויודעים ששקר נחלו אבותיהם ושנביאיהם ואבותיהם הטעום:

פרק יב

א אל יעלה על הלב שבימות המשיח יבטל דבר ממנהגו של עולם או יהיה שם חידוש במעשה בראשית אלא עולם כמנהגו נוהג וזה שנאמר בישיעה וגר זאב עם כבש ונמר עם גדי ירבץ משל וחידה ענין הדבר שיהיו ישראל יושבין לבטח עם רשעי עכו"ם המשולים כזאב ונמר שנאמר זאב ערבות ישדדם ונמר שוקד על עריהם ויחזרו כולם לדת האמת ולא יגזלו ולא ישחיתו

establishment as *B'chezkas Moshiach*). At the same time, there is no reason why he can't begin his leadership outside the Land of Israel and finally come to Israel to complete his mission as *Moshiach Vadai*.

This can also answer why the Rambam writes in *Igeres Teiman* that *Moshiach* must be a prophet whereas in the *Yad Hachazaka*, he mentions this only in *Laws of Repentance* (chapter 9, halacha 2). There he writes that *Moshiach* will be a prophet almost as great as *Moshe Rabbeinu*, while in *Laws of Kings* (chapter 11, halacha 3) he makes no mention of this requirement at all! The answer is that in *Laws of Repentance* as in *Igeres Teiman*, the Rambam is referring to the qualities *Moshiach* should ultimately exhibit as *Moshiach Vadai* and prophecy is certainly among them. Whereas in *Laws of Kings*, the Rambam is describing the identifiable traits that *Moshiach* initially must have for us to be able to recognize him as *B'chezkas Moshiach*, and prophecy is not one of them.

In light of the above, we can now have some understanding of the unfortunate historical phenomena of false messianism. It is no secret that many false messiahs have presented over the course of Jewish history. What's important to note is that **faith in them was not based upon the halachic framework established by the Rambam, but rather stemmed from the miracles and wonders they performed.** These may have in fact been observed phenomena, but these qualities have no bearing on the halachic determination of *B'chezkas Moshiach*.

For example, in the very same *Igeres Teiman*, the Rambam lists numerous examples of individuals in various cities who proclaimed to be *Moshiach*. One such group of individuals living in Cordova, Spain "performed miracles and foretold future events". One of them climbed a tall tree and threw himself off while pretending to fly, based on the verse that says that Jews will "fly on clouds". When the rabbis saw that these people did not possess the qualities to be

many additional years editing it, making it his final word on the subject matter of Moshiach.

Aside from that, upon examining the context of the Moshiach the Rambam was asked about in Igeres Teiman, we can show that there really are no contradictions at all. In Igeres Teiman, the Rambam was asked about the Messianic potential of a man whom he describes as an ignoramus. Nothing was known about his lineage nor did he do anything to bring Jews back to Torah. The only reason there were Jews in Yemen who believed in his statements that he was Moshiach and that G-d had commanded him to redeem the Jewish people was because of the miracles he had performed. What's important here to note is that they were inquiring about a person who quite suddenly claimed to be *Moshiach Vadai* without the halachic process of establishing himself first to be *B'chezkas Moshiach*. As such, the Rambam responded that to "skip" to the stage of *Moshiach Vadai* (if such a thing is even possible):

A. He must be in Eretz Yisroel, since that's where *Moshiach Vadai* will be when he brings about the full Redemption.

B. He will not need to be known in advance since he skipped the stage of *B'chezkas Moshiach* where he exhibits incredible leadership qualities that people become aware of.

C. His identifying quality is that he is able to perform miracles.

In Laws of Kings, however, the Rambam is speaking about a sequence of events that must occur which involves an initial stage of *B'chezkas Moshiach* and a later stage of *Moshiach Vadai*. In other words, according to halacha, first he is to begin restoring the Davidic dynasty, while exhibiting similar leadership qualities and assiduous Torah study as did his father David, and specifically not through miracles (ie., whether or not he performs miracles has no bearing on his

אלא יאכלו דבר המותר בנחת עם ישראל שנאמר ואריה כבקר יאכל תבן וכן כל כיוצא באלו הדברים בענין המשיח הם משלים ובימות המלך המשיח יודע לכל לאי זה דבר היה משל ומה ענין רמזו בהן:

ב אמרו חכמים אין בין העולם הזה לימות המשיח אלא שיעבוד מלכיות בלבד יראה מפשוטן של דברי הנביאים שבתחילת ימות המשיח תהיה מלחמת גוג ומגוג ושקודם מלחמת גוג ומגוג יעמוד נביא לישראל ולהכין לבם שנאמר הנה אנכי שולח לכם את אליה וגו' ואינו בא לא לטמא הטהור ולא לטהר הטמא ולא לפסול אנשים שהם בחזקת כשרות ולא להכשיר מי שהוחזקו פסולין אלא לשום שלום בעולם שנאמר והשיב לב אבות על בנים ויש מן החכמים שאומרים שקודם ביאת המשיח יבא אליהו וכל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן לא ידע אדם איך יהיו עד שיהיו שדברים סתומין הן אצל הנביאים גם החכמים אין להם קבלה בדברים אלו אלא לפי הכרע הפסוקים ולפיכך יש להם מחלוקת בדברים אלו ועל כל פנים אין סדור הויית דברים אלו ולא דקדוקיהן עיקר בדת ולעולם לא יתעסק אדם בדברי ההגדות ולא יאריך במדרשות האמורים בענינים אלו וכיוצא בהן ולא ישימם עיקר שאין מביאין לא לידי יראה ולא לידי אהבה וכן לא יחשב הקצין אמרו חכמים תפח רוחם של מחשבי הקצים אלא יחכה ויאמין בכלל הדבר כמו שבארנו:

ג בימי המלך המשיח כשתתיישב ממלכתו ויתקבצו אליו כל ישראל יתייחסו כולם על פיו ברוח הקודש שתנוח עליו שנאמר וישב מצרף ומטהר וגו' ובני לוי מטהר תחילה ואומר זה מיוחס כהן וזה מיוחס לוי ודוחה את שאין מיוחסין לישראל הרי הוא אומר ויאמר התרשעת להם וגו' עד עמוד כהן לאורים ולתומים הנה למדת שברוח הקודש מייחסין המוחזקין ומודיעין המיוחס ואינו מייחס ישראל אלא לשבטיהם שמודיע שזה משבט פלוני וזה משבט פלוני אבל אינו אומר על שהן בחזקת כשרות זה ממזר זה עבד שהדין הוא שמשפחה שנטמעה נטמעה:

ד לא נתאוו החכמים והנביאים ימות המשיח לא כדי שישלטו על כל העולם ולא כדי שירדו בעכו"ם ולא כדי שינשאו אותם העמים ולא כדי לאכול ולשתות ולשמח אלא כדי שיהיו פנוין בתורה וחכמתה ולא יהיה להם נוגש ומבטל כדי שיזכו לחיי העולם הבא כמו שביארנו בהלכות תשובה:

ה ובאותו הזמן לא יהיה שם לא רעב ולא מלחמה ולא קנאה ותחרות שהטובה תהיה מושפעת הרבה וכל המעדנים מצויין כעפר ולא יהיה עסק כל העולם אלא לדעת את ה' בלבד ולפיכך יהיו ישראל חכמים גדולים ויודעים דברים הסתומים וישיגו דעת בוראם כפי כח האדם שנאמר כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה' כמים לים מכסים:

Question 1

What is the process through which Moshiach will be revealed according to the Rambam?

How will the Jewish people recognize who Moshiach is? Will the recognition come as a result of Heavenly revelation or will the Jewish people also have a role in identifying him using Torah guidelines which are “*lo bashamayim hee*” (not based on Heavenly revelation).

Answer

In the story of the exodus through the first Redeemer, Moshe Rabbeinu, we find that although he was sent by Hashem, that alone was not enough to convince the Jewish people that the time of their Redemption had arrived and that Moshe was the Redeemer. They also needed a sign that was passed down to them from Yaakov and Yosef that the Redeemer would need to use the words “*pakod yifkod*” (He will surely remember you). And even still Moshe said, “the people will not believe me and will not listen to my voice” (Shmos 4:1), and therefore he was given wonders to perform involving the snake, leprosy, and the plague of blood “in order that they believe that the G-d of their forefathers appeared to you” (Shmos 4:5).

So Moshe the first Redeemer was recognized as such through a combination of signs and wonders and saying “*pakod yifkod*”. The question is: how will we recognize the final Redeemer and how will we know that the Redemption has truly arrived?

This question is clearly answered by the Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* (Laws of Kings 11:4) where he provides signs regarding Moshiach's ancestry, his role, and Messianic activities. He writes, “If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor, will compel all of Israel to walk in

generations would overcome the letdown of the failed Ben Koziva and nevertheless continue to have faith in an individual who exhibits signs of *B'chezkas Moshiach*. We must not shy away or have our faith weakened as a result of the incident. On the contrary, according to the Rambam we are to follow Rabbi Akiva's example as our protocol of how we must act when we have identified someone who exhibits the signs of *B'chezkas Moshiach*. We must proclaim with complete faith that he is *B'chezkas Moshiach* and that G-d willing he will ultimately merit becoming *Moshiach Vada*.

Question 9

How can one reconcile the differences in how the Rambam describes Moshaich in *Igeres Teiman* (Letter to Yemen) with the way he describes him in the *Yad Hachazaka*?

When comparing both of these works, it appears that there are three areas where the Rambam contradicts himself. Contrary to the standards established in *Yad Hachazaka*, in *Igeres Teiman*, the Rambam writes that Moshiach:

- A. will first reveal himself in Israel
- B. will be someone who is completely unknown before he is revealed
- C. his true test will be his ability to perform miracles

Answer

First, it must be made clear that if contradictions are found between the *Igeres Teiman* and the *Yad Hachazaka*, we follow the latter work. One basic reason for this is because the *Yad Hachazaka* was completed nine years after *Igeres Teiman*, and the Rambam spent many additional years editing it, making it his final word on the subject matter of Moshiach.

say that there was a problem with the way Rabbi Akiva and the other sages believed in and anticipated Moshiach's coming. Certainly that can't be the case. After all, the Gemorah (Menachos 29B) says that Moshe himself said that Rabbi Akiva was so great that he was worthy of the Torah being given through him, and Rabbeinu Gershom (Baba Basra 12B) writes that there was never a man as great as Rabbi Akiva. G-d forbid to say that someone whom the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 86B) describes as the person upon whom the entire Oral Torah is built, should mistakenly leave his 24,000 students, and mistakenly travel from one country to the other, and mistakenly announce that a certain individual is Melech HaMoshiach.

In reality, everything Rabbi Akiva did was based on halacha and is instructive for all future generations, and should in no way be viewed as a mistake or a failure. In fact, Yalkut Mishlei (remez 944) says that when Rabbi Akiva died in prison, Eliyahu Hanavi came personally to bury him and the Midrash Asara Harugei Malchus adds that at that time, Eliyahu quoted the verse "there is abundant peace to those who love your Torah and there is no failure among them" (Psalm 119:145), for Rabbi Akiva did not err nor did he fail, G-d forbid. Rather, everything he did was guided by true Torah principles, including his activities in rallying the Jewish people to unite behind Ben Koziva and accept him as Melech HaMoshiach.

The fact that Ben Koziva was ultimately unsuccessful in completing his mission does not detract from the fact that he was the *B'Chezkas Moshiach* of that generation; however, he did not merit to become the Moshiach "that the Torah promised" (ie., *Moshiach Vadai*), as the Rambam writes in the section of chapter 12 that was censured.

The Rambam continues there and says the reason that Hashem allowed it to get to such a point only to have the people's hopes shattered was "to test many people". In other words, Hashem brought about the rise and fall of Ben Koziva as a test to see if future

(the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of G-d, we may, with assurance, consider him Moshiach ("*B'chezkas Moshiach*", the presumed Redeemer). And if he is successful (in the above activities), and builds the Sanctuary in its place, and gathers the exiles of Israel, behold he is certainly Moshiach ("*Moshiach Vadai*").

Now the Rambam writes in his introduction to the Yad Hachazakah that he is writing a book of *halachos* (Torah laws); thus the Rambam intends to teach a practical halacha that in the beginning of Moshiach's revelation, the Jewish people will be able to identify him based on signs that establish him to be *B'chezkas Moshiach*, followed by a phase which includes the building of the Beis Hamikdash and gathering the exiles, which will prove beyond all doubt that he is *Moshiach Vadai*. For if this lengthy description was not an integral part of the halachic process of identifying Moshiach, why else would the Rambam provide these identifying signs and describe these two distinct phases in a work devoted exclusively to halacha?

In other words, just as Bnei Yisroel had a tradition instructing them how to recognize the Redeemer, as explained by both Rashi (Shmos 3:18) and in the Midrash quoted by the Ramban (Shmos 3:18) who refers to a "*mesores geula*" (redemption tradition) that any Redeemer who used a double language of remembrance (ie., "*pakod pakodti*") is the true Redeemer, likewise regarding our Redemption we have a halachic *mesores geula* that Moshiach must be identified by the specific signs that the Rambam delineates.

Furthermore, from the fact that the Rambam is the only halachic authority who writes about the halachos of Moshiach and there is no one who argues with him in these matters, it is a clear psak that if there is a Jew who fulfills the first set of criteria enumerated in *Hilchos Melachim*, behold we declare that he is *B'chezkas Moshiach*. And once he

completes the second set of criteria, we declare that he is *Moshiach Vadai*.

Question 2

Will Moshiach need to perform miracles?

The Torah tells us that in addition to using the double expression of “*pakod yifkod*”, Moshe Rabbeinu had to perform miracles in order for the Jewish people to believe in him. Will Moshiach also be required to perform miracles?

Answer

The Rambam (Laws of Kings 11: 3) writes, “One should not presume that Melech HaMoshiach 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 greatest sages of the Mishna, was one of the supporters of King Ben Koziva and would describe him as the presumed Moshiach. He and all the sages of the generation considered him to be Moshiach until he was killed in battle by the Romans. Once he was killed, they realized he was not destined to become *Moshiach Vadai*. **The sages did not ask him for any signs or wonders.**

The Raavad, however, disagrees and quotes Sanhedrin 93B where Ben Koziva is said to have referred to himself as Melech HaMoshiach and the sages sent messengers to see if he could perform a miracle such as discerning who was right or wrong using only his sense of smell. Once they saw that he could not, they sentenced him to death.

are to follow Rabbi Akiva's example even if this is the minority opinion. Similar to the Ritva in his commentary on Gemorah (Eruvin 61B) and the Ridbaz in his commentary on the Rambam (Laws of Nedarim Chapter one, halacha 24) who say that when Rabbi Akiva's reasoning is compelling, the halacha follows him even when the majority of the sages disagree.

And what was that compelling reasoning? A person who discovered someone who met the qualifications of *B'chezkas Moshiach* would certainly seek to publicize this knowledge to others, especially since the process of becoming *Moshiach Vadai* involves widespread acceptance on the part of the people.

Question 8

Did Rabbi Akiva err in declaring Ben Koziva to be Moshiach?

Ultimately, Rabbi Akiva appears to have made a mistake since his hopes for Ben Koziva did not materialize. Is it not unwise to rely on this story to serve as an exemplar of how we should approach someone who manifests the signs of Moshiach?

Answer

How can a believing Jew say that Rabbi Akiva and all the sages of his generation made a mistake in a matter of halacha, heaven forbid, when the Rambam himself relies on their example as a matter of halacha, binding for all generations?

Also, from the vantage point of the faith we must have in the sages of Israel, how can one say that the greatest of the Tana'im erred in something so basic to the fundamentals of our faith? G-d forbid to

Furthermore, the Rambam seems to go out of his way in halacha 3 to identify Rabbi Akiva as a great sage from among the sages of the Mishna. One can say that the reason for this is to emphasize that although the sages of the Mishna are unusually concise while towers of halachos are built on each and every one of their words, nonetheless “Rabbi Akiva would say about him that he is Melech HaMoshiach” (ie., emphasizing that such words were frequently spoken to others). And from this, the Rambam proves that when a Jew from the House of David exhibits the signs of *B’chezkas Moshiach*, we should follow Rabbi Akiva’s example and declare him to be such, since speaking and publicizing is the manner in which he becomes revealed as *Moshiach Vadai* according to Torah.

As for the other sages who the Rambam says only imagined that he was Melech HaMoshiach but did not actually verbally proclaim it, it should not be understood that they disagreed with him on the need to publicize it, since we find no record in the Gemorah or anywhere else of such a disagreement.

It could be argued that a possible reason for their apparent silence was that insofar as Ben Koziva led a revolution against the Romans, any attempt to ascribe a Messianic role to him could have been punishable by death. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, spent his life waiting for an opportunity to give up his life for Hashem. Regardless of the reason, Rabbi Akiva was the undisputed leader of the generation and so it stands to reason that he spoke for all the sages. It is also plausible to say that by the Rambam including Rabbi Akiva together with the other sages in one sentence he aims to accentuate their mutual agreement.

And even if this is not the case and the other sages did in fact disagree with Rabbi Akiva about openly publicizing one who is *B’chezkas Moshiach*, the Rambam nevertheless teaches us that halachically we

The Kesef Mishna explains that the Rambam follows the version of the story as detailed in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Taanis 4:5) that it was the Romans who killed him and not the sages. This is consistent with the Rambam’s approach in general which follows the view of Shmuel (Brachos 34B) that there is no difference between the present era and the Messianic Era except [for the emancipation from] the dominion of [gentile] nations. Clearly then, Moshiach will not have to perform miracles and wonders.

Question 3

When will all the prophecies regarding miracles in the Messianic Era be realized?

We’ve already established that Moshiach’s revelation does not call for miracles, but how are we to reconcile this with the numerous prophecies and statements of our sages that describe the Messianic Era as replete with miracles?

Answer

Rambam writes (Laws of Repentance 8:7), “All the good things that the prophets prophesied for the Jewish people refer to things that the body enjoys and will be realized during the Messianic Era.” This is to say that even according to the Rambam, at some point during the Messianic Era there will be a shift away from the world’s natural pattern.

Even by Moshiach himself, we find that he will act in a supernatural way. As Isaiah says (11:4), “He will strike [the wicked of] the world with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” In Psalms (72:9) we read, “May nobles kneel before him and may his foes lick the dust,” which the Zohar (Parshas Vayera

107:B) interprets as a reference to Moshiach. In fact, according to the commentators Ibn Ezra, Radak, and Sforno, the entire Psalm 72 refers to Moshiach. It is implausible to say that the Rambam would be in disagreement with the simple meaning of so many verses which describe Moshiach and the Messianic Era in supernatural terms.

Additionally, the Rambam himself quotes Isaiah (11:9) who describes the Messianic Era as a time when “the knowledge of G-d will fill the earth as the water covers the ocean bed”, a clear and extreme transformation from the concealment of G-dliness prior to Moshiach.

So even though we see that Rambam acknowledges that at some point Moshiach will perform miracles and there will be a transformation of the present natural order, **this does not mean that Moshiach’s initial arrival must be miraculous.**

Rather, the miraculous phase will commence once the building of the Beis Hamikdash and the ingathering of exiles has taken place. Then Moshiach will ascend to an even higher level where he teaches Torah to the entire Jewish people including all the tzaddikim of previous generations until “the Jewish people will be exceedingly wise and know hidden things” (end of Laws of Kings, chapter 12).

Similarly, in accordance with one of Rambam’s 13 fundamentals of Jewish faith, a phase involving the resurrection of the dead will follow, which is clearly a supernatural occurrence. However, this will take place in the later phase of the Messianic Era and is not a prerequisite for Moshiach’s initial revelation.

These two stages will be reflected in the evolution of Moshiach’s greatness. The Torah relays that the soul of Moshiach preceded the creation of the world and is the fulfillment of the entire purpose of creation. As our sages interpret the verse, “and the spirit of Elokim was hovering over the waters” (Bereishis 1:2), this refers to the spirit of Moshiach. Nonetheless this may not be revealed until a later time

Question 7

Why does the Rambam speak about *B’chezkas Moshiach*? Wouldn’t it be safer to simply wait until he is *Moshiach Vadai*?

Even if we arrive at a time where the signs of *B’chezkas Moshiach* are manifest, why does the Rambam speak about it? What gain is there in knowing and publicizing who is *B’chezkas Moshiach*? Why not simply wait until he is *Moshiach Vadai* and has built the Beis Hamikdash? Why risk raising people’s hopes with the possibility of letting them down?

Answer

This question may as well be asked to Rabbi Akiva and not just to the Rambam, for it was Rabbi Akiva who publicized that Ben Koziva was Melech HaMoshiach and became his weapon’s bearer, and this of course happened under Roman rule when the exile was in full force. Why did Rabbi Akiva not wait for Ben Koziva to fully attain the status of *Moshiach Vadai*, and instead rushed to proclaim that he was Melech HaMoshiach as soon as he saw the early signs of *B’chezkas Moshiach*?

The explanation for his haste was that according to Rabbi Akiva, there is a clear halachic significance to attaining even the first stage of *B’chezkas Moshiach*. **For according to halacha, the completion and full revelation of Moshiach’s kingship is specifically accomplished by the people’s recognition of him and their subsequent acceptance of his kingship.** This is precisely the reason why Rabbi Akiva said, “he is Melech HaMoshiach” (Talmud Yerushalmi Taanis 4:1), since this is the way to further the revelation of his kingship. One may even postulate that this is the reason numerous gemorahs and midrashim speak of Rabbi Akiva’s travels to visit Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora.

they said and knew that he was fitting, and so it is in every generation there needs to be one who is fit (to be Moshiach) in case the generation be found worthy. Also, according to this, the students of the Arizal wrote that in their generation it was the Arizal, and all of this is obvious.”

We find a similar idea presented by Rabbi Tzadok Hacoen from Lublin who writes in Pri Tzadik (Devarim, Letter 13) that in every generation there is one soul which is fit to be Moshiach if the generation is worthy. Likewise, we find various opinions in the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 98:B) “The House of Sheila said his name is Sheila. The House of Yanai said his name is Yinon, etc.”, meaning that each one of them said about their rebbe that he is the soul that is fit to be Moshiach. Further in the Gemorah we even find that Rabbi Nachman said about himself that he is Moshiach. And so we find in later generations that there were tzadikim who hinted that they were Moshiach, such as the holy Ohr Hachayim.

The Rambam’s halachic classification of *B’chezkas Moshiach* is different, however, for he is not just referring to someone who is fit to be Moshiach if the generation is worthy, but that he is Moshiach in actuality, already in the process of restoring the Davidic Kingdom, persuading the entire Jewish people to follow the Torah, and waging the wars of Hashem in the generation of Redemption, as a precursor to building the Beis Hamikdash and ingathering the exiles. This distinction is clear from how the Rambam concludes this halacha by saying that if he did these things and was successful, behold he is *Moshiach Vadai*. In other words, **when an individual (*B’chezkas Moshiach*) exhibits these halachic signs, he is not merely fit to be Moshiach, but rather the period of his actual revelation as such has already begun.**

during the Messianic Era, in accord with Rambam’s ruling that the presumed Moshiach will not be required to perform miracles and wonders to establish his candidacy.

This is reflected in Chazal’s statement on the words, “You are my son; I have begotten you this day” (Psalms 2:7). The Midrash Tehillim explains, “that at the time of the Redemption the Moshiach will be like a person who was born anew” because new powers will be invested in him making him like a completely new person, “and when that time comes, G-d says to them ‘I need to create him anew’”.

We find this idea further echoed in Bamidbar Rabbah (Parsha 11, B), “Rabbi Berachya in the name of Rabbi Levi said, ‘as was the first Redeemer so will be the final Redeemer. The first Redeemer, this is Moshe who revealed himself to them and then was concealed, so too the final Redeemer will reveal himself to them and then goes back and is concealed from them’”. This initial revelation and subsequent concealment constitutes the first stage of Redemption. Sfas Emes in his gloss on tractate Rosh Hashana 11B says that at the time Moshe began the process of redeeming the Jewish people from Egypt, there was a degree of concealment for he did not yet redeem them (first stage), but when he finally took them out he was fully revealed as the true Redeemer (second stage).

So it will be with Moshiach. During the phase when he is only *B’chezkas Moshiach*, he is partly revealed and partly concealed since he has not yet redeemed the Jewish people and his supernatural abilities are not yet fully recognized. But once the redemption has occurred, Moshiach is completely revealed, meaning that he is created anew and his soul receives an elevation, at which point all the supernatural abilities and prophecies will become fully realized as we have explained above.

Question 4

Must Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet) come in advance to let us know who Moshiach is?

We say in *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals), “May the Merciful One send us Eliyahu Hanavi who is remembered for good to give us good tidings of salvation and comfort.” Why then does the Rambam codify the signs of *B’chezkas Moshiach*, placing the obligation of identifying him upon the Jewish people? Isn’t the job of Eliyahu Hanavi to inform us who Moshiach is and when he will come?

Answer

According to the Rambam, it is not the job of Eliyahu to tell us who is *B’chezkas Moshiach*. The source for Eliyahu’s coming as a harbinger of Moshiach is in Gemorah (Eruvin 43B) and is part of a larger discussion on whether or not the restrictions on traveling certain distances on Shabbos also apply if one is traveling ten handbreadths above the ground; this discussion has nothing to do with establishing who is *B’chezkas Moshiach*. The Gemorah says that if someone took an oath that he will become a nazir on the day that the Son of David comes [to Jerusalem or to Tiberius, where the Sanhedrin will first be established], then he is henceforth forbidden to drink wine every day of the week except for Shabbos (since according to one opinion, Moshiach could arrive on any day except for Shabbos). The Gemorah uses this to support the opinion that the restriction to travel certain distances on Shabbos also extends to traveling ten handbreadths above the ground, thereby making it (ostensibly) impossible for Moshiach and Eliyahu to appear on Shabbos, thereby enabling one who made such an oath to drink wine on Shabbos.

Question 6

What is the difference between one who is “*fit to be Moshiach*” and one who is “*B’chezkas Moshiach*”?

It is well documented in numerous holy books that throughout the generations there were righteous individuals who were said to be “fit to be Moshiach” if the generation was worthy. Is this similar to what the Rambam describes as *B’chezkas Moshiach*?

Answer

These two categories are not one and the same. There are many sources in Torah that support the contention that in every generation there is someone who is fit to be Moshiach. For example, the Bartenura in his commentary to Megillas Ruth writes, “In every generation there is someone born of the seed of Yehudah who is fit to be Moshiach.” The Chasam Sofer (Vol. 6, responsa 98) writes, “From the day the Temple was destroyed, someone was immediately born who is worthy as a result of his righteousness to be the Redeemer, and when the time comes G-d will reveal Himself to him and send him. And then G-d will bestow upon him the spirit of Moshiach which is submerged and concealed above”. Similarly, he writes in his gloss to tractate Pesachim, “that it appears from the Rambam at the end of the Laws of Kings that he is one of the righteous individuals of the generation...and perhaps he is here in our city”.

In reality, from the Gemorah it appears that in certain houses of study they took it a step further by actually referring to Moshiach by name. For example (Sanhedrin 98B), “Rav said, ‘If Moshiach is from those who are alive it would be Rabbeinu Hakadosh’”, a reference to Rabbi Yehuda the Prince. The Sdei Chemed in Maareches Aleph (rule 70) writes, “In this way, it was understood by them in every generation who it was... In the generation of Rabbi (Rabbi Yehuda the Prince),

denies the entire Torah, for it is an established principle that we follow the majority opinion.

As per the Yalkut Shimoni quoted above, The Maharal in Netzach Yisroel (chapter 62) explains that the reason G-d is credited with the Redemption is because He stands Moshiach on his feet, so even the Yalkut Shimoni can agree that **the Redemption will come through a human king but since he will be brought to stand by G-d it will be as if G-d Himself is redeeming the Jewish people.**

The Arizal also writes in Daled Meos Shekel Kesef (p. 78), “Melech HaMoshiach will be a righteous person born of a man and a woman but on that day his righteousness will increase...and then on that day of the end times, the ‘soul of his soul’ which is in Gan Eden will be given to this righteous person and he will merit to be the Redeemer, just as it was with Moshe Rabbeinu who was born of flesh and blood and grew greater and greater until he perfected his soul.”

Also, the formulation of the *Ani Maamin* (Rambam’s 13 Principles of Belief) indicates a belief in a human Moshiach whom we are obligated to wait for and anticipate that he can come any day. Similarly, three times a day in the *Shemona Esrei* prayer, we ask Hashem to quickly sprout the offshoot of David Your servant, which without a doubt refers to a king of flesh and blood.

Therefore, if someone today insists that “there is no Moshiach in Israel” but that G-d alone will redeem the Jewish people without human involvement, he perpetrates an incorrect approach to halacha, and denies the Torah and the foundations of our faith.

It is clear from the continuation of the Gemorah that Eliyahu’s announcement of Moshiach’s arrival comes at the stage of *Moshiach Vadai*, after he has been victorious in waging the wars of Hashem, for it describes the gentiles as already being subservient to the Jewish people.

Unlike the Gemorah, the Rambam does not give Eliyahu a halachically decisive role even regarding *Moshiach Vadai*, as he writes in Laws of Kings Chapter 12 regarding both the wars of Gog and Magog and the coming of Eliyahu, “that no man will know how it will be until it will be”. This tells us that **we are not dependent upon Eliyahu to bring us definitive word prior to Moshiach’s arrival.**

It’s also untenable to say that Eliyahu will announce the individual who is *B’chezkas Moshiach* for once he announces him, he is no longer *B’chezkas Moshiach* but *Moshiach Vadai*. For this reason, the Rambam makes no mention of Eliyahu in this halacha and may even be strengthening the point by using Rabbi Akiva as an example of someone who proclaimed Ben Koziva to be Moshiach without any prior announcement by Eliyahu.

Also interesting to note in support of the Rambam’s view regarding Eliyahu’s indeterminate role is the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 98A) where we learn that Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi asked Moshiach for the date of his arrival. Moshiach answered “today” (ie., today, if the Jewish people listen to His voice). From this we see that Moshiach could come immediately without Eliyahu coming beforehand to make any announcements. This view is similarly supported in the *zemiros* (traditional songs) of Motzei Shabbos, where we ask that Eliyahu should come quickly **with** the son of David (not beforehand). Also in the prayers we recite at a circumcision, we first ask that Hashem send His anointed one, Moshiach, and only then do we ask Hashem

to send his Kohen Tzedek, referring to Pinchas who shares the same soul as Eliyahu.

All this demonstrates that there is no requirement for Eliyahu to come before Moshiach's arrival, and certainly not before he establishes himself to be *B'chezkas Moshiach*. As far as the prayers for Eliyahu's tidings of salvation and comfort that we mention during the Grace after Meals, this can refer to tidings made during the unfolding process of the Redemption but not relating to Moshiach's identity itself.

But one may ask the following question: Doesn't the Rambam himself establish (Laws of Kings 1:3), "We cannot appoint a king in the beginning without a Sanhedrin and a prophet", and if so, how can we appoint King Moshiach without Eliyahu Hanavi? Many of the commentators answer this question by noting the use of the word "beginning". In other words, the requirement to have a Sanhedrin and a prophet in order to appoint a king only applies for the "beginning" kings like Shaul and David. In fact, we learn the requirement to have a prophet from the Sifri who explains that the words, "that Hashem your G-d will choose" indicates a prophet. But the need for a prophet is only when a choice is being made by G-d, but once David was chosen (as an eternal dynasty) we no longer need a prophet to appoint a king who is one of his descendants.

Question 5

Why must Moshiach be a human being? Why can't we say that G-d Himself will redeem us?

The Yalkut Shimoni (remez 577) writes, "G-d said, 'In this world you were saved by human beings... but in the future I Myself will save you'... as it says, 'Israel is saved by G-d, an everlasting salvation.'"

There are those who would like to prove from here that the Final Redemption will not be in the hands of a flesh and blood king but by G-d himself. What is the meaning of this Midrash?

Answer

It is axiomatic to our system of halacha that a midrash or any opinion found in the Gemorah which was not accepted into the canon of halacha can by no means detract from the final authority of an explicit halacha codified by an accepted halachic authority. Giving weight in practice to such opinions once the halacha has been determined causes great damage to the way Torah and halacha operate. Imagine if someone were to eat chicken and milk together based on the opinion of Rabbi Yossi Haglili which he found in the Gemorah. Any attempt to bring proof against a clear, and in our case undisputed, halacha, must be rejected out of hand.

In Laws of Kings (ch. 11), Rambam speaks unequivocally about the two Moshiachs, Dovid and Moshiach his descendent, and what they will do, and adds that "anyone who does not believe in him (ie., Moshiach) or await his arrival, not only denies the prophets but also denies the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu."

Now the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 99A) quotes the opinion of Rabbi Hillel who says there is no Moshiach for Israel, which Rashi interprets to mean that G-d alone will rule over them and redeem them. The Gemorah, however, ends up rejecting this opinion based on the verse in Zecharya (9:9) who prophesied during Second Temple times that, "...for behold your king will come to you, righteous and victorious is he; a humble man riding a donkey..."

The Chasam Sofer in his responsa on Yoreh Deah (Responsa 356) writes that anyone today who insists that there is no Moshiach for Israel, quoting Rabbi Hillel's opinion, is considered an apostate and