



THOUGHTS ABOUT MESSIAH

Among Jewish people there is a great diversity of opinions regarding Messiah (literally, "the anointed one"). However, the major viewpoints can be placed in one of several categories.

■ **A Personal Messiah:** The belief that the Messiah will be an individual who will lead Israel from degradation to exaltation. Within this category there are two disparate views.

A personal messiah who is divine: This is clearly the minority view point of all the opinions held by Jewish people.

A personal messiah who is human: This person is fully human, but will be endowed with supernatural powers by God to enable him to accomplish so monumental a task. Throughout Jewish history various individuals have gained a following among some who accepted their messianic identity. The most famous of these, perhaps, was the second century A.D. Bar Kokhba who had even the support of the renowned Rabbi Akiva. Most Orthodox Jews would subscribe to this position, including the ultra-Orthodox Lubavitchers who believed that their leader, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel

Schneerson, would reveal himself as Messiah.

■ **A Messianic Period:** The view that the Scriptures pertaining to the Messiah will be fulfilled not in an individual, but in a movement resulting in a utopian age of righteousness, justice, prosperity, and tranquility. It is normally held that the Jewish people as a whole will play a vital role in this movement. The other two major branches of American Judaism, Reform and Conservative, generally hold to this position.

There are, of course, many non-practicing, assimilated, and completely secular Jews who give very little thought to the issue of Messiah and therefore hold no position.

However, throughout the history of the Jewish people the messianic hope has held a prominent place. This was dramatically displayed as Jews of the Holocaust were taken to the gas chambers with the words of one of *Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith on their lips:

I believe completely that the Messiah will come, and even though he delays, I continue to believe.

The Apostle Peter's confession (Matthew 16:16) in response to

Jesus' question—"Who say ye that I am?"—clearly indicates which of these categories reflects his conviction.

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ [Greek form of the Hebrew, *moshiach*, "Messiah"; a clear indication that Peter believed in a **personal** Messiah], the Son of the living God. [Indicating that he believed in a personal Messiah **who is divine.**]

*See Volume 1, Number 5 of *Heart's Desire* for information on Maimonides.

ON FAMILIAR TERMS

A glossary of terms commonly occurring in conversation with, or reading about, Jewish people, but not widely understood by non-Jews, presented on an installment basis.

Challah (pronounced kàh-lah)

The name given to the loaves of bread placed on the Jewish family table for the Sabbath meal (Friday evening) and other festival celebrations. *Challot* (plural of *challah*) are distinctive in appearance, having been carefully made from strips of dough braided into an ornamental loaf.



Challah

Halakhah (pronounced hahlahkàh)

The body of rabbinic literature which provides very detailed regulation of Jewish conduct in every

aspect of daily life. Questions of a *halakhic* nature not clearly addressed in extant literature are referred to contemporary rabbinic councils for consideration and authoritative ruling.

Hamsa (pronounced hàhm-sah)

A common motif in ornamental jewelry, this stylized image of the human hand (*Hamsa* is actually related to the Hebrew word for five, referring to the five fingers on the hand.) is believed to provide protection against "the evil eye."

Kabbalah (pronounced kah-bàhlah)

A form of Jewish mysticism tracing its origin to the end of the twelfth century A.D. and consisting of esoteric approaches to God and divine truth, especially emphasizing the hidden meaning of numbers and numerical patterns applied to the Biblical text.

Mikveh (pronounced mìk-vah)

A pool of water into which religious Jews immerse themselves to provide ritual cleansing from various forms of impurity. Extensive *halakhic* regulation provides guidance in the construction and usage of the *mikveh*. It is widely held that the Jewish concept of the ritual bath provided the basis for the Christian ordinance of believers baptism.

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