

YLJC Judaism 101

**THE END OF DAYS
(AND A VERY
NAUGHTY BOY)**

Study pack



GW 16.11.17



MOSHIACH, MOSHIACH, MOSHIACH

Signs of the Messiah:

- Once he is King, leaders of other nations will look to him for guidance (Isaiah 2:4)
- The peoples of the world will turn to the Jews for spiritual guidance (Zechariah 8:23)
- The whole world will worship the One God of Israel (Isaiah 2:11ff)
- He will be descended from King David (Isaiah 11:1) via Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:8ff, 2 Chronicles 7:18)
- Evil and tyranny will no longer be able to stand (Isaiah 11:4)
- Knowledge of God will fill the world (Isaiah 11:9)
- He will include and attract people from all cultures and nations (Isaiah 11:10)
- All Israelites will be returned to their homeland (Isaiah 11:12)
- There will be no more hunger, illness or death (Isaiah 25:8)
- All of the dead will rise again (Isaiah 26:19)
- The Jewish people will experience eternal joy (Isaiah 51:11)
- He will be a messenger of peace (Isaiah 52:7)
- Nations will recognise the wrongs they did to Israel (Isaiah 52:13ff)
- The ruined cities of Israel will be restored (Ezekiel 16:55)
- Weapons of war will be destroyed (Ezekiel 39:9, Isaiah 2:4)
- The people of Israel will have direct access to the Torah through their minds and Torah study will become the study of the wisdom of the heart (Jeremiah 31:33)
- He will grant us all the worthy desires of our hearts (Psalms 37:4)
- He will take the barren land and make it abundant and fruitful (Isaiah 51:3, Amos 9:13ff, Ezekiel 36:29ff, Isaiah 11:6ff)

Progressive Judaism subscribes to the idealised picture painted in the later books of the Bible of life in Messianic times. It is an era of peace in which justice and righteousness reign supreme and all live in harmony. The benefits will apply not only to Jews but to all people, and there will be universal tranquillity and co-operation. (It is, of course, the absence of such world-wide peace that is one of the reasons why Christianity's claim that Jesus was the Messiah has never been accepted by Jews.)

We believe that the most important feature is not so much the actual person of the Messiah but the era of peace that the Messiah will usher in. As a result, references to 'the Messiah' in our liturgy have largely been changed to 'the Messianic Age'.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain: Faith and Practice: a Guide to Reform Judaism Today, 1991

THE VERY NAUGHTY BOY

Shabbatai Zvi was born in Izmir, Turkey, on the Ninth of Av, 1626. Zvi received a traditional education. His gifts being early recognized, he was destined by his family to become a hacham, a member of the rabbinic elite. He studied under illustrious rabbis, and seems to have been ordained as a hacham when he was about 18. He then set out on a path of asceticism.

Between 1642 and 1648 he lived in semi-seclusion. During this period he began to display a character that conforms largely to what handbooks of psychiatry describe as an extreme case of manic-depressive psychosis. During his periods of illumination he felt impelled to commit acts which ran counter to religious law, in particular pronouncing the Ineffable Name of God, the Tetragrammaton. Around 1651-54, his rabbis banished him.

For several years Zvi wandered through Greece, where he made many friends. But this stay also ended in disaster when, during one of his exalted states, he married a Torah scroll under a chuppah, and committed other acts which were considered intolerable. Possibly influenced by the example of the prophet Hosea who married a whore, Zvi married Sarah, a rumoured prostitute, in Cairo in 1664.

The turning point in Zvi's life came with the news that a man of God had appeared in Gaza who disclosed to everyone the secret of happiness. In 1665, Zvi travelled to Gaza to visit this physician of the soul; by then, the latter had had an ecstatic vision of Zvi as the Messiah, and when Zvi arrived he tried to convince him that he was indeed the Messiah.

When Zvi entered another period of illumination, he had absorbed all these new events and, now sure of himself, proclaimed himself as the Messiah and swept with him the whole community, including its rabbi. Some weeks of frenzied excitement followed. Riding around on horseback in majestic state, Zvi summoned a group of his followers, appointing them as apostles.

By Channukah of 1665, Zvi “began to do things that seemed strange: he pronounced the Ineffable Name, ate forbidden fats, and did other things against God and God’s Law, even pressing others to do likewise.”

Back in Constantinople, all the believers were asked to come and kiss the hand of the messianic king; most of the community did so, including some “infidels” (non-believers) who were afraid of the mounting terrorism of the believers. After this ceremony, Zvi decreed the abolition of the fast of the Tenth of Tevet, and instead turned it into a feast-day.

Eventually, in 1666, Zvi was arrested by the Turkish authorities. It was said that he could have obtained his release by a very large bribe which his followers were prepared to pay, but that he refused, thereby greatly enhancing his reputation. The rabbis of the capital who visited him in prison found a dignified scholar who bore his sufferings with an air of nobility, rather than a sinner who set himself above the Law and tradition.

But that Pesach, Zvi sacrificed a Passover lamb and roasted it with its fat, inducing his companions to eat this forbidden food and blessing it with the now customary blessing of “God who permits the forbidden”.

In the autumn of 1666, Zvi was brought before the Sultan. He denied ever having made messianic claims. According to some he even made a long speech about this. Finally he was given the choice between being put to death immediately; or converting to Islam. Agreeing to apostatise and put on the turban, Zvi took the name Aziz Mehmed Effendi and accepted a royal pension of 150 piasters per day. His state of mind after his apostasy was one of deep dejection.

The apostasy produced a profound shock, paralysing leaders and followers alike. In wide circles it was simply not believed and it took some time until the truth was accepted. Now the believers were faced with a cruel dilemma: to admit that their belief had been wholly in vain and that their redeemer was an imposter, or to cling to their belief and inner experience in the face of outward hostile reality and look for an explanation and justification of what had happened. That many accepted the second alternative and refused to give in proves the depth of the movement. Because of this, it did not come to an abrupt end with the apostasy (but who could have dreamed of a Messiah who would forswear his allegiance to Judaism?) On the other hand, the rabbis and

communal leaders, particularly in Turkey, acted with great circumspection. Their policy was to hush up the whole affair, to calm the excitement by pretending that little had actually happened, and to restore Jewish life to its “normal” state.

Zvi himself lived in Adrianople until 1672, succeeding in being allowed to lead a double life, performing the duties of a Muslim but also observing large parts of Jewish ritual. The Turks expected him to act as a missionary, but the 200 heads of families whom he drew to Islam were all secret believers whom he admonished to remain together as a group of secret fighters.

This group’s descendants – known as Dönme (‘converts’) – continue to live in Turkey, where they practice a mixture of Sabbateanism and Judaism to this day.

Encyclopaedia Judaica

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Imagine two twins growing peacefully in the womb. Their lives are serene. The whole world, to these twins, is the womb. Who could imagine anything bigger, better, more comfortable?

Suddenly, the womb convulses. There is upheaval, turmoil, writhing. Then there is a mysterious pounding. Faster, faster; lower, lower.

The first twin exits. Tearing himself from the womb, she drops out of sight. The second twin shrieks, startled by the ‘accident’ that has befallen his only companion. He bemoans the tragedy – the death of a perfectly fine embryo. Why? Why? Why didn’t she take better care? Why did she have to fall into that terrible abyss?

And while mourning, he hears a head-splitting cry and a great noise from the black abyss, and trembles: “Oh my! What a horrible end! Just as I predicted!” he says.

Meanwhile, the ‘dead’ twin has been born into the new world. The head-splitting cry was a sign of health and the tumult was the chorus of “mazel tov”-s sounded by the doctor, the nurses, and the attendants, all thanking God for the arrival of a healthy child.

Yosef Tukachinsky

Unlike Christianity, Judaism has never had a clear map of the hereafter. But two different doctrines have arisen: first, the notion of the immortality of the soul; and secondly, the notion that the dead will revive and be resurrected bodily in the Messianic era. This is expressed in the second paragraph of the Amidah, which traditionally concludes, “Blessed are You, God, who revives the dead.”

Amongst Progressive Jews the belief in the literal resurrection of the body is no longer maintained. Therefore, our Amidah reads: “Blessed are You, God, who renews life beyond death,” which refers to the immortality of the soul but not the resurrection of the body.

All that can be stated is that, whilst life on earth as we know it is limited to our current stay on earth, there is life after death. It is not necessarily more desirable and to be valued above this life, but rather a different stage. In the absence of any further details, the best policy is to concentrate on the merits of the world we know and to use life here to the full. The good deeds that we perform are because it is right to act in such a way rather than to earn reward in the next life.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain: Faith and Practice: a Guide to Reform Judaism Today, 1991

I once ascended to the firmaments. I first went to see Hell and the sight was horrifying. Row after row of tables was laden with platters of sumptuous food, yet the people seated around the tables were pale and emaciated, moaning in hunger. As I came closer, I understood their predicament. Every person held a full spoon, but both arms were splinted with wooden slats so they could not bend either elbow to bring the food to their mouth.

Next I went to visit Heaven. I saw the same setting I had witnessed in Hell: row after row of long tables laden with food. But the people here in Heaven were sitting contentedly, obviously sated from their sumptuous meal. As I came closer, I was amazed to discover that here, too, each person had arms splinted on wooden slats. How, then, did they eat?

As I watched, a woman picked up her spoon and dug it into the dish before her. Then she stretched across the table and fed the person across from her. The recipient of this kindness thanked him and returned the favour by leaning across the table to feed his benefactor.

I suddenly understood. Heaven and Hell offer the same circumstances and conditions. The critical difference is in the way the people treat each other.

I ran back to Hell to share this solution with the poor souls trapped there. I whispered in the ear of one starving man, "You do not have to go hungry. Use your spoon to feed your neighbour, and he will surely return the favour and feed you." "You expect me to feed the detestable man sitting across the table?" said the man angrily, "I would rather starve than give him the pleasure of eating!"

I then understood God's wisdom in choosing who is worthy to go to Heaven and who deserves to go to Hell.

Rabbi Haim of Romshishok