

Educator's Guide

The Mashiach (Messiah) in Judaism

The Jewish concept of a Messiah, or Mashiach in Hebrew, has been discussed extensively by rabbis, philosophers, poets and even featured in Jewish prayer. However, much like many other Jewish concepts, there are debates amongst Jews over what a messianic era is, how or when it will come about and how to help the Mashiach arrive. Despite these debates, the belief in the Mashiach is a fundamental ideal that has been passed down for generations and has created a cohesive peoplehood of Jews, bonded over a shared history and belief of a shared, peaceful future.

This video was co-produced by Z3 project and OpenDor Media.

Video:  [Do Jews believe in a Messiah?](#)

Big Ideas

1. The belief in the Mashiach is an essential belief of the Jewish people.
2. There is a diversity of perspectives within the Jewish world concerning the Mashiach.
3. The belief in the Mashiach has played an important role for Jewish continuity and hope.

Essential Questions

1. What are the Jewish views regarding the Mashiach?
2. Why is the belief in the Mashiach an important one for the Jewish people?
3. Is Zionism a messianic movement?

Review Questions

1. True or **false**: Jews believe that Jesus was the Mashiach?
2. Where does the concept of the Mashiach originate?
 - The Talmud
 - **The Bible**
 - The Shulchan Aruch
 - The Mishneh Torah
3. Which of the following beliefs are **not** associated with the coming of the Mashiach?
 - Restoring the land of Israel to the Jews
 - Rebuilding of the Temple
 - **Becoming a Supreme Court justice in Israel**
 - Creating an age of global peace
4. **True** or false: There are a variety of viewpoints within Judaism concerning the coming of the Mashiach?
5. The belief in the Mashiach imbues a sense of:
 - Depression
 - **Hope**
 - Embarrassment
 - Fear

Discussion Questions

1. Passing down belief in the Mashiach

The belief in the Mashiach has been passed down from generation to generation throughout the last few thousand years of Jewish history. Why do you think the Jewish people have held onto this belief in one form or another for so long?

2. Joke session

Read the following classic Jewish joke to your students:

One day, coming back from trading in the town, a village's men find a beggar sitting at the side of the road leading into the village. 'Moishe' they say, 'What are you doing out here?' He tells them 'The rabbi appointed me as the village watchman. I sit here all day watching for the Messiah.' 'What kind of job is that!' they say. 'Well,' Moishe said, 'the pay is not too good, but it's steady work.'

Discuss:

- What is the message or major lesson from the joke?

- There is a saying that “God helps those who help themselves”. Is there a connection between this saying and this joke? If so, what is it?

3. Rambam’s Thirteen Principles of Faith

Rambam (Maimonides), one of the greatest codifiers of Jewish law and philosophy, compiled the [Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith](#), also referred to as *Shloshah Asar Ikkarim*. Rambam explained that these thirteen principles showcase the “fundamental truths of our religion and its very foundations.” One of the thirteen principles is the belief in the arrival of the Mashiach and the messianic era.

- Are you surprised that Rambam included the belief in the Mashiach as one of the thirteen principles of Jewish faith? Why or why not?
- If you were to add another item to Rambam’s list, what would it be and why?

4. False messiahs in Jewish history

Jewish tradition states that in every generation there is a person who potentially could be the Mashiach. As a result, there have been numerous examples throughout Jewish history in which a Jew claimed or others claimed that they were the Mashiach when they were not. You can read more about these false messiahs throughout history [here](#). Why do you think there have been so many false messiahs within Jewish history?

5. The power of belief

Belief plays a crucial role in who we are and what we do, even when those beliefs are not fully understood. And just as beliefs are so important to each of us individually, with the Jewish people, it’s only through powerful shared beliefs, like the belief in the Mashiach, that we’ve managed to persevere throughout Jewish history. Why do beliefs matter and how do they connect us as a people?

Learning Activities

1. Lesson plan

Use our ready made lesson plan [HERE](#).

2. Ani Ma’amin: The tune of Jewish survival

Read the story of the niggun (tune) behind the song “Ani Ma’amin” based on #12 of Rambam’s [Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith](#). After reading the story, turn the lights off in the room and play the tune for your students [here](#). After listening to

the song, give your students the opportunity to reflect in a journal entry. You can give them the following prompts to get them going:

- What was your reaction to the story behind the tune of Ani Ma'amin?
- After hearing the story, how did it feel to listen to the tune itself?
- Why do you think this song in particular is such a powerful song for Jews around the world?
- What does this song make you think of?

3. Podcast listening party

Listen to our [podcast episode](#) about Shabbetai Zvi, one of the most well known false messiahs in Jewish history. Download our [podcast listening party PDF](#) to engage your students with the content.

4. Give your students our [Kahoot](#) on Does Judaism Believe in a Messiah!

Reflection Questions

1. Ani Ma'amin on the way to the gas chambers

The powerful niggun (tune) for Ani Ma'amin was composed by Hassid Azriel David Festig in a packed cattle car on the way to his death at Treblinka during the Holocaust. Many Jews sang this tune which expresses faith in the coming of the Mashiach while walking towards the gas chambers in Nazi death camps.

- Why do you think Jews sang this song on the way to their deaths?
- What does it teach us about the Jewish people that so many used their last breaths to sing this song of hope?
- What is your personal reaction to this story? What does it teach us about the power of hope and faith?

2. Hastening the coming of the Mashiach

According to Jewish tradition, there are numerous [ways](#) in which Jews can help hasten the coming of the Mashiach, primarily through mitzvot (commandments) such as Teshuvah, the observance of Shabbat, Tzedakah and Jewish unity. In the Talmud (Shabbat 118b), there is a teaching that if every Jew were to keep one Shabbat properly, then the Mashiach would come.

Today, different Jews focus on different methods for getting to that better age. For some, the focus is on doing good deeds such as visiting the sick and giving

charity. For others it's about learning Torah and prayer. For others it's about correcting the injustices in the world and spreading Jewish values. But whatever the approach, they all stem from a similar place: a responsibility to take a proactive stance in making the world a better place than how we found it. What do you think you can personally do to bring about a better age?

3. Religious Zionism and Messianic times

Many Jews view Zionism as fundamentally messianic in its essence, as a number of [prophecies](#) have taken place in modern Jewish history that Jewish tradition states would take place during messianic times. The ingathering of the exiles, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the return of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel are all examples of this. In fact, in many synagogues around the world, the modern State of Israel is referred to as "Reishit Tzemichat Ge'ulatenu" (the dawning of our redemption), in other words, the beginning of the messianic age.

- Should belief in the Mashiach change in an era in which Jewish life is flourishing like it hasn't in a millennium? (including achieving sovereignty in the Land of Israel and the return to Jerusalem?)
- How can we yearn for something we have already achieved, at least in part?
- Do you believe that modern circumstances should impact the way that we view the messianic age and the coming of the Mashiach?
- Do you believe that (according to Jewish tradition), we are currently living in the beginning of messianic times?

4. Judaism as eternal optimism

Throughout Jewish history, even in our darkest hours, Jews have hoped and prayed for a brighter future. Former Israeli President Shimon Peres famously said that "both pessimists and optimists die the same way but live very differently."

- How does the concept of Mashiach instill a sense of optimism for the Jewish people?
- Are you an optimist? If so, how does being optimistic affect your own life?
- Do you think being optimistic is something you're born with or a decision that you need to make?

5. What will happen when Mashiach comes?

Various Jewish philosophers and scholars have [shared](#) different perspectives on

what will happen when the Mashiach comes. Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba said that when Mashiach comes, all of the prophets' prophecies will be fulfilled. The animals will make peace with each other; the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the lion will eat straw, and babies will play in the viper's nest. Rambam, on the other hand, argued that the *Mashiach* will not necessarily perform any miracles and wonders.

- What are your beliefs when it comes to Mashiach?
- What lessons do you believe are most important when it comes to the concept of Mashiach?

Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:
 - [Shabtai Tzvi](#)
 - [How Did Jews Resist During and After the Holocaust?](#)
 - [How Education Kept Judaism Alive](#)
 - [Jewish Ritual: the Secret to Community?](#)
 - [The Immigration Nation: Ingathering of the Exiles](#)
 - [Repairing the World: is Tikkun Olam Jewish?](#)
2. Pini Dunner, [How Ani Ma'amin Survived the Shoah](#)
3. [Rambam's 13 Principles of Jewish Faith](#)
4. Israel Hayom, [Top Rabbis: Look at the Signs, Messiah is Coming!](#)
5. Mizrahi, [Israel: A Land of Living Prophecy](#)
6. Torat Har Etzion, [The Messianic Era](#)
7. Chabad, [What is Mashiach?](#)