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Class #2: Foundations of Torah, Principals of Faith, and Moshiach (the Messiah)

### Lesson 7: **Two Periods Within The Era Of The Redemption**

Material for Lesson #7: Excerpt from the book, "I Await His Coming Every Day: Analytical Studies by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson of the Rambam's Rulings on Mashiach and the Ultimate Redemption"

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Note: This lesson contains some emendations to the source text, so our UNA students should study the email text for the purpose of the course.

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## **The Prophecies Concerning Mashiach**

### **Prophecies as Allegories**

Rambam[84] sets out the following principles in regard to the Era of the Redemption:[85] One should not entertain the notion that in the Era of Mashiach any element of the natural order will be nullified, or that there will be any innovation in the work of creation. Rather, the world will continue according to its pattern.

Although Yeshayahu [Isaiah][86] states, "The wolf will dwell with the lamb...", these [words] are an allegory and a riddle. They mean that Israel will dwell securely together with the gentiles {who were oppressing them or hating them in the past} who are likened to wolves and leopards.... [In this Era, all nations] will return to the true faith and no longer plunder or destroy....

Similarly, other prophecies of this nature concerning Mashiach are analogies. In the Era of the King Mashiach, everyone will realize what was implied by these analogies and allusions.

Our Sages taught:[87] "There will be no difference between the current age and the Era of Mashiach except [our emancipation from] subjugation to the [gentile] kingdoms."

### **Actual Miracles in the Era of the Redemption**

On the surface, there are several Midrashim which would appear to contradict Rambam's principle that the Era of the Redemption will not inaugurate a new and miraculous world order. For example, *Toras Kohanim* teaches: "What Scriptural text teaches us that shade[88] trees will ultimately produce fruit? The following:[89] 'The trees of the field will produce their fruit.' "

A similar concept is found at the conclusion of Tractate *Kesubbos*,[90] which states:

Rav Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: "Ultimately all the shade trees in Eretz Yisrael will bear fruit, as it is written,[91] 'The trees will bear fruit and the vine and the fig trees will give forth their strength.' "

These statements appear to contradict the principle stated by Rambam, for surely the yielding of fruit by a shade tree represents a change in the natural order. Nevertheless, it is possible to explain that our Sages also spoke in allegories, so that the term "fruit trees" could be interpreted as a reference to Torah scholars and "shade trees" to the unlearned.[92]

On closer analysis of the passages, however, such an interpretation is untenable.[93] The above-mentioned passage in *Toras Kohanim* comprises the exegesis of several verses which speak of an abundance of material blessings in a very literal sense. For example, on the same verse quoted above, "The earth will give forth its produce and the trees of the field will produce their fruit," *Toras Kohanim* explains: "The earth will not give forth produce as it does now, but rather as it did in the time of Adam, the first man. On the very day he sowed, crops were produced." Similarly, when the passage in *Kesubbos* is considered in its totality, it is obvious that our Sages' statements were meant to be understood literally.

For these reasons, Rambam's statements were not accepted by all authorities. In his gloss on *Hilchos Melachim [Laws of Kings]*, Raavad takes issue with Rambam, stating, "Behold: the Torah writes,[94] 'And I will remove predators from the earth,' implying that this prophecy is surely not an allegory, but rather a description of what will actually take place."

### **One Possible Resolution: The Uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael**

Radbaz on the *Mishneh Torah* takes note of Raavad's statement and comments:

This does not represent a contradiction: just as the other verses are allegories, this is also an allegory.... What one should believe is the following. The [prophecies] will be fulfilled in a literal manner in Eretz Yisrael. [This is implied by the verse,[95]] "They shall do no evil, nor shall they destroy throughout My holy mountain, because the land [i.e., the Land of renown] will be filled with knowledge." Similarly, it is written, "I will remove predators from the land." In other lands, in contrast, "the world will continue according to its pattern." [In these lands] the prophecies will be fulfilled in an allegorical sense, as it is written,[96] "Nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more." In Eretz Yisrael, however, the prophecies will be fulfilled in both a literal and an allegorical sense.

### **A Rejection of This Explanation**

The statements of Radbaz, however, do not appear to represent a complete resolution of the issue:

Rambam's above-quoted statement, "One should not entertain the notion that in the Era of Mashiach any element of the natural order will be nullified, or that there will be any innovation in the work of creation," seems to imply that throughout the entire world, the natural order will continue to prevail. The institution of a miraculous order within Eretz Yisrael would surely appear to be an "innovation in the work of creation."

Rambam's conception of the Era of the Redemption is also reflected in the previous chapter of *Hilchos Melachim*. There, Rambam writes:[97]

One should not entertain the notion that the King Mashiach must work miracles and wonders, bring about new phenomena within the world, resurrect the dead, or perform other similar deeds. This is [definitely] not true. [A proof can be brought from the fact that] Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest Sages of the Mishnah, was one of the supporters of King Ben Koziva, and would describe him as the King Mashiach....[98] The Sages did not ask him for any signs or wonders. Since Bar Kochba's revolt took place in Eretz Yisrael, it would appear that the Rambam maintains that the natural order will continue to prevail during the Era of the Redemption even in the Holy Land.

### **An Alternative Resolution: Back to Eden**

The author of *Avodas HaKodesh*[99] offers a different interpretation to the concept that the natural order will continue to prevail in the Era of the Redemption. He holds that the intent is that G-d will not bring about a new order that transcends nature. All creatures will, however, return to the nature with which they had been originally endowed at the beginning of creation, before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

Based on this conception, the seemingly miraculous prophecies of the Era of the Redemption mentioned above do not pose a contradiction to the Rambam's thesis. Before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, all trees bore fruit, and there were no predators. The sin debased the spiritual composition of the entire world, bringing about these negative characteristics. In the Era of the Redemption, however, these will be eradicated,[100] and the world will revert to its original nature. Thus, the natural order will not cease to exist in the Era of the Redemption. On the contrary, G-d's true intent for the natural order will be revealed.

### **The Rejection of This Thesis**

This is, however, difficult to explain within the context of Rambam's stance. His statement that "One should not entertain the notion... that there will be any innovation in the work of creation," apparently implies that the current natural order will continue. Seemingly, it does not matter exactly when the potential to produce fruit was taken from the shade trees, nor when certain beasts were endowed with a predatory nature. From Rambam's statements, it appears that since this is their nature at present, this nature will continue to prevail.

Thus, it is still difficult to comprehend how Rambam will reconcile his principle that the natural order will not be repealed in the Era of the Redemption, with the statements of our Sages which appear to indicate that ultimately, the Era of the Redemption will initiate a new world order, in which nature will give way to miracles.

### **Two Apparent Self-Contradictions**

The *Lechem Mishneh* further emphasizes the difficulty with Rambam's thesis, noting several places within the *Mishneh Torah* itself where Rambam renders decisions that run contrary to this principle. For example:

Rambam's thesis is based on the following Talmudic passage:[101]

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba states in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: "The prophets all prophesied only regarding the Era of the Mashiach. The World to Come, in contrast, [is described by the verse]:[102] 'G-d, no eye but Yours has seen.'" This seems to conflict with [the opinion of] Shmuel, who maintains: "There will be no difference between the current age and the Era of Mashiach except [emancipation from] subjugation to the kingdoms."

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba is stating that the prophets' visions all refer to the Era of Mashiach, and it is in this Era that the miracles which they prophesied will take place. The World to Come, in contrast, represents a higher level of existence which even the eye of prophetic vision could not conceive. Shmuel, in contrast, differs from this view. He maintains that the miracles foretold by the prophets will not take place in the Era of Mashiach, for at that time the natural order of the world will continue to prevail as in the present. [The *Lechem Mishneh* notes that in *Hilchos Melachim*,[103] a book of practical Torah Law, Rambam identifies with Shmuel's view, while in *Hilchos Teshuvah*[104], on spiritual concepts, he identifies with the view of Rabbi Chiya bar Abba.]

The Mishnah teaches:[105]

A [Jewish] person should not go out [to the public domain on Shabbos] carrying a sword or a bow.... If he does so, he is liable to bring a sin offering. Rabbi Eliezer says, "These articles are ornaments [and hence, like jewelry, are considered as garments which may be worn on Shabbos]." Our Sages say: "On the contrary, they are shameful, for it is written,[106] 'And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks... and they shall not learn war any more' "; [i.e., were they to be ornaments, they would not have to be transfigured in the Era of the Redemption]. [107]

In the Talmud's discussion of the issue, our Sages associate this difference of opinion with the difference of opinion between Rabbi Chiya bar Abba and Shmuel mentioned above. There is a question among the Sages as to whether Rabbi Eliezer accepts Rabbi Chiya bar Abba's view or not. It is obvious, however, that the ruling of the Sages is not in accordance with Shmuel's view. Nevertheless, although Rambam subscribes to Shmuel's opinion in regard to the Redemption, in regard to the Shabbos laws he accepts the ruling of the Sages.[108]

### **Is the Resurrection Not a Miracle?!**

The above difficulties can be resolved within the context of the resolution of another question, of broader scope. One of Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith is the belief in the Resurrection of the Dead[109] which will take place after the coming of Mashiach. If so, how can Rambam say that the natural order of the world will not be altered in the Era of the Mashiach?[110] What innovation could be more cataclysmic than the Resurrection of the Dead?

### **In Conclusion: Two Periods Within the Era of the Redemption**

It would therefore appear that Rambam maintains that there will be two periods[111] within the Era of the Redemption: one period associated with the coming of Mashiach, when the natural order will continue to prevail, and a subsequent period which will see miracles that depart from the natural order, including the Resurrection of the Dead.

In this context, we can understand the implications of Rambam's reference to Bar Kochba as proof that Mashiach need not work miracles. This clarifies that the coming of Mashiach will not bring about a new world order, and hence his ability or inability to work miracles is not at all significant in regard to his role among the Jewish people.[112]

According to Rambam, Mashiach will restore the monarchy, build the Beis HaMikdash, and gather in the Jewish people, thus creating an environment in which the Jewish people will be able to observe the Torah and its mitzvos in a perfect manner. Furthermore, he will remove any obstacles to this end in the world at large. As a consequence, the Jewish people will "be free [to involve themselves] in Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress or disturb them. At that time there will be neither famine nor war... [and] the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d." [113] I. e., while the natural order of the world prevails, the Jewish people and the world at large will be elevated to a perfect state of knowledge and practice. [114] This is the purpose of Mashiach's coming.

In this context, we can understand Rambam's approach to the prophecies of the Torah and the statements of our Sages which appear to indicate that there will be a change in the world order in the Era of Redemption. Those prophecies which are connected with Mashiach personally or the immediate effects of his coming in the world at large, Rambam interprets as allegories, for in this period "the world will continue according to its pattern." [115]

In contrast, prophecies that G-d will "remove predators from the earth" and cause shade trees to produce fruit, which speak of the Era of the Redemption as a whole, need not be interpreted as allegories. They will be fulfilled in a literal sense in the latter period of the Era of the Redemption, the period in which the dead will be resurrected.

### **Resolving the Difficulties in the Rambam's Statements**

In this context, we can explain the two problematic issues raised by the *Lechem Mishneh*. Firstly, in regard to the laws of Shabbos: Since ultimately there will be an era when the natural order will change, Rambam concludes that weapons are not ornaments and a person who carries them in the public domain is liable. Similarly, in regard to the difference of opinion between Rav Chiya bar Abba and Shmuel: From the statement of the Talmud that Rav Chiya bar Abba differs from Shmuel, it appears that Rav Chiya bar Abba himself maintains that miracles will take place in the beginning of the Era of the Redemption. In regard to this, Rambam differs and accepts Shmuel's view. On the other hand: Since ultimately, in the later period of the Era of the Redemption, all the prophecies of miracles - even those intended to be understood in a literal sense - will be fulfilled, it is fitting for Rambam to borrow Rav Chiya bar Abba's statement that "The prophets all prophesied only regarding the Era of the Mashiach,..." in order to emphasize the uniqueness of the World to Come. [116]

### **What Will Bring About the Advent of the Miraculous Era?**

There is still a certain difficulty with the Rambam's decision. Since the coming of Mashiach will not necessitate a departure from the natural order, what event will? What is the cause that will lead to the Resurrection of the Dead and the beginning of a miraculous order of existence?

There is a further difficulty which is raised by Rambam's own statements concerning the Era of the Redemption. In *Iggeres Techiyas HaMeisim*, Rambam writes that his own statements in the Mishneh Torah - that the prophecies concerning the Redemption are allegorical in nature - do not represent a definite and final ruling on the matter; indeed, it is quite possible that the prophecies will be realized in a literal sense. According to the explanation above, this statement is problematic. These prophecies are to be understood as allegories, because Mashiach is intended to bring about a state of redemption within the natural context of the world. And this state of redemption, which finds expression in the complete observance of the Torah and its mitzvos within the context of our material existence, is the purpose of his coming. The revelation of a miraculous order would appear to contradict this ideal.

### The Resolution: Meriting and Not Meriting

These difficulties can be resolved by elucidating the following Talmudic passage.[117] It is written:[118] "Behold, one like a son of man came on the clouds of heaven"; however, it is also written,[119] "[Your king will come...] like a poor man riding on a donkey." If [the Jewish people] are found worthy of it, [Mashiach] will come "on the clouds of heaven"; if they do not merit, he will come "like a poor man riding on a donkey."

Similarly, in many other contexts, it can be explained that there are two possible paths of conduct for Mashiach. If the Jewish people are meritorious, he will take the one path; if, heaven forbid, merits are lacking, he will come by the other path. For example, several sources[120] state that the Third Beis HaMikdash is completely built and will descend from the heavens. In contrast, there are other sources[121] (and this opinion is adopted by Rambam[122]) which maintain that the Third Beis HaMikdash will be built by Mashiach. Here, too, it can be explained that if the Jews are found worthy, they will be granted a heavenly Beis HaMikdash; if not, the Beis HaMikdash will have to be built by mortal effort.

### The Possibility of Miracles

In the *Mishneh Torah*, which is a text of Halachah, Torah law, Rambam chooses to describe the Redemption in terms that will surely be fulfilled. Since the merits of the Jewish people depend on free will, who can tell what they will ultimately be found worthy of? Rambam therefore states that the natural order will continue to prevail. The possibility, however, remains that the collective spiritual attainments of the Jewish people will bring about a miraculous world order.[123]

On this basis, we can understand what will lead to the advent of the second period in the Era of the Redemption. Once "the occupation of the entire world [including the gentile nations] will be solely to know G-d" and the Jews will be perfect in their observance of the Torah and its mitzvos, the Jews will surely have attained the level at which they are considered to have "merited". This will then allow for the advent of a miraculous order, including the Resurrection of the Dead.

Thus, in the *Mishneh Torah* Rambam describes the Redemption within the context of the natural order, for this, at the very least, will come to pass. Nevertheless, in *Iggeres Techiyas HaMeisim*, he writes that the possibility exists that the Jews will in fact "merit", in which case the prophecies of miracles will materialize in a literal manner at the very beginning of the Era of the Redemption.

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 May we witness the fulfillment of these prophecies when, "As in the days of your exodus from Egypt, I will show you wonders." [124]

### Footnotes:

84. [The following text resolves a number of apparent contradictions within Rambam's various discussions of the character, both natural and miraculous, of the Era of the Redemption. It is a somewhat abbreviated translation of a text first published in *Chiddushim U'Biurim BeShas*, Vol. II, p. 277. This text telescopes a number of talks which the Rebbe Shlita delivered in the course of the month of Nissan, 5733 (1973), and which appear in Yiddish in *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXVII, in connection with Parshas Behar-Bechukosai.]

86. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 11:6.

88. [This term has been used to denote "ilanei srak" (lit., "barren trees").]

89. Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:4.

91. Yoel (Joel) 2:22.

93. In general, it is difficult to accept the thesis that our Sages' statements were intended as allegories. In contrast to the prophets, who frequently spoke in allegory, our Sages generally spoke directly. Thus, unless there is a clear indication to the contrary, their words should be understood straightforwardly.

94. Vayikra 26:6.

95. Yeshayahu 11:9.

96. Ibid. 2:4.

97. Significantly, Raavad also takes issue with Rambam on this matter. Basing himself on Sanhedrin 93b, he maintains that after the Sages heard of Bar Kochba's pretensions to be the Mashiach, they investigated whether or not he had miraculous power. When he failed to demonstrate such powers, they had him killed.

Rambam favors the view stated in *Eichah Rabbah* commenting on verse 2:2 and in the Jerusalem Talmud, *Taanis* 4:5, that Bar Kochba was killed by gentiles.

(Despite the differences between Rambam and Raavad, it is possible to reconcile the sources on which these two opinions are based. It was in fact the Romans who actually killed Bar Kochba, as is stated in the latter two sources. Nevertheless, they were able to defeat and kill him only because the Sages withdrew their support of him.)

98. Furthermore, Bar Kochba's contemporaries were even willing to sacrifice their lives in war to support him.

100. [This will be accomplished through our service in refining and elevating the material substance of the world in the era prior to Mashiach's coming.]

102. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 64:3.

106. Yeshayahu 2:4.

109. In the *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam also emphasizes the importance of the belief in the Resurrection, stating that a [Jewish] person who denies this belief will not be granted a portion in the World to Come.

110. The question is reinforced by Rambam's definition of "the World to Come" as the spiritual world of the souls which follows life in this world. According to the view of Raavad, Ramban, and the sages of the Kabbalah and Chassidus, the term "the World to Come" applies to the era after the Resurrection. This conception allows for the possibility of explaining that in the Era of Mashiach, the natural order will continue to prevail. The Era of the World to Come, by contrast, will be characterized by miracles.

The above explanation cannot be offered according to Rambam's position, for he defines the World to Come as the world of the souls. Thus there is even greater force behind the question raised above: How can it be said that there will be no changes within the natural order in the era of Mashiach, if that era includes the Resurrection?

111. [The Shelah holds likewise that the view of Shmuel presupposes two such periods.]

112. [See the above essay on "The Function of Mashiach," which explains that, if anything, the conception of Mashiach as a miracle-worker runs contrary to the Rambam's appreciation of the role of Mashiach.]

114. [From a conceptual perspective, we can appreciate the necessity for distinguishing two periods within the Era of the Redemption. The Era of the Redemption is the time during which G-d's sovereignty over our material world will be revealed. Were it necessary for the Era of the Redemption to involve miracles, this would imply that G-d's sovereignty could not (so to speak) be revealed in the world's present context. It would thus appear that the natural order stands in contradiction to the manifestation of His Kingship. Therefore, the Era of the Redemption must include a period when the natural order remains, yet "the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d." This will clearly indicate that our material frame of reference does not stand in opposition to the manifestation of G-d's sovereignty. Nevertheless, such a period does not represent the ultimate expression of G-dliness.

Our Sages (Midrash *Tanchuma*, Naso 7:1; and see Tanya, ch. 33) describe this world as G-d's dwelling place. Just as a person expresses himself freely in his own home, similarly, G-d's essence will be revealed within our material world. This implies the revelation, not only of those limited dimensions of G-dliness that can be enfolded within the confines of the natural order, but also the expression of the transcendent aspects of G-dliness whose manifestation will suspend the natural order. These transcendent qualities will be revealed in the second period of the Era of the Redemption, when the natural order gives way to miracles.]

115. As an example of this principle, Rambam cites the prophecy, "the wolf will dwell with the lamb." He concludes that this prophecy is an allegory because it amplifies the allegorical prophecy of an earlier verse, "A shoot will emerge from the stem of Yishai (Jesse)," which describes Mashiach's coming. It could be suggested that the Rambam chooses this prophecy as an example, because the analogue which it communicates reflects one of the central themes he seeks to emphasize concerning the Era of the Redemption - that the Jews will not be disturbed by the gentile nations in this Era, and will therefore be able to devote their energies to the study of Torah and the knowledge of G-d.

116. This also sheds light on another apparent contradiction in Rambam's rulings. After recording the difference of opinion between Rav Chiya bar Abba and Shmuel, the Talmud quotes the following difference of opinion. Rabbi Chiya bar Abba states...: "The prophets all prophesied only regarding *baalei teshuvah* (penitents). In contrast, the perfectly righteous [are described by the verse]: "G-d, no eye but Yours has seen."

This conflicts with [the opinion of] Rabbi Abbahu who maintains: "In the place of *baalei teshuvah*, the righteous cannot stand."

The fact the Talmud mentions these two differences of opinion in connection with each other appears to indicate that they are interrelated. As mentioned, Rambam quotes Rav Chiya bar Abba's statements in regard to the Era of the Redemption, and yet we find that in *Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:4, Rambam cites Rabbi Abbahu's view. Nevertheless, based on the explanation above, we can conclude that there is no contradiction between Rambam's two statements. Although Rambam borrows Rav Chiya bar Abba's words, which differ from those of Shmuel, he favors the latter's view. There is thus no difficulty with his acceptance of Rabbi Abbahu's position.

118. Daniel 7:13.

119. Zechariah 9:9.



123. On a deeper level, it can be explained that the purpose of Mashiach's coming, as stated above, is to bring about a perfect observance of the Torah and its mitzvos within our material world. When, however, the Jewish people have been found worthy, Mashiach will also demonstrate the unique relationship that G-d shares with them by revealing miracles.

124. Michah 7:15. [Though the above sichah was delivered some years ago, this verse has pointed contemporary relevance, as the Rebbe Shlita has indicated on numerous occasions. See the booklet published by Sichos In English, entitled "I Will Show You Wonders: Public Statements of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, Shlita, Before and During the Gulf Crisis."]

\*\*\*\*\*Quiz for Lesson 7\*\*\*\*\*

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1. According to Rambam, if a Torah-faithful Jewish patrilineal descendent of King David arises as a leader who is fighting the wars of Hashem, should we reject him as a presumed Moshiach for the sole reason that we don't see any miraculous changes in the course of nature?
2. What, if any, innovation in nature has been prophesied which would be more cataclysmic than the Resurrection of the Dead?
3. The sage Rav Chiya bar Abba held that the prophets of the Hebrew Bible all prophesied regarding what era?
4. In what work authored by Rambam does he say that his own statements in the Mishneh Torah - that the prophecies concerning the Redemption are allegorical in nature - do not represent a definite and final ruling on the matter?
5. What are the two different prophecies regarding how Moshiach will make his appearance in the world?
6. What are the two possibilities for the means by which the Third Holy Temple ("Beis HaMikdosh") will be built?
7. How did Bar Kochba, who for a number of years following the destruction of the Second Temple was considered by the majority of the Sages to be a presumed Moshiach, really die?

[Historical note: It is prophesied that Moshiach will display a special sense and ability for righteous judgment. At an eventual point during his war against the Romans, Bar Kochba listened to and believed an evil slander that one of the righteous sages was a collaborator with the Romans, and he sentenced this sage to be executed for being a traitor. When this happened, the sages stopped supporting Bar Kochba as a presumed Messiah.]

8. According to the view of Raavad, RambaN (Nachmanides), and the sages of the Kabbalah and Chassidus, the technically accurate meaning of the term "the World to Come" ("Olom Habah") applies to what era?
9. Since the Jews will not be disturbed by any other nations in the Era of the Redemption, they will have more time to work on their essential goals. In that era, what will they be devoting their energies to?
10. At that blessed time, what will be the occupation of the entire world?

An extra question, just for thought: Does our "normal" ("non-miraculous") material frame of reference stand in opposition to a revelation of G-d's kingship?