Everything you always wanted to know about the Messiah…

The 12th principle of the Jewish faith declares our belief in the coming of the Messiah (in Hebrew “Mashiah”). This issue is a bit complex and sometimes not very well understood. So we will gradually explore what we do know and what we cannot know for sure about the Messiah.

A methodological note: I will be writings about the Messiah based on the words of Maimonides, which was the first to formulate the 13 principles of the Jewish faith. Maimonides (1135-1204) wrote a seminal book called “Mishne Tora.” This book is the most comprehensive code of Jewish law. Mishne Tora consists of 1,000 chapters, exactly the same number of chapters the Mishna has. Maimonides writes about the Messiah in the penultimate chapter of his book. And in the last chapter he writes about the messianic age. These texts are undoubtedly the most authoritative texts on this subject (the Shulhan Arukh does not contain any information about the Messiah).

I will also use an English book which in my opinion is probably the best modern book writing on this subject. I’m referring to the book **The Real Messiah?** by Aryeh Kaplan, who as its subtitle says, is also “a Jewish response to [Christian] Missionaries”.

Let’s start explaining what the word “Messiah” means.

The word “Messiah” in Hebrew does not mean “savior”. In Hebrew savior is *moshia’*, and is a term generally used to refer to God, and not a man, as we say in the Amida □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□ □□□□. “God is the King who helps us, SAVES (moshia’) and protects us.”
The word □□□□ (Mashiah) means “anointed”. In ancient Israel,

the king had to be officially appointed by the court and by a prophet (see Mishne Tora, Kings 1:3) and the official inauguration-ceremony was performed by anointing the king with a special oil (shemen hamish-ha). For example, when the prophet Samuel appoints Shaul, the first king of Israel, the pasuq says: *"And Samuel took the jar of oil and poured it over his head …"* (I Samuel 10: 1) and so Shaul was officially established as the king. Messiah, therefore, means "anointed king". And why is it important to clarify that he will be an anointed king, and is it not enough to just to say that he will be a king? Because there were always usurpers and false kings, who would seize the power and proclaimed themselves kings or leaders. When we say "Messiah" we are clearly saying that this will be a king who will not usurp the power, but will be assigned legally and officially as the Jewish Monarch, and as such he will accepted by all Israel, like King David or King Shaul.

The Messiah therefore, will be the King of the Jews. Of course it will not be a secular political leader, but as King David, he will strictly follow the laws of the Tora, defend them and establish the Tora as the law for all his people (similarly, before entering the execution of his office, an american president takes an oath to "…preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States") .

According to our prophets (see Yesha'ayahu 11) the Messiah will be a leader who will be known and respected for his "wisdom and insight, advice, strength, knowledge and reverence for HaShem."

Aryeh Kaplan says that the Messiah will be. "… The leader who will bring the complete redemption to the Jews, both spiritually and physically. And with it, he will bring everlasting peace, prosperity and moral perfection to the world .

On this point, we can add that Maimonides says that there are

three prerequisites that must be met before a person can be considered as a potential candidate to be the Messiah. And the first of those conditions is that he must be a descendant of King David.

Why? Because HaShem promised King David that the monarchy will belong to his descendants. Hence the “full name” of the Messiah in Hebrew is “Mashiah ben David”, i.e., “the anointed king, a descendant of the dynasty of David.”

To be continued…