

Middah Reflection #4

Messianic Yearning

By Shmuly Yanklowitz



Religious Jews are taught at a young age to yearn for the *geulah* (redemption). With sophistication, the student comes to learn that messianism is not just about seeking an end--it is also a worldview, a process of living with a vision and with a dream. What is one to do who lacks this excitement for life, this drive to make change, this idealism to envision a better world? Rabbi Luzzatto (Mesillat Yesharim, Chapter 7) writes:

“The best advice for the person in whom this desire does not burn is that he consciously enthuse himself so that enthusiasm might eventually become second nature to him. External movement arouses the internal, and you certainly have more of a command over the external than the internal.”

Yearning for a better world, for a messianic age, is seen as a Jewish foundational concept. In fact, the Gemarrah says that one of the first questions one is asked on one's judgment day is whether or not one was “*tzipita lishua*” (waiting with hope for redemption). Did one yearn for a world devoid of poverty, human suffering, hate, and cruelty? Did one act to bring this dream into reality? Today, due to extremists, notions of messianism have become unappealing for many, but we cannot lose the inner human emotional need for a notion of salvation and the fruits that that impulse can produce. Discussing the successes of the Zionists' building and founding of *Medinat Yisrael*, Rabbi David Hartman writes:

“if the messianic vision is abandoned, the resultant anchorage exclusively in the world of immediacy and everyday concerns may lead to cynicism or despair regarding the possibility of achieving anything radical in human history and may discourage responsible action by the halakhic community”
(*A Living Covenant*, page 288).

We need more balance in our lives as justice seekers, but we also need more radical visionaries! For a person who wishes to profoundly shape the world, it may be necessary to become one who yearns and works tirelessly for redemption. As Rav Luzzatto recommends, we should take on spiritual practices which help to cultivate the internal

desire for an ideal world and external practices that help to be *makriv* the *geulah* (bring near an ideal human society). May we be blessed with success!