

Moshiach In Every Generation – Sanhedrin 98b

Appendix – Kuntres Shmoi Shel Moshiach

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The concept of משיח בכל דור – Moshiach in every generation, was mentioned earlier. Several Acharonim including the Chasam Sofer, Bartenura, Sedai Chemed and others, state in each generation there is someone alive that is fit to be Moshiach. If the generation merits they will become the actual Moshiach and bring the Geulah.

While this concept is widely held. It is not the only, and exclusive, legitimate belief regarding awaiting Moshiach's arrival. As mentioned in earlier chapters, several Gedolay Yisroel, Rishonim and Acharonim, throughout the generations state their understanding of the Gemara regarding Moshiach coming from the maisim as literal. Such that Moshiach from the living (the Moshiach of the generation) or the maisim are both legitimate possibilities, that have a strong foundation in Chazal and Mesoras Yisroel throughout the generations.

Furthermore, even within the acharonim that state there is Moshiach in each generation. The Sedai Chemed continues and states explicitly Moshiach from the maisim is still a possibility and quotes the Gemara Sanhedrin 98b. Furthermore, regarding the Chasam Sofer that states simply Moshiach will be from the living. The Maharsham to Eruvin 43a, (and others) raise a Kasha, question, on the Chasam Sofer and state his position appears to require further analysis - Tzarich Iyun - as to why the Chasam Sofer doesn't quote the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98b that states Moshiach could also be from the maisim. I.e. not only was the Chasam Sofer's opinion, one respected opinion, among many Gedolay Yisroel throughout the generations that state Moshiach could be either from the living or also the maisim. It was also not the final word on the topic.

Interestingly, the Munkatcher Rebbe (also post Chasam Sofer) author of Shu't Minchas Elazar writes in Shaar Yisaschar (ח"ב ע' שעד, and ח"ד שו"ת מנחת אלעזר ח"ד) regarding HaRav Shlomo Elazar Alfandari, even though he died. He still considered him the Moshiach of the generation, and that he would be revealed as the Actual Moshiach via a miraculous revelation from heaven.

Rashi – Sanhedrin 98b

From an in-depth analysis of our Gemara. It can be seen that Rashi's understanding of our Gemara (and indeed it appears to be the simple implication of the Sugya), doesn't limit discussion and belief in Moshiach, to be restricted to the confines of the concept of משיח בכל דור. I.e. Chazal didn't limit discussion and belief in Moshiach, to be solely understood within the context of משיח בכל דור.

Rashi's approach to this matter can be seen regarding Menachem Ben Chizkiya Shmoi in Sanhedrin 98b, (also appearing in Yerushalmi and Medrash as explained in previous chapters) Rashi states s.v. מנחם: בן חזקיה.

Rashi appears to understand Menachem is the son Chizkiya. A real person and not merely an abstract concept, of that which represents the Moshiach, that will bring comfort.

As explained in Medrash and Yerushalmi and brought by the Maharsha Sanhedrin 98b. Menachem Ben Chizkiya was a baby born the day the second Bais Hamikdosh was destroyed and was taken away by "ruchos" spirits or winds to Gan Eden. And there is a Yesh Omrim – "There are those that say" that he is Moshiach. וַיֵּשׁ אֹמְרִים: מִנְּהֶם בֶּן חִזְקִיָּה שָׁמוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "כִּי רָחֵק מִמֶּנִּי מִנְּהֶם מְשִׁיב נְפָשֵׁי
As the Maraharsh states it was a tradition handed down to them.

Clearly we see Menachem Ben Chizkiya according to the simple implication of the Gemara Sanhedrin 98b and specifically according to Rashi and Maharsha, was a real person that they called Moshiach (i.e. pointed a finger at and stated he is fit to be Moshiach). From the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdosh until the Gemara was written is a period of several hundred years. I.e. Menachem Ben Chizkiya being thought of as Moshiach is distinct to the concept (as stated by the Chasam Sofer, Bartenura etc.) of a living משיח בכל דור, that is born in each generation.

Furthermore Rashi s.v. אי מן חייא הוא כגון רבינו הקדוש

Rashi writes:

אם משיח מאותן שחיים עכשיו ודאי היינו רבינו הקדוש...
ואם היה מאותן שמתו כבר היה דניאל איש חמדות
"If Moshiach is from those that are alive now. For sure it is Rabbi... And if [Moshiach is] from those who died already it was Doniel the beloved..."

We can see that Rashi understands our Gemara as teaching Moshiach can be from those living now. i.e. It can be understood that there is Moshiach alive in the generation. But also together with this understanding, is the fact that its brought together with "And If from the dead." - "If from the living. And If from the dead." i.e. we can see according to Rashi that Moshiach being alive, in the generation, is not a negation of Moshiach from the maisim, from a previous generation. As Doniel lived several generations before Rabbi.

Rashi writes further:

לישנא אחרינא: כגון רבינו, כלומר, אם יש דוגמתו בחיים היינו רבינו הקדוש
"Another explanation, 'like Rebeinu HaKadosh': If there is an example of him [Moshiach] among the living, it is Rebeinu HaKadosh".

Rashi states "אם יש" - "If there is" someone alive that resembles the Moshiach. i.e. its not a simple matter that of course there is someone that resembles the Moshiach that is alive, in the generation.

Thus, we can see, Rashi doesn't understand Chazal discussing and teaching about Moshiach, to be restricted to the confines of the concept of משיח בכל דור. As was explained in previous chapters Rashi (and others) understand our Gemara as teaching literally, Moshiach can come from the maisim. I.e. someone from a previous generation, that was likely assumed (or as the Sedai Chemed writes the one that was "estimated") to be the one that was considered fit to be Moshiach of his generation, during his lifetime.

Such that it can be seen from Rashi (and others), while there maybe the concept of משיח בכל דור there is also concurrently, hand in hand together with that, the concept that Moshiach could also be from the maisim. Such that the Gemara, and specifically Rashi state – "if from the living" and in the same sentence – "If from the maisim". According to Rashi both possibilities are understood to be on equal footing and not dependent on any specific conditions. As explained at length Sefer Shmoi Shel Moshiach.

Agadic Interpretation

As is the case in general with Agadah. More than one approach to a given Agadic passage is considered legitimate. For as long as it makes logical sense and doesn't contradict the principals in which the Torah may be interpreted. Whether it is an understanding within the simple meaning (psbat) or even a more homiletic interpretation (Drush).

As it relates to our passage regarding the Yeshivos of Rebbe's Shayla, Yannai and Chanina. There are several legitimate and distinct approaches, that Gedolay Yisroel, Rishonim and Acharonim, have written in their commentaries.

For example Abarbanel and others, famously write that the names Shayla, Yannai, Chanina and Menachem are an acronym for the word Moshiach. Others explain that these sages in quoting verses from scripture, were referring to the different qualities Moshiach will possess.

Still other commentaries including the Agadas Eliyahu to our passage state that the intention of the sages in quoting verses of scripture was to hint to their students that they are the one that is fit to be Moshiach of their generation.

All these different understandings to our Agadic passage are legitimate. And one way doesn't necessarily negate another way. A person may prefer an understanding that resonates most with him.

However, as was explained at length in previous chapters. Based on an in-depth analysis of this passage as it appears in the Bavli, Yerushalmi and Midrash, and specifically according to Rashi's explanation to our Gemara. The understanding of the Gemara is not limited to the interpretation that they were merely referring to the Moshiach of their generation alone. As stated in previous chapters, there is a strong implication and legitimate understanding to say, that the Yeshiva students continued to call their Rav Moshiach even after they passed away. And did not just think of them within the confines of, or as being limited to, the Moshiach of their generation alone. As was also pointed out regarding Menachem Ben Chizkiya.

The Yeshiva students of Rebbe Yannai

In addition to the detailed explanation given in previous chapters. The understanding that the students continued to call their Roshei Yeshiva Moshiach after they passed away, and not just (confined to) the concept of the Moshiach of their generation alone. Can also be seen from the actual verses which were quoted by the Roshei Yeshiva's themselves. As seen from Rashi S.V. - Dibur haMaschil, Lifnei Shemesh.

לפני שמש - עד שלא נברא היה שמו ינון והיינו אחד מז' דברים שעלו במחשבה ליבראות

Rashi states regarding the verse Rebbe Yannai used to hint to his students he is fit to be Moshiach. "Before the sun: Even before the sun was created his name was Yinon, this is one of the seven things that Hashem thought of before creation".

Upon analysis of Rashi's explanation of the posuk we can see. Rebbe Yannai being thought of as Moshiach, is not limited to being thought of as the Moshiach of his generation alone. Rather Rebbe Yannai being thought of as Moshiach, is in a way that is associated with the Ultimate Redeemer. The soul of Moshiach, that is predestined and preordained, even before the world was even created.

As explained earlier Chazal teach, without dissenting opinion, that Moshiach i.e. the Ultimate Redeemer, can be from the living or the maisim.

As explained above "fit to be Moshiach" means not that they are the actual Moshiach and fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. Rather when Hashem decides its time for Geulah, it will be the Tzadik that is "fit

to be Moshiach” that will become the Ultimate redeemer, the Goel Tzedek and then fulfill all the Messianic prophecies. Until that time he is only “fit to be Moshiach” and can be referred to as “Moshiach”, as explained above.

Since the students know Moshiach can come from the living as well as the maisim (as explained in previous chapters). It is a legitimate understanding with strong implication, that they did not think of him just as the Moshiach of their generation alone. Such that if Hashem decides to bring the Geulah in his lifetime. Then they would hold Moshiach will be coming from the living, and it would indeed be a case of the Moshiach of the generation becoming the Ultimate Redeemer. However, once Rabbi Yannai passes away. It appears they would hold Moshiach will be coming from the maisim, when Hashem decides its time to bring the Geulah. As their whole approach to thinking of him as Moshiach from the beginning, was due to a hint given by their teacher based on a verse that is associated with the actual Moshiach.

So too with the students of Rabbi Shayla and Rabbi Chanina, as was explained above. The verses quoted, such as “Until Shiloh comes”, are speaking about the Ultimate Redeemer. The hint is an association to the actual Moshiach. i.e. Their students felt their teachers’ possessed qualities the Moshiach will have. There is no indication, nor reason to believe this was limited to the lifetime of their teachers. As explained in previous chapters.

It is also simple to understand, one does not need a verse in scripture to hint, or believe, one is fit to be Moshiach of his generation alone. As seen from Rashi regarding Rabbi from the living and Doniel from the masim. Rashi states they were both considered fit to be Moshiach due to a logical inference of them having suffered and being pious. As the Chasam Sofer says, Moshiach of the generation is designated (and therefore known) by his righteousness. Also, the Sedai Chemed writes that the Moshiach of the generation was always something that was “Estimated” - by piety.

In Conclusion

Belief there is Moshiach alive in each generation, as well as belief Moshiach can be from the maisim, are both legitimate beliefs. Each has a strong foundation in Chazal, and Mesoras Yisroel throughout the generations. When tracing the source for the concept of Moshiach in each generation to the Gemara. We find it mentioned together with the fact Moshiach can also be from the maisim.