

## Bar Kochba As Moshiach

Appendix – Kuntres Shmoi Shel Moshiach  
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Throughout this *sefer*, it has been demonstrated that Chazal clearly maintain the possibility that Moshiach may emerge either from among the living or from those who have passed away. Moreover, it was demonstrated that the Rambam, *l'halacha*, does not rule out the scenario in which Moshiach arises from the dead, particularly in a redemption characterized by wonders and miracles.

This raises a critical question: Upon the death of Bar Kochba, why does the Rambam (text below) write (Hilchos Melachim 11:3), “Since he was killed, it became known that he is not [Moshiach]”? Why is there no indication that Rebbi Akiva continued to maintain faith in Bar Kochba’s messianic status after his death? If Chazal permit the possibility of Moshiach returning from the deceased, why would Rebbi Akiva abandon this belief? At first glance, the plain reading of the Rambam appears to suggest that Rebbi Akiva did, indeed, cease to hold this belief. This, in turn, seems to imply—at least within the halachic framework—that the notion of a Moshiach arising from the dead is either not recognized, or is in fact rejected by halacha.

### **The Core Distinction**

The resolution to this apparent difficulty lies in understanding the fundamental distinction between two separate categories: (1), the Actual Moshiach (*Moshiach b’Vadei*) also referred to as the *Goel Tzedek* - the Ultimate Redeemer, and (2) *Raui Leheyos Moshiach*—one who is considered fit to be Moshiach.

As previously explained in this *sefer*, the designation *Raui Leheyos Moshiach* carries no halachic weight. It is comparable to titles such as *Tzadik HaDor* or *Sar HaTorah*, which Chazal and Jewish tradition have used to describe individuals of exceptional spiritual stature, yet without conferring formal legal status in halacha. A person may be regarded as fit to be Moshiach whether alive or deceased, as has been demonstrated extensively in earlier chapters.

By contrast, the Rambam confers halachic significance only upon the actual Moshiach - the Ultimate Redeemer. This halachic status is formalized in two stages: (1) *Chezkas Moshiach*—a presumed actual Moshiach - presumed Goel Tzedek, and (2) *Moshiach b’Vadei* - the definitive, actual Moshiach. Someone who is merely “fit to be Moshiach” does not enter the Rambam’s halachic framework at all, and carries no formal halachic status as Moshiach.

## Rebbi Akiva's Position

Rebbi Akiva did not regard Bar Kochba merely as *Raui Leheyos Moshiach*. Rather, he believed Bar Kochba was the *Goel Tzedek*, the Redeemer actively initiating the process of *Geulah*. As the Rambam records, "He would say about him, 'This is the King, the Moshiach'... until he was killed due to sins."

Once Bar Kochba fell in battle, along with thousands of others, it became unequivocally clear that he was not the actual Moshiach. As understood from all the prophecies in Tanach, the Ultimate Redeemer will succeed in his mission; failure plainly indicates that he is not the promised *Goel Tzedek*.

## Rambam's Halachic framework

Before achieving the status of *Chezkas Moshiach*, the Rambam teaches that the individual must first be "someone who diligently engages in Torah study and is occupied with Mitzvos like David his forefather." I.e. he must first be in the category of *Raui Leheyos Moshiach*.

He earns the halachic status of *Chezkas Moshiach (Presumed Goel Tzedek)* by actively initiating the process of *Geulah*: compelling Torah observance among the Jewish people and waging the wars of Hashem. Once this halachic status is attained, we presume him to be the actual Moshiach, engaged in these actions specifically to bring about the redemption. At this stage, however, *Chezkas Moshiach* has not yet fulfilled any of the messianic prophecies.

Only after successfully compelling all Jews to observe Torah and achieving complete victory in the wars of Hashem, followed by building the Bais HaMikdosh and gathering in all the exiles, does he attain the status of *Moshiach B'Vadei* - the definitive actual Moshiach, no longer merely presumed.

However, if the halachically presumed actual Moshiach fails in his mission or is killed, the Rambam rules: "It is known that he is not the one the Torah promised." Rambam thereby clarifies that such a figure is not the Ultimate Redeemer that the Torah promised. The Torah promises that there will ultimately be a *Goel Tzedek*, who successfully fulfills all the Messianic prophecies and brings the *Geulah*; failure simply indicates that this individual currently before us is not that figure.

Rambam's ruling resolves the apparent difficulty created by our prior halachic recognition of him as the *presumed actual Moshiach*. Does his failure imply that the true *Goel Tzedek* came and failed, thereby undermining the Torah's promise *Chas v'shalom*? Does it suggest that he was a fraud or false messiah? In order to clarify this, Rambam explains how halacha instructs us to understand a figure who was rightly regarded, at the time, as the presumed actual Moshiach.

Rambam teaches that he is not a false messiah, but rather “like all the kosher and complete kings of Davidic lineage who have died,” serving as “a divine test”, as “the appointed time of redemption has not yet arrived”. Although his halachic status as *Chezkas Moshiach*, presumed Moshiach is revoked and nullified, this ruling concerns only halachic identification and status. It does not diminish his spiritual greatness; his righteousness and piety remain intact.

He is not spiritually disqualified from being considered *Rai Leheyos Moshiach*, nor does the Rambam preclude Hashem from choosing this *tzadik* as the *Goel Tzedek* at the future appointed time of redemption. There is no halachic prohibition in continued belief that this Tzadik is Rai Leheyos Moshiach and that he will become the Goel Tzedek when it is “The appointed time of redemption”. The Rambam does not identify the future Moshiach beyond establishing the halachic criteria—Davidic lineage, Torah observance, and requisite actions. Accordingly, he retains and reverts back to his non halachic status of *Rai Leheyos Moshiach*, just as prior to attaining *Chezkas Moshiach*.

## Historic Precedent

Clear precedent can be found in the case of Dovid HaMelech. Chazal note that Dovid HaMelech endeavored to bring about the final Geulah during his lifetime, yet he was ultimately “not successful” in fully accomplishing it<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, Chazal record opinions indicating that, should Moshiach arise from the *maisim*, it could indeed be Dovid HaMelech. In other words, his spiritual greatness and piety were not diminished by his inability to actualize the Geulah at that time, and he remains *Rai Leheyos Moshiach*. Similar can be said about Zerubavel (and others). As the Malbim comments on Chaggai ch. 1 and 2, if the Jewish people were deserving, the gathering of the exiles and building of the second Temple started by Zerubavel would have led into the final redemption, with Zerubavel becoming Moshiach. However, the Jews were not deserving, and he did not achieve full redemption at that time. Nevertheless, Malbim at the end of Chaggai (2:23) states that Zerubavel could become Moshiach from the *maisim* when the appointed time of redemption arrives.

## No Requirement for Miracles

The Rambam (quoted below) cites the episode of Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochba primarily to illustrate a key principle: the *Moshiach* is not halachically required to perform wonders and miracles. However, Rambam doesn’t teach us to reject Moshiach if he does make miracles. The Raavad however, argues asserting that the *Moshiach* must indeed perform miracles.

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<sup>1</sup> See Devarim Rabbah 1:16. Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer ch. 28. Rashi on Bereishis 15:11. Ramban, end of his Hasagos on Rambam’s Sefer Hamitzvos.

In the following halacha, Halacha 4, Rambam defines the two stages of *Chezkas Moshiach* and *Moshiach bVadei*. As mentioned before, even prior to becoming *Chezkas Moshiach*, he must be pious and fit to become Moshiach. Rambam then goes on to describe a *Chezkas Moshiach* who did not succeed in becoming the Goel Tzedek. Even after he failed or is killed and is formally declared “not the one the Torah promised,” Rambam teaches that he remains “*kosher and complete*” and was chosen by Hashem as a “test for the many”.

By contrast, in the case of Bar Kochba, Rambam notes that he was killed due to sins. Chazal relate that Bar Kochba’s death was a consequence of his (eventual) transgressions (see *Yerushalmi Taanis* 4:5; *Midrash Eicha Rabba* 2:4). Such that he is no longer of the level of piety to be considered *Raui Leheyos Moshiach*.

Thus, Bar Kochba’s failed attempt—killed “because of sins”— is inherently different to a *Chezkas Moshiach* who fails in his mission.

### **Sins of the Generation**

We do not find any sources that indicate Rebbi Akiva had any interactions with Bar Kochba before he led his revolt, such as a teacher and student relationship.

From Chazal it appears Rebbi Akiva’s association with Bar Kochba began upon seeing him lead his revolt with tremendous success. Due to this Rebbi Akiva believed the Geulah is commencing, and he would say that Bar Kochba is “The King the Moshiach” and therefore the great Tanna helped Bar Kochba as Rambam states “He was his arms-bearer”.

Even according to the opinion that “killed due to sins” is understood to mean the sins of the generation and not of Bar Kochba himself. Nonetheless, even according to this understanding it would still be unreasonable to think Rebbi Akiva would continue to believe that Bar Kochba would become the actual Moshiach in the future.

His whole approach to thinking of Bar Kochba as the actual Moshiach, was not primarily because Bar Kochba’s spiritual stature made him uniquely qualified of being *Raui Leheyos Moshiach*, but chiefly because his military victories appeared to signal the unfolding of the Geulah. Once his military campaign failed and Bar Kochba was killed along with hundreds of thousands of others (or even if Bar Kochba would have managed to escape), the entire basis for Rebbi Akiva’s belief collapsed.

His association with Bar Kochba was not based on a teacher student relationship such that he was intimately aware of his scholarship, piety and ability to inspire others to serve Hashem, like Rebbi’s Shayla, Yannai and Chanina. Nor was it based on a mesorah like Menachem Ben Chizkiya. Bar Kochba was not a Tanna like Rebbi Akiva and many others in that generation. According to the statements of Chazal concerning Bar Kochba, his level of piety was never considered exceptional.

On one hand, according to this opinion, there was a real chance to bring the Geulah. But due to the sins of the generation, it didn’t manifest. However, on the other hand in hindsight, the Jews would have been better off had Bar Kochba not lead the revolt to begin with.

Based on the above we can understand, even according to this opinion, why Rabbi Akiva would not continue to think that Bar Kochba would be Moshiach.

### **If from the deceased, he is like Doniel Ish Chamudos**

As noted earlier, when Rav stated that if Moshiach comes from the maisim, he is like Doniel Ish Chamudos. None of the Amoraim objected or even questioned this statement, implying universal agreement that Moshiach can indeed come from the living or deceased.

Neither the Gemara nor its commentaries raise any question regarding Rav's statement from the story of Bar Kochba. As explained above, the distinction between *Ravi Leheyos Moshiach* and the *Goel Tzedek* is fundamental for understanding both the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* and the Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim*. The Gemara addresses the category of one merely fit to be Moshiach, whereas the Rambam codifies the criteria by which the *Goel Tzedek* may be recognized, if he arrives without overt wonders and miracles.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is no halachic rejection of the view that *Moshiach* may arise from the deceased, provided the individual in question is *Ravi Leheyos Moshiach*. The Rambam's codification in *Hilchos Melachim* serves to establish the halachic criteria by which the *Goel Tzedek*, the Ultimate Redeemer, can be recognized if he emerges without overt miracles. It does not, however, address the status of those who are merely fit to fulfill that role. Belief in a Moshiach who is deceased, yet considered spiritually fit and pious, is firmly rooted in Chazal and the Mesorah. Halacha likewise remains open to the possibility of a posthumous redeemer, in a redemption characterized by wonders and miracles.

A question to ponder. If the yeshivah students of Rabbi's Shayla, Yannai and Chanina would have called their Roshei Yeshiva Ravi Leheyos Moshiach for several years. Then one of them would have reached the halachic status of Chezkas Moshiach only to later, after some time, become "not successful or killed". Such that the ruling "It is known that he is not the one the Torah promised" and "it was a test to the many" as "the appointed time is yet to come", is pronounced upon their Rosh Yeshiva.

Would they abandon their Rav's teaching and Mesorah, which was based on his exposition of a *posuk* associated with the Actual Moshiach and indicated that he was *Ravi Leheyos Moshiach*? Or would they remain faithful to that Mesorah, continuing to affirm that their Rav is still *Ravi Leheyos Moshiach* (as explained above, similar to Dovid HaMelech), and that he will indeed become the Actual Moshiach when the "Appointed Time" arrives?

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ואל יעלה על דעתך שהמלך המשיח צריך לעשות אותות ומופתים ומחדש דברים בעולם או מחיה מתים וכיוצא בדברים אלו [ב]. אין הדבר כן. שהרי רבי עקיבא חכם גדול מחכמי משנה היה. והוא היה נושא פליו של בן כוזיבא המלך. והוא היה אומר עליו שהוא המלך המשיח. ודמה הוא וכל חכמי דורו שהוא המלך המשיח. עד שנהרג בעונות. כיון שנהרג נודע להם שאינו. ולא שאלו ממנו חכמים לא אות ולא מופת. ועקר הדברים ככה הן. שהתורה הזאת חקיה ומשפטיה לעולם ולעולמי עולמים. ואין מוסיפין עליהן ולא גורעין מהן. וכל המוסיף או גורע, או שגלה פנים בתורה והוציא הדברים שלמצוות מפשוטן הרי זה בודאי רשע ואפיקורוס.

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ואם יעמד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו. כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה. ויכף כל ישראל לילך בה וליחזק בדקה. וילחם מלחמות ה'. הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח. (אם עשה והצליח ונצח כל האמות שפסביבו ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי. ואם לא הצליח עד כה, או נהרג, בידוע שאינו זה שהבטיחה עליו תורה, והרי הוא ככל מלכי בית דוד השלמים הקשרים שמתו. ולא העמידו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא לנסות בו רבים, שנאמר "וימן המשכילים יקשלו לצרוף בהן ולברר וללבן עד עת קץ כי עוד למועד".

3. One should not presume that the Messianic king must work miracles and wonders, bring about new phenomena in the world, resurrect the dead, or perform other similar deeds. This is definitely not true.

Proof can be brought from the fact that Rabbi Akiva, one of the greater Sages of the Mishnah, was the arms-bearer of King Bar Kozibah and would describe him as the Messianic king. He and all the Sages of his generation considered him to be the Messianic king until he was killed because of sins. Once he was killed, they realized that he was not the Mashiach. The Sages did not ask him for any signs or wonders.

The main thrust of the matter is: This Torah, its statutes and its laws, are everlasting. We may not add to them or detract from them. Whoever adds and subtracts or interpreted the Torah in a distorted manner which takes the commandments away from their plain meaning— he is certainly wicked and a heretic.

4. And if a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor; will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach. If he succeeds and is victorious over all the nations surrounding him, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.

If he did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not the redeemer promised by the Torah. Rather, he should be considered as all the other proper and complete kings of the Davidic dynasty who died. God caused him to arise only to test the many, as Daniel 11:35 states: 'And some of the wise men will stumble, to try them, to refine, and to clarify until the appointed time, because the set time is in the future.'