

“Moshiach” is a verb—The Sabbath Guest

DON'T LET DOGMA, CYNICISM AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS PREVENT MAGIC

Rick Concoff, speech to graduating Chaverim seniors, May 3, 2013

In Chaverim, each year, sometime during the course of our dinner discussions, we ask the question, “Is the world getting better or worse, or is it possible we could have a world without war or hunger?” In this discussion, many things come up on both sides, better and worse. Radiation can save a person with cancer, or obliterate a whole population. Pharmaceuticals have given us better quality of life and pollute our waterways, guns can protect or kill us. Cyberspace has unlocked the door to accessible information, the voice of a people longing for freedom, and yet is used to steal, deceive and hurt as well.

Whether you are a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, an agnostic, or an atheist, the 2000- year-old concept of a “messianic age” can have meaning. The idea that we can achieve a world of peace and an end to hunger comes from the book of Isaiah and has inspired centuries of hope, inspiration, forward thinking and doing.

Who would not be in support of Isaiah’s dream and vision? It has served as the foundation of youthful idealism for centuries.

Whether or not we believe in the messianic vision, each Havdallah and on Pesach, we sing Eliahu Hanavi, we affirm that hope. We have struggled however, for years with the idea that the “messiah” would be one person, descendant of David, ordained by god to lead humankind to a path of better behavior, love, generosity, compassion and unconditional support. There have been many who have claimed to be or were thought to be the “one.” Their teachings have led to righteous behavior and at times have led to the opposite, acts of selfishness, violence, senseless persecution, and even genocide.

“Moshiach” comes from the verb “masah” which means to anoint (usually with oil), to select or designate someone for an important holy or sacred task. In other words, we could construe the concept of moshiach to be the divine inspiration for an individual to do what he/she is destined to do to help make the world a better place. Perhaps we are all given the gift of a life with the purpose of making the planet a bit better, a bit more human, a bit more evolved, loving and even a bit more holy.

If we reframe *moshiach* as a verb, we can all take a place on the continuum as active participants. So when the innocent actions or display of a young child causes the adults to stop fighting and merge into joy, that is *moshiach*. When you give the checker at the grocery store back the change because it was too much, that is *moshiach*. When you give bone marrow to someone you have never met, that is *moshiach*. Most of us do tikkun olam often, humbly, in a small way, not even noticing it or having it noticed at all. Some do it in a bigger way, and it is noticed, documented and becomes a model, an inspiration that moves hundreds, thousands and even millions to right action. Big or small, it is powerful and contagious.

Perhaps even “god” is a kind of verb, and if that is the case, we are all instantly empowered with the ability to be part of the “movement” by “doing god”.

The anthem of the Chasidic Jews “We want *moshiach*, and we want *moshiach* now” takes on a new meaning with this understanding, and as a matter of fact, it is happening in every moment. Let us not miss it as did the people in the story.

We can be heroes, mentors, and inspired elders, young idealists and visionaries who can guide each other towards this work. And if *moshiach* is a verb, perhaps we are the adverbs that accompany it hand in hand.

In order to know what our work in the world is supposed to be, we need to know who we are. In Chaverim we participate in that quest every time we meet. I would like to extend my love and gratitude to this year’s Senior Class for five years of learning together, playing together and laughing together, for your leadership in Chaverim and at Camp Chai and to wish you health, safe travels, and a rich and adventuresome life. Please stay connected to your Jewish roots as a place you can always come back to.

No program can be sustained without the support of many. Thanks to each and every parent, to the Chaverim Committee led by Deborah Cutler, Rabbis Gittleman, Kramer and Miller, JCC, Sonoma County, Karen Gould and Exec. Dir. Beth Goodman. A special thanks to Aaron Selya for his great work as well.

Yashar Koach, Congratulations, here is to more work together.

Shabbat Shalom