

Yom Kippur Morning
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Congregation Beth Israel
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Dan Bern wrote a song called Jerusalem, it goes like this...

Everybody's waiting for the Messiah

The Jews are waiting

The Christians are waiting

Oh so are the Muslims

It's like everybody's waiting

They been waiting a long time

I know how I hate to wait

Like even for a bus or something

An important phone call

So I can imagine how darned impatient

Everyone must be getting

So I think it's time now

Time to reveal myself

I am the Messiah

I am the Messiah

“Everybody is waiting for the messiah”. What is our big infatuation with this intangible entity? We have been waiting a long time for this redeemer to come along and save us.

Judaism believes several things about the Messiah. He (& traditional Judaism says that it will be a ‘he’) will: be a descendant of King David, gain control over the land of Israel, gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth, and will bring peace to the world. The messianic time will be peaceful and will bring together all peoples; ‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they study war anymore.’ (Isaiah 2:4)

Many of us are familiar with this quote from Isaiah, and dream of a time when the world will truly be at peace. Wouldn't it be great for the messianic age to arrive in our lifetime? Waiting for that moment has provided hope for thousands of years. Visualizing the end of war and affliction would be a dream come true.

Hope gives us purpose and motivates us to believe that there is something better in the future...something to look forward to, like the messianic age.

But how it will happen? Who is going to save us? Who will lift up the fallen or free the captive? Jews have been waiting for thousands of years for this one person to arrive and fix all that is wrong in the world. However, is one person capable of doing all of this? I don't think so...I am here to tell you that the Messiah is not coming.

Rabbi Robert Levine writes in his book, There is no Messiah and You're it - "Perhaps God never intended to send us *one specific messianic individual* but was simply waiting for us to recognize and embrace the messianic mission intended for each one of us"¹

The messiah, the one person, the one individual who will redeem us and bring peace to the world is not coming. It's up to us. We've spent thousands of years hoping; now it must be paired with action.

I am sure that many of you are familiar with the famous story of a religious man standing on top of a roof during a flood. A man comes by in a boat and says "get in, get in!" The religious man replies, "no don't worry, God will save me."

A second boat arrives and the driver tells him to get in. The man on the roof responds again, "no don't worry, God will save me." With the water at his chin and in his mouth, another boat comes to rescue him, but he turns down the final offer as well...saying don't worry God will save me.

He arrives in heaven, turns to God and says "I thought you were going to save me?" God responds - "I don't know what you're complaining about, I sent you three boats."

The man waiting for the three boats believed that God would save him. Having faith that God is in partnership with us is valuable and necessary, but that can't be the only thing. Hope doesn't pay the bills, hope doesn't put food on the table, and hope doesn't save us from drowning...only we can do those things. Each of us is a redeemer... you, and you, and you, and me. It's our responsibility to stop waiting and start doing. The one messiah is not coming, we embody the characteristics of the messiah, and only through collective action will the messianic age arrive.

We can't keep waiting for the messiah to end poverty...because waiting has gotten us nowhere.

Rabbi Bradley Artson writes, "Even as our accomplishments loom so large, our failures assume a still-more terrifying posture. Our scientific advances threaten to poison our air, render our water unusable, and leave our land in ruin [*sic*]. Even as medicine advances, we grapple with plagues that remind us of our continuing frailty, and our devastating powerlessness [*sic*]. Despite our tremendous wealth, the illiterate and unemployed,

¹ Levine 157 – There is no Messiah...and You're It.

outcasts and hopeless, loom even larger, making a mockery of our smug self-satisfaction. Women are still underpaid; terrorists and floods catch us ill-prepared. Blacks and Latinos are still underemployed, and gays and lesbians are still subject to assault”²

Now, more than ever, is the time to act. Be the messiah, you can be someone’s redeemer. As we sit amidst Yom Kippur, our day of introspection and atonement, we must ask ourselves - what have we done to help bring about the messianic age?

God gives us the opportunity and we have the ability. People are hungry, we can feed them...fill another grocery bag. People are sick ...we can help to heal them, donate blood. People are homeless, we can build shelter for them...log on to rebuildtogether.org. People are persecuted...we can stand up for them, log on to jewishworldwatch.org.

We can affect change globally, locally, personally, and professionally. Hoping for the messiah is vital because it helps to motivate us, but in reality, we need action. As many of you know, Congregation Beth Israel holds an annual school supply drive. We begin collecting pencils, pens, backpacks, and other school supplies during the summer and then donate the materials to Kuban Elementary School. This year when two of our mitzvah committee members delivered the supplies, the principal was especially overjoyed by their arrival. The principal explained that our donations could not have come at a better time. Over the Labor Day weekend, the school had been burglarized, and the school supplies she kept in her office for the students had been stolen. The items our congregation collected were immensely appreciated.

Like with the three boats, we first need to recognize that the boats are opportunities not just for ourselves, but for those around us as well. We need to see the problem, mobilize ourselves to take action, and recognize the moments in our lives when we can act as the messiah.

Redemption will only come when we can find a way to actually see the people around us. Often times, we see the need but choose to do nothing. You know, the man standing on the corner with a sign that asks for food or money. We feel badly for him, but often not badly enough.

We hear about the empty food banks and over-filled shelters. And yet we consistently ‘miss the boat.’ The food banks are so desperately in need of food that the Interfaith Cooperative Ministries truck could barely afford to sit outside Chaparral Christian Church this morning. The six hours that the truck is sitting here today collecting our donations is six hours that it’s not delivering food to hungry families. The need for food is so great that the food banks are completely reliant on daily deliveries from ICM to fill

² Artson 339 -[The Everyday Torah](#).

their shelves. Our donations this morning will help to temporarily alleviate some of this need.

But today is Yom Kippur and we are participating in an interfaith food drive; who will fill these shelves next week, next month, and six months from now? You see, together we can feed the hungry, we are the messiah. We have no excuse. Even in this financially challenging time, we can find ways to help.

Rabbi David Wolpe writes, “The task of the messiah is to save, to redeem, to uplift the lowly, to humble the proud. None of those tasks, are beyond our capacities. We can be everyday messiahs, ordinary saviors. Perhaps the most important part of messianism is the faith that it is real. The Messiah is not a superhuman, just an exemplar of humanity. And this aspiration-to be such an exemplar-should not be alien to any of us.”³

Congregation Beth Israel provides all of us with opportunities to be a messiah: The Barbara L. Kahn Kids Walk to Stomp Out Cancer, our annual Adopt a family winter holiday drive, Race for the Cure, Mitzvah Day, Pizza for Peace, and our back to school backpack drive.

There are also ways we can globally affect change in our lives and hasten the messianic era:

Donate blood

Fill another grocery bag

Volunteer at a National Park - [nps.gov/gettinginvolved](https://www.nps.gov/gettinginvolved)

Feed the hungry - [strength.org](https://www.strength.org).

Donate your clothing - [dressforsuccess.org](https://www.dressforsuccess.org)

Become a court appointed advocate for a child [[nationalcasa.org](https://www.nationalcasa.org)]

Help a refugee thrive in America - [their.org](https://www.theirc.org) [International Rescue Committee]

Donate your hair to Locks of Love [or to [pinkheartsfund.org](https://www.pinkheartsfund.org) [locksoflove.org](https://www.locksoflove.org)]

Tutor underprivileged children– [experiencecorps.org](https://www.experiencecorps.org)

There are thousands of opportunities to be the messiah. A list of organizations will be available on our website next week.

Hope is important, but it must be paired with action. The one messiah isn't coming, it's up to us.

Someone had a dream that the homeless man at the grocery store was actually the Messiah. The dreamer awakened and made his way to the man in the beggar's clothes.

“Are you the Messiah?” he asked.

“I am”, the man answered.

The dreamer said: “With so much misery and pain and callousness in the world, what are you waiting for? “

³ Wolpe 54 -[Floating Takes Faith](#).

To which the Messiah replied: “With so much misery and pain and callousness in the world, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?”⁴

Everybody's waiting for the Messiah

The Jews are waiting

The Christians are waiting

Oh so are the Muslims

It's like everybody's waiting

They been waiting a long time

I know how I hate to wait

...well the wait is over! The one messiah isn't coming, but together all of us can bring about the messianic age.

Look to your right and left, in front of you and in back of you...we are the messiah. When the boats come by, get on, when the opportunity arises to help someone, take action.

⁴ With gratitude to Rabbi Karen Fox of Wilshire Boulevard Temple for letting me 'borrow' the volunteer opportunity list and a story.