

2. The Mashiach Starting Point


Points in this Section

- ✦ *Torah's description of creation's beginning alludes to Mashiach as its ultimate purpose.*
- ✦ *The purpose of creation is to create a Divine "abode" in the lowest realms - the material world.*
- ✦ *Mitzvot are the "tools" for transforming the material world into a Divine "abode".*

With some sense of the meaning of the word, let us see where the concept of Mashiach begins. As we will see, the roots of the Mashiach concept will reveal how the Messianic Era is integral nature to Judaism.

To begin, we might as well start at ... the beginning. Let's take a quick look at the story of creation. According to the Midrash, Mashiach makes quite an early appearance.

☞ Depending on your audience, it may be very helpful to give a brief background of Midrash and its role in understanding Scripture.

 **8. a. In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth; the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of G-d moved upon the face of the waters.**

Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1-2

b. In the beginning G-d "created". Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created, while the creation of the others was contemplated (but they were not yet created)... The name of Mashiach was [among those that were] contemplated.

Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit (Genesis) 1:4

☞ Regarding "the name of Mashiach": Maharsha (Pesachim 3a) explains this concept based on the name "Menachem". Injecting a bit of Chassidus into his explanation, perhaps we could say as follows: The whole idea of Mashiach is to transform an undesirable situation to conform to true desire, Hashem's true desire. "Menachem" means "consolation"- which is precisely to transform a situation from undesirable to desirable. This would also explain why it was only contemplated: for at the beginning of creation, the world was still a vessel for the Divine presence, and did not yet require this transformative quality of "consolation".

c. And the spirit of G-d "hovered". This alludes to the spirit of Mashiach.

Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit (Genesis) 2:4

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 **9. G-d informs us of the end in the beginning The verse alludes to the end of time in the beginning of time in order to teach us that the ultimate purpose of creation is for the days of Mashiach.**

Rabbeinu Bachaye, Torah Commentary, ad loc.

To understand how Mashiach is the ultimate purpose of creation, we have to take a step back: What is the ultimate purpose of creation? Why are we here? What is the plan? It is only in light of Torah's cosmic vision can we begin to appreciate the meaning of Messianic era and how integral it is to Judaism.

The following Midrash offers a glimpse into the Divine intention. In the section of the Torah that relates the inauguration of the Tabernacle (Mishkan) - the place in which the Divine Presence was revealed as the Jews moved through the desert, the Midrash wonders why the words, "On the first day," are used to describe the initial offering of Nachshon, the chief of the tribe of Yehudah. The Midrash explains:

10. "On the first day" (Numbers 7:12): R. Shmuel bar Abba said, "What is [implied by the expression] 'on the first day'?"

From the first day that G-d created the world, He desired to dwell with His creations in the lowest realms ("tachtonim"). See how it is written: On the creation of the first day (Genesis 1:5), "and there was evening and there was morning day one." It does not say, "the first day," but rather "day one". Just as it says "day one", it should also say, "day two", "day three" [on the following days! Instead, it says "on the second day," etc.] Why then does it say, "day one"? For as long as G-d was one alone ("yechidi") in His world, He desired to dwell with His creations in the lower realms; but He did not do so until the Tabernacle was constructed and He caused His presence ("Shechinah") to dwell therein. When the princes came to bring their sacrifices, G-d said, "Let it be written that on this day was the world created" [and thus finally it says, "on the first day"].

Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar (Numbers) 13:6

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☺ To put it simply: The Midrash conveys that the purpose of creation is to transform this lower realm into a Divine abode. When this was achieved, it was actually considered the beginning of creation. How would we make a "Divine abode" from a "lower realm"? Let's take a closer look at each aspect of this idea.