

Being a Messiah

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

It has been aptly said that the history of Messianism in Judaism is the history of failed Messiahs. After all, if we are still waiting for the Messiah, then all the claimants have failed.

But there are messianic gestures, and messianic aspirations, even among those who cannot lay claim to the title Messiah. In his novel *The Days of Simon Stern*, Arthur Cohen creates a character who seeks to become a modern Messiah by saving the doomed Jews of Eastern Europe. Herzl was, even in his lifetime, hailed by some as a modern Messiah.

The task of a Messiah is to save, to redeem, to uplift the lowly, to humble the proud. None of those tasks, on a small scale, is beyond our capacities. We can undertake to be everyday Messiahs, quotidian saviors.

"To believe in the heroic," said Disraeli, "makes us heroes." Perhaps the most important part of Messianism is the faith that Messianism is real — not only ultimately in history, but daily in our lives. The Messiah is not superhuman, just an exemplar of humanity. And to be fully human is something each of us can aspire to.