

# “Being a Messiah”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Recently, Dr. David Ruderman of the University of Pennsylvania gave a fascinating lecture on the history of Messiahs in Judaism. He spoke about those who pretended to be the Messiah and the disappointment that followed their failure. For as we know, the history of Messianism in Judaism is the history of failure. We still wait.

But there are messianic gestures, and messianic aspirations, even among those who cannot lay claim to the title Messiah. In the Talmud, Samuel says that the Messiah will be the one who liberates Israel from the yoke of the nations; that is, from being ruled by others. Similarly, 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. Maimonides writes that the Messiah will not overturn the order of nature, but will rather bring international understanding and peace. The Messiah, as understood by Samuel in the Talmud, is not superhuman, just an exemplar of humanity. Such a noble vision should inspire us all.