

Messianic Expectations: A Comparative Study

Donna M. Brown

*The Christian looks forward to the advent of Christ, the Jew is still expectant of the coming of the Messiah, the Buddhist is waiting for the coming of the Bodhisattva, the Hindu for the coming Avatar and the Mohammedan for the appearance of the Imam Mahdi.*¹ (Alice A. Bailey)

Abstract

This article explores the historical origins and advance of messianic expectancy as it expresses in the world's great religious traditions. It begins with an examination of the genesis of the messianic ideal, tracing both the source of the belief and its historical influence and development. The article provides a comparative study of five world savior archetypes—the Hindu Kalki, the Buddhist Maitreya, the Jewish and Christian Messiahs and the Islamic Imam Mahdi. Relevant scriptural passages referencing core beliefs are provided throughout. Also discussed are the eschatological features or End Time prophecies associated with the Parousia or reappearance of these five restorers or redeemers. The intention is to reveal the vibrant, cross-cultural nexus contained within diverse religious forms and to highlight the promising light of renewal and God's protecting love that each faith ultimately envisions.

Introduction

From the time of antiquity to the present, humanity has looked with expectancy for a prophesized Coming One, an Avatar, a World Savior or Messiah, who will usher in a new age of spiritual advancement, truth and global peace. The centrality of this theme is an integral part of all the major religions. Esoteric Philosophy, especially as it is presented in the teachings of the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul and Alice A. Bailey, also anticipates the reappearance of a great Avatar, a Christ, whose "self-initiated task and pre-ordained destiny"²

is to act as a transmitter of divine energy and power. These "divine Intermediaries," as the Tibetan terms them, are extraordinary individuals who emerge in order to alter the course of human civilization and destinies of nations.

The concept of a Coming One or Messiah has been part of humanity's shared experience from the beginning. Indelibly rooted in the human psyche, the idea of the savior or redeemer can be associated, in the deepest sense, with the role of the Mythic Hero or the World Savior latent within each individual and the human collective. This underlying archetype is an expression of an abiding certitude within Atma as it gives birth to human aspiration and will, the idea of progress or advancement, and humanity's innate urge to fulfill its ultimate destiny as a planetary light bearer or savior. The powerful Messiah or savior concept also stems from humanity's desire for protection from above and relief in its hour of great suffering and need. It becomes especially acute in times of great crisis when humanity's development is either in decay or at an impasse. Avatars or redeemers not only bring succor and reprieve during periods of extreme hardship and difficulty, they provide recourse to an unseen but dimly sensed God in his "Secret Place

About the Author

Donna M. Brown is a long-time student and teacher of esoteric philosophy. Her background includes a career in the arts and election to public office in the District of Columbia. She serves as a Board Member of the School for Esoteric Studies.

Most High”³ since they serve as the link of Divine guidance between humanity and God.

Messiahs or Avatars are beings who have developed and transcended their own human and divine natures. They are free from human limitation, from selfish and separative behaviors. Having achieved a measure of demonstrated perfection and unity or identification with God, they have a unique capacity and a pre-ordained destiny to transmit some aspect of divine purpose, some great cosmic Principle or power that will forever change the world.⁴

All world saviors or Messiahs have a salvific function that is universal in both its scope and mission. They belong to all humanity regardless of background, religion or country. Through them, the continuity of divine revelation is implemented so that humanity can more fully realize its own divine nature. The revelation these light bearers bring is part of an immortal script that is reflected through different religious and cultural beliefs, proving that the Truth of Revelation is One, but the expressions or manifestations of the Divine are many.

Origins of the Messianic Ideal

There is a great deal of debate and ambiguity about the origins of the Messianic ideal. This article does not set out to provide either a comprehensive or definitive exegesis on the topic. Rather, it offers a brief hypothetical outline, from a layperson’s point of view, culled from a wide range of esoteric and scholarly sources. As previously stated, the Savior Archetype is deeply psychological and innate to the human psyche. The concept of the Messiah is the principle of Divinity and Atma in every human being. Yet, as the astounding parallels and similarities of belief within the world’s religions suggest, the Messianic archetype or idea not only abides at the core of each individual, it has been seeded into different ethnic and historical collectivities by certain divine representatives from whence it migrated from place to place. Although it had been common, particularly in the West, to believe that the concept of the Messiah originated with the Old and/or New Testaments, it is now more or less widely accepted that the source of the Messianic ideal can be traced back to ancient Meso-

potamian astrology (3000-2000 B.C.E.)⁵ and mythologies: in other words, in the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian lands between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Iraq.⁶ This theory accords with the writings of Helena Blavatsky who confers the source of the Messianic belief to the Babylonian Oannes-Dagon. She explains that Oannes-Dagon, the “Fish-Man” first came to the Babylonians as a reformer and a wise instructor. He was “a man, a priest and an Initiate... Appearing from the Erythraean (Red) Sea, he brought them civilization, letters and sciences, law, astronomy, religion, teaching them agriculture, geometry, and the arts in general.”⁷ She goes on to say that:

This allegory of Oannes ... reminds us of the “Dragon” and “Snake King”; Nagas who in the Buddhist tradition instruct people in wisdom on lakes and rivers and end by becoming converts to the good Law and the Arhats. ... The “fish” is an old and very suggestive symbol of the Mystery-language, as is also “water”; Hea was the god of the sea and Wisdom, and the sea serpent was one of his emblems, his priests being “serpents” or Initiates. ... [T]his being (Oannes) was accustomed to pass the day among men, teaching; and when the sun had set, he retired again into the sea, passing the night in the deep, for he was amphibious... he belonged to two planes, the spiritual and the physical.⁸

Oannes eventually became associated with Bel or Marduk, the supreme Babylonian creator God or Sun. However, as a result of the Persian conquest in 538 BCE,⁹ the World Teacher or Savior ideal of Oannes-Marduk came into contact with the pre-Zoroastrian Mithra. Although the two priesthoods co-existed in the Chaldean or Neo-Babylonian capital and borrowed much from each other, Mithraism, one of the oldest monotheistic systems in the world, became dominant. Blavatsky points out that, like Oannes, Mithra was originally depicted as a solar serpent who functioned as a medium between the visible and invisible lights. She links him to the “Divine or Inner Sun” and describes him as the “Spiritual Man.”¹⁰ Theosophist James Allen adds to this

portrait in defining Mithra as “hidden Beingness... the mysterious force of growth and the invisible light” and as “the latent power of cognition; astrologically, the source of the light of the heavens; and mystically, the creative force of love.”¹¹

Since worship of a pre-Zoroastrian “Mitra” existed in the Indian-Vedic tradition around 1500 BCE, Mitra may well have been adapted to or fused with Mithra. Blavatsky affirms this theory in saying that the Zoroastrians, Mazdeans and Persians borrowed their concepts from India.¹² Certainly both Mitra and Mithra existed in the sacred texts of the Vedas and the Avesta (the sacred texts of the Zoroastrians) when the Hindus and Persians still made up the Aryan Indo-European family.¹³ Both Mitra and Mithra were linked to the Sun and light. Mitra, whose name refers to one who establishes a benevolent but binding covenant, a promise or alliance, was seen as a mediator between humans and God. It is not clear that the Vedic Mitra was initially envisaged as a Messiah, but Mithra undoubtedly was. It was the Persian Mitra or Mithra, whose name Blavatsky equates with the “Mystery of the Monad,” who drove evil or “Ahriman” from heaven, atoned for humanity’s iniquities and is expected to return as the judge of all men.¹⁴

The Indo-Iranian legends of Mitra/Mithra and Zoroaster are also suspected of having an influence on Buddhism. Since the Pali Canon, one of the earliest Buddhist texts, made scant mention of the Maitreya as the future Buddha who succeeds Gautama and bypasses such notable figures as Manjusri and Avalokitesvara, some scholars have hypothesized that the legend of the future Buddha was introduced later, perhaps by the Mula-Saravastadin monks living in Kashmir and Gandhara who were ruled by the Indo-Greeks and the Persians.¹⁵ In an essay on Buddhism and Islam, Alexander Berzin points out that Buddhism and Zoroastrianism peacefully coexisted in the ancient Afghan city of Balkh “where they influenced each other’s development. Cave monasteries from this period, for example, had wall paintings of Buddhas with auras of flames and inscriptions calling them ‘Buddha-Mazda.’ This was an amalgam of Buddha and Ahura Mazda, the

supreme god of Zoroastrianism.”¹⁶ Maitreya certainly takes on many of the characteristics of the Zoroastrian *Saoshyant*—an agent of Ahura Mazda—whose name means “One Who Brings Benefit.” Both Saoshyant and Maitreya are heavenly helpers who bring about universal salvation and the final renovation of the world.

Vedic and especially Persian aspirational ideas no doubt influenced Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed, there are many striking similarities between the three Abrahamic faiths and Zoroastrianism, especially in its later *Roman Mithras* phase. Its impact on Judaism can be traced, in part, to 586 BCE, when Babylonian forces conquered the Jews and carried off a portion of the population into exile. “Many of the captives, who were from the educated and upper classes as well as the royal family, were brought into contact with the Zoroastrian religion of the Persian Empire.”¹⁷ While it is certain that a measure of “cross pollination” took place (for example, Merkaba Mysticism’s influence on Mithraic and Zoroastrian religious attitudes cannot be overlooked), it has been suggested that before exile the Jewish people rejected the idea of a Universal God, envisioning him instead as merely a tribal or domestic deity. Eventually, toward the end of the Jewish exile, Yahweh assumed the position of the One and only God and Judaism became Monotheistic. Contact with the Persians also seemed to have affected Judaism’s ideas on cosmic evil, their beliefs on life after death or heaven and hell, as well as their conceptions of a “spiritualized” savior or Messiah. Further evidence of Zoroastrian and Mithraic influence is suggested by the fact that the majority of the Old Testament is now thought to have been compiled during internment, or after, the Persians released the Israelites from their Babylonian captivity.¹⁸

Christianity was built on the foundations of Judaism, but it too was inspired by a mixture of Persian Zoroastrian and Mithraic beliefs. Zarathustra or Zoroaster is often credited as being the first prophet to predict the star of the Magi and the imminent birth of the Messiah.¹⁹ He may also have been the first man to promulgate the idea of a divinely inspired or revealed religion. But Mithraism and Mithras,

which was popular in Rome during Jesus' life, seems to have had a particularly strong impact on early Christian beliefs. In addition to the natural process of interchange that might have taken place between early Christianity and Mithraism (which predated Christianity by at least 600 years), there was a methodical effort to blend the two systems of belief. The process of assimilation was headed up by Paul of Tarsus, who was well acquainted with the worship of the Roman Mithras since he grew up in Tarsus, which was "a hotbed full of Mithraic spiritual warriors."²⁰

While a number of important Mithraic concepts may have been fused with the nascent Christian religion, some historians argue that Christianity was diminished by the more militant mindset that eventually developed in Mithraism, a mentality that tended to turn Christianity "away from the non-violent teaching of Christ."²¹

There are many references in the writings of Paul that are illustrative of the quasi-militant aspects of the Roman Mithraic faith.²² In Ephesians 6:10-17, for example, Paul takes up the warrior-like tone and explicit imagery of Mithras when he says that Jesus's followers must take up the "armor of God," the "shield of faith," the "helmet of salvation" and the "sword of the Spirit" to stand up against the Devil's evil schemes.

As Christianity gained political dominance, worship of Mithras was prohibited. But by that time a number of Mithraic forms were preserved in Christianity and in Catholicism in particular.²³ Both Mithras and Christ share the same virgin birth on December 25th, had twelve apostles, performed miracles, died for humanity's sins and ascended into heaven to return again to judge the living and the dead. Adherents of Mithras believed that by eating and drinking the flesh and blood of a sacrificial bull they would be born again, a belief strikingly akin to the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist. In his *Religions of the World*, Gerald Berry discusses some of the many other similarities between the two faiths:

Both Mithras and Christ were described variously as "the Way," "the Truth," "the

Light," "the Life," "the Word," "the Son of God," "the Good Shepherd." The Christian litany to Jesus could easily be an allegorical litany to the sun-god. Mithras is often represented as carrying a lamb on his shoulders, just as Jesus is. Midnight services were found in both religions. The virgin mother ... was easily merged with the virgin mother Mary. Petra, the sacred rock of Mithraism, became Peter, the foundation of the Christian Church.²⁴

Scholars also speculate that Christianity incorporated Zoroastrian (and Jewish) apocalyptic myths about the "end times" and a "final battle in which good defeats death and evil" into its own doctrine. The many parallels between the Book of Revelation, the final book in the New Testament canon, and certain Zoroastrian and Mithraic texts, such as found in the Zand-i Vohuman Yasht²⁵ and the Avesta, would seem to confirm ancient Persian inspirations.²⁶

It is probable that Christianity was also strongly influenced by the Egyptian mythology. Comparisons between Biblical texts and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the stories of Osiris and Jesus, cosmological observations, symbolism and tradition, all point to a blending of Egyptian and Christian metaphysics. Some scholars and Egyptologists, such as Gerald Massey,²⁷ concluded that the origins of all myths, mysteries, symbols, languages and religions, came out of Africa, particularly Egypt via the Greeks. However, it must be pointed out that the Egyptians came under Sumerian or Mesopotamian and other near eastern influences in the Pre-dynastic Period.²⁸ These inspirational influences are said to be reflected in Egyptian architecture, most especially in the building of step pyramids, Egyptian concepts of writing, use of numbers, art and mythology. With respect to Sumerian influence on myth, there is evidence that the Hero/Ruler myth as well as other religious ideas and practices were followed in Egypt (and Arabia).²⁹ Blavatsky seems to confirm the Egyptian-Sumerian connection in her comments likening the symbolism of Osiris's mitred headdress with that of savior prototype Oannes-Dagon.³⁰

Just as Zoroastrianism and Mithraism was merged or subsumed into Christianity in the

West, so too were they fused with Islamic lore and Sufism in the East.³¹ This synthesis developed a new dimension in Islam, particularly in Persia or Iran where Zoroastrianism predated Islam by over 1000 years. Having their own rich religious and cultural identity, the Persians did not fully accept the impersonal and formal version of Islam that they came into contact with during the 200 years in which the Arabs dominated Persian civilization and culture.³² While some Zoroastrians did convert to Islam, others blended the five pillars of the Islamic faith with their own belief system, including elements of other traditions such as Neo-Platonism and Hinduism, which contributed to the outward or exoteric theology of Shi'ism, and the mystical or inner tradition of Sufism.³³ It must be added here that the nature and origins of Sufism are a matter of much controversy. Some scholars contend that Sufism is inherently Islamic and existed from the time of Muhammad and the Quran.³⁴ Others trace the golden thread of Sufism to the Caucasus.³⁵ Notwithstanding these arguments, Zoroastrian influence on Sufism was intimate and cannot be overlooked. According to one Islamic scholar, "Zoroastrianism provided a vocabulary for Sufi poets like Hafiz who often speak of the 'fire-temple,' the Zoroastrian priest, etc., as symbols of the Sufi center (khaniqah or zawiyah), the spiritual master and so on..."³⁶ He goes on to say that "Zoroastrian angelology and cosmology were also resuscitated by Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, the founder of the [Sufi] school of Illumination or Ishraq."³⁷

Given the many similarities in teachings and rituals among Zoroastrianism and Sufism, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Zoroastrianism and Sufism may well stem, at least in part, from the very same root that has inspired and nourished all the great faiths as they have emerged from the labyrinth of time and space.

The Kalki Avatar

One of the most ancient pre-Vedic and pre-Aryan mythical ideas to be found in India is that of a *cakravartin*, a wheel-turning, divinely inspired world monarch or Avatar whose station in the cosmic scheme is to in-

carne as a final unifier of the terrestrial realm.³⁸ Such an Avatar or king is an enlightened being with the freedom to turn or move everywhere without obstruction.³⁹ The *cakravartin* is symbolically referred to through the *chakra* or wheel and is one of the titles given to the various Avatars of Vishnu who come during the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new creation.

There are many such Avatars or incarnations of the Supreme Being, Vishnu, as stated in Vedic Bible or Srimad-Bhagavatam (1.3.26): "O Brahmanas, the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water."

One of the earliest references in the Hindu tradition, perhaps as early as 3138 BCE, to a returning Avatar or God-man, is found in the following oft-quoted passage from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Whenever there is a withering of the law and an uprising of lawlessness on all sides, then I manifest Myself.

For the salvation of the righteous and the destruction of such as do evil, for the firm establishing of the Law, I come to birth, age after age.⁴⁰

Although the *Bhagavad Gita* contains no concrete reference to an Avatar or savior by name, it serves as the all-important basis of the Hindu "Doctrine of Avatars" and the belief that the God Vishnu, who exists outside of the material world, would incarnate at the end of every cycle or age when humanity is no longer able to distinguish between good and evil.

Hindu scripture speaks of 10 different Avatars (dasavatara) or divine representatives of Vishnu who intervene during crucial stages of human evolution in order to initiate an entirely new cycle of evolutionary growth. The legend of the Avatar, says Cosmologist and Astrologer Robert E Wilkinson, is "not a mere allegory but an archetypal story describing the incarnations or emanations of living and conscious evolutionary forces. The appearance of the Avatars is also not a random event but a cosmological necessity."⁴¹ They take birth based on human need and, as Wilkinson states, "at

particular points in the cosmic cycle that correspond to the earth's passage through the zodiacal ages as described in the *Rig Veda*.⁴²

The coming cakravartin for this present cycle or age (the Iron Age) is the Kalki Avatar or the destroyer of impurities. One of the first named references to the last or tenth and future Avatar—the Kalki Avatar—is found in the *Vishnu Purana*.⁴³ Thought to be composed around 700 C.E.,⁴⁴ the *Vishnu Purana* is the primary text of the Vaishnava branch of Hinduism; a branch with more adherents than any other. Chapter XXIV of the text speaks of the time, the reasons and the results for Kalki's appearance:

[W]hen the practices taught by the Vedas and the institutes of law shall nearly have ceased, and the close of the Kali age shall be nigh, a portion of that divine being who exists of his own spiritual nature in the character of Brahma, and who is the beginning and the end, and who comprehends all things, shall descend upon earth: he will be born in the family of Vishnúyaśas, an eminent Brahman of Shambhala village, as Kalki, endowed with the eight superhuman faculties. By his irresistible might he will destroy all the Mlechchhas [non-Vedics or barbarians] and thieves, and all whose minds are devoted to iniquity. He will then reestablish righteousness upon earth; and the minds of those who live at the end of the Kali age shall be awakened, and shall be as pellucid as crystal. The men who are thus changed by virtue of that peculiar time shall be as the seeds of human beings, and shall give birth to a race who shall follow the laws of the Krita or pure age.⁴⁵

The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* reiterates this theme and describes a time, at the conjunction of two Yugas, when “the Lord of the creation will take His birth as the Kalki incarnation” and

appear as the supreme chastiser who will eliminate the wicked and evil plunderers of the earth.⁴⁶

A number of subsequent Puranas and other sacred texts⁴⁷ either refer to or elaborate upon Lord Kalki's appearance and the descent of divine awareness onto the physical plane. These

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many texts indicate that Kalki (whose name in Sanskrit suggests the antithesis of sin or stain), is the tenth and the last of the Maha (great) Avatars of Vishnu who is expected to manifest at the juxtaposition between the present Kali-yuga and at the beginning of the incoming Satya-yuga or era of Truth.

According to the *Mahabharata*, the Lord Kalki will be possessed of great energy, intelligence and prowess. Like the *Sri-*

mad-Bhagavatam and the *Kalki Purana*, it states that the Lord Kalki will be born in the village of Shambhala to a blessed Brahmin family. The texts go on to describe Kalki not as teacher, but as an imperial sovereign,⁴⁸ a warrior king mounted upon a winged, white horse (the white horse is thought to symbolize self-mastery, enlightened consciousness and the purification of the ego by the Super Ego)⁴⁹ who wields a miraculous, comet like sword. Impelled by chaos, decadence and decline, Kalki incarnates on the physical plane as divine awareness and absolute virtue in order to destroy the enemies of Dharma and reestablish a new world order.

Kalki, the “apocalyptic horse rider,” is related to the Ekadesha Rudra Principle or eleven destructive powers of Shiva⁵⁰ that correspond to the risen Kundalini and the energies of the Sahasraha Chakra. As the presiding deity of the Sahasraha his task is to use this highly discriminative power in order to first purify and then awaken Hindus and all humanity to their own inherent potential. Various texts go on to say that Kalki will use these powers to restore the

purity of the Brahman caste and emerge as the supreme ruler of the world in the newly constituted Golden Age.⁵¹ He will, however, be assisted by two individuals who are to be members of the Manu's family. These two have lived through all four yugas and are living now in this present age. In association with the long awaited Kalki, they will reappear and help to establish the one world religion.⁵²

Kalki or Kalkin in Buddhism

Elements of the Kalki legend are also found within the Buddhist Kalachakra tradition. The legend seems to begin when the first king of Shambhala, King Manjushiri-yashas, adopted the Kalki or Kalkin appellation, along with the numerous Hindu concepts, images and terms contained within the Kalachakra rite or initiation in an effort to unite his people, the majority of whom were Hindu.⁵³ The Dharma of the Kalachakra, which was originally given by Buddha Shakyamuni, continued to be transmitted through a succession of kalkins or chieftains of Shambhala. This transmission is said to culminate in the twenty-fifth Kalki or Maitreya Buddha who will bring about global enlightenment and peace.⁵⁴

Modern Interpretations of the Kalki Legend

Contemporary interpretations of the Kalki or Kalkin myth tend to dismiss the bleak and violent apocalypticism that is often associated with the Hindu and some Buddhist eschatological writings. *The Gnostic Circle* by Patriza Norelli-Bachelet says that Kalki's mission is "to join the two poles [matter and spirit] and then erase the separation that exists in the reservoir of spiritual energy on the planet..."⁵⁵ Other interpreters relate the Kalki prophecies to either past historical invasions or to contemporary historical events, such as World War II or September 11th.⁵⁶ Other interpreters contend that one individual cannot possibly be the ultimate manifestation of God. Tibetan Buddhist interpretations, such as those offered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, are largely symbolic and metaphorical in nature. As such, they view Kalki as an archetypal symbol of spiritual consciousness and life that can be demonstrated in any individual who has destroyed cor-

rupting influences in themselves and who assists others in defeating foulness in themselves. However, these views do not negate the belief in Kalkin as a coming world teacher and leader; they merely emphasize humanity's innate potential to achieve a similar level of enlightenment and inner peace.

Maitreya

Hindu views on the Kalki Avatar, as noted in the preceding section, have a number of similarities with Buddhist beliefs about the future Buddha or Maitreya. Such similarities have led scholars to speculate that the Maitreya Buddha may have originated from the Hindu Kalki and that the Kalki was most likely influenced by Persian or Indo-Iranian ideas.⁵⁷ Yet others argue that Maitreya, Mithra and Kalki are unrelated. Nevertheless, the origins of the Maitreya myth can be confidently traced back to the earliest period of Buddhism in India.⁵⁸ One historian says that the concept of Maitreya first emerged in Buddhist scriptures as early as 200 A.D.⁵⁹ Prophecies concerning Maitreya are found in the canonical literature of the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist sects and nearly all Buddhists accept the idea of his coming. Within the larger Buddhist community, however, there are several areas of disagreement with regard to where and when the encounter with Maitreya might take place. With respect to the *where*, some Buddhists expect to meet the Maitreya on earth, while others believe that any encounter with Maitreya must take place in the Tushita heaven—a celestial realm that can only be reached through meditation. Differences regarding the *when* have to do with whether one expects to meet the Maitreya in his or her present lifetime or after death.⁶⁰

In addition to these distinctions, there are a wide variety of views with regard to the specific role that Maitreya is to play as humanity's hope for the future. In China, Korea and Vietnam, for example, Maitreya is one of a number of salvific figures who has taken on a militant and catastrophically apocalyptic demeanor. Yet he is also worshiped as an otherworldly figure who "comes to rescue the lost from the profane world, by reminding them of

their sacred roots and showing them the way home to the Eternal Mother.”⁶¹ Japanese views of Maitreya are equally varied. From the spectrum of Japanese beliefs three distinct themes can be identified. The first is an agrarian utopian idea based on what has been described as “horizontal cosmology in which the world of spirits and ancestors” (and the future Maitreya) “come from across the sea.”⁶² The second is based on “vertical cosmology” in which ancestors and spirits live above the world in the sacred mountains (such as Mount Fuji) where Maitreya awaits the time of his return to earth.⁶³ The third tradition is linked to the idea of Maitreya as a savior who would usher in a Golden Age of world renewal.

A Brief History of the Maitreya based on the Vajrayana and Mayanana Traditions

Maitreya, whose nature is loving kindness and whose name means “the unconquerable,”⁶⁴ is thought to be one of the five earthly Buddhas and the successor of the historic Shakyamuni Buddha. His coming has been long prophesized in various Buddhist texts, which include the following prediction from the Gautama Buddha himself:

I am not the first Buddha who has come upon the Earth, nor will I be the last. In due time another Buddha will rise in the world, a holy one, a supreme enlightened one, endowed with auspicious wisdom embracing the universe, an incomparable leader of men, a ruler of gods and mortals. He will reveal to you the same eternal truths, which I have taught you. He will establish his law, glorious in its origins, glorious at the climax and glorious at the goal in the spirit and the letter. He will proclaim a righteous life wholly perfect and pure, such as I now proclaim. His disciples will number many thousands, while mine number many hundreds. He will be known as Maitreya.⁶⁵

According to Mahisasaka (an early Buddhist school going back to the time of Siddhārtha Gautama), Maitreya is said to have taken bodhisattva vows from and been “anointed” by the “Tathagata Great Power” innumerable eons or kalpas ago.⁶⁶ In a brief history of the future

Buddha, Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984) writes that as a bodhisattva Maitreya dedicated himself to the meditation of great love and taught this path to others. So deeply did he contemplate loving kindness that anyone who came in close proximity to him was also brought to the realization of love. Thus the Tathagatas of the Ten Directions foretold that he would forever be known as unconquerable and supreme love.⁶⁷

Maitreya eventually achieved the tenth and highest level of a bodhisattva and became a fully enlightened and perfected Buddha.⁶⁸ The Tathagatas (celestial Buddhas who never incarnate on earth), also went on to proclaim Maitreya Buddha a Tathagata, as he was one of the elect few who correctly understood the cardinal doctrine of Buddhism, i.e., pratitaya-samutpada, the law of cause and effect.⁶⁹

As various texts and legends suggest, Maitreya currently gives teachings in accordance with the needs of different disciples, many of whom are advanced bodhisattvas. He is also able to manifest as Tathagata throughout the ten directions of space, which, according to Avatamsaka Sutra, is “attended by innumerable hundreds of thousands of billions (nayuta) of asankhyas of lights.”⁷⁰ Tathagata light might be thought of as the Fiat Lux, the light of supernatural knowledge or Spirit. The following lines from the Avatamasaka Sutra provide a revealing description of Maitreya’s singular honor and power in manifesting as Tathagata:

Tathagata has a light called “accumulation of all merits”; has a light called “pure and free effulgence”; has a light called “emanating supremely sublime sounds”; has a light called “understanding all speeches and bringing joy to others”; has a light called “the realm of freedom which reveals the permanent obliteration of all doubts”; has a light called “free universal effulgence of non-abiding wisdom”; has a light called “free wisdom which universally obliterates all false differentiations”; has a light called “emanating sublime voices according to needs”; has a light called “emanating pure free voices, adorning the lands, and bringing sentient beings to maturity.”⁷¹

Maitreya's Mission

The future Buddha is currently residing in the splendor of a Tushita heaven awaiting the time of his (or her) messianic mission. That mission entails rebirth or incarnation into an age of decline, either at the end of the current age (or in some far distant future) when the teachings have lost their meaning. Thus his arrival represents the consummation of Buddhist teaching that was first derived from Gautama Buddha.

In the *Anagatavamsa Desana* (The Sermon of the Chronicle to be), the Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha describes this decline in the quality of temporal existence as the five disappearances: the disappearance of attainment (in the Dispensation), the disappearance of proper conduct, moral habit, purity or method, the disappearance of learning, the disappearance of symbols and the disappearance of the relics or holy objects.⁷²

The following lines also illustrate the apocalyptic form this period of global turmoil and decay is expected to take:

First will begin an unprecedented war of all nations. Afterward, brother shall rise against brother. Oceans of blood shall flow. They shall forget the meaning of the word Teacher.⁷³

Despite this prophesized period of religious decline, warfare, cataclysm and ignorance, the apocalypticism of Buddhist cosmology is not inherently pessimistic. Like the Hindu puranic view, Buddhism asserts that the universe evolves and devolves, rises and declines in an eternally oscillating or alternating series of cycles. The Sanskrit *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* or "Prophecy of Maitreya" provides a description of the coming cycle and the stupendous reversal resulting from Maitreya's salvific arrival.

[People] will lose their doubts, and the torrents of their cravings will be cut off: free from all misery they will manage to cross the ocean of becoming; and, as a result of Maitreya's teachings, they will lead a holy life. No longer will they regard anything as their own, they will have no possession, no gold or silver, no home, no relatives! But they will lead the holy life of

chastity under Maitreya's guidance. They will have torn the net of the passions, they will manage to enter into trances, and theirs will be an abundance of joy and happiness, for they will lead a holy life under Maitreya's guidance.⁷⁴

During his teaching career Maitreya will turn the wheel of great teachings three times and each time vast assemblies will listen and be transformed in accordance with their unique capacities and needs. Humans as well as myriads of celestial beings will be among the gathered multitudes who are led to liberation and enlightenment through the strength of his loving kindness.⁷⁵ Thus Maitreya is the eschatological cosmic savior and initiate of peace whose foremost perfection is love and patience.

Many Buddhists expect that the Maitreya will come at the end of the present Kali-yuga or the beginning of the Aquarian Age, but most Buddhist scriptures prophesize that the Maitreya will appear centuries later, in the Age of Capricorn, to assume his role as the World Teacher.⁷⁶ Other modern esoteric teachers, such as Lucille Cedercrans (1921-1984) who have sought to synthesize Eastern and Western teachings, believe that the Maitreya's loving kindness has always been available and is at work in the world now, especially as his proximity to humanity increases.⁷⁷

All questions regarding the time of his arrival aside, the coming of Maitreya is generally thought to represent the consummation or final dispensation of Buddhist teaching, as well as a unique spiritual opportunity for all those who have the great fortune to be alive when he is fully active in the world.

The Mashiach

Messianic Expectation

Judaism, like the aforementioned traditions, also anticipates the coming of the Messiah or Mashiach, which means "anointed" (with oil). The term "Anointed One" (symbolizing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) stems from a sacred Israeli rite where prophets, high priests and kings were anointed with specially perfumed oils before undertaking their offices.⁷⁸

The significance of this ancient ritual eventually carried over to the messianic belief in one who is chosen by God as the ultimate king or prophet to fulfill God's purpose on earth.

The concept of a Mashiach in Judaism was not always connected to a human spiritual redeemer.⁷⁹ Before that notion began to develop, during the age of the classical Jewish prophets (922 B.C. to 400 B.C), the idea of the redeemer in the Torah⁸⁰ resided solely in the nature of the Deity or Lord God who is king and reigns over the world (1 Samuel 12:12).⁸¹ The Torah or Pentateuch never mentions a Messiah by name, but it does contain a number of prophetic references to an expected redeemer such as the following passage in Job 19:25, which says: "I know that my redeemer lives and will stand at the end on the earth."

Likewise in Deuteronomy 18:15-18: we see that the "Lord God" is regarded as the only redeemer or Messiah:

"A prophet will the LORD thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me;" and "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and I will put My words in his mouth."⁸²

The later or minor prophets of the Tanakh⁸³ also express hope in a redeemer who will come at the "Day of the Lord." For example, Micah 4:1-3 says:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more.⁸⁴

Many other accepted passages referring to the Messiah can be found in the books of Amos, Ezekiel, Habbakuk, and Zechariah, to name a few. But here too the Messiah in question is either the "LORD alone as redeemer and no other"⁸⁵ or the Davidic house and kingdom as a collective Messiah. Still, in several other prophetic books (Hosea, First Isaiah, Micah, Jer-

emiah, and Second Zechariah) the concept of a Messiah as a personal or ideal human begins to emerge.⁸⁶ But, unlike the Vedic, Buddhist, Islamic and Christian redeemer, the Jewish Messiah is not a demigod, sacrificial savior or God incarnate.⁸⁷ Rather he is expected to be a great human luminary, an eminent political or military leader, or a charismatic teacher who will restore the Davidic Kingdom of Israel and furnish the correct interpretation of Mosaic Law.⁸⁸ Like the aforementioned traditions, Jewish messianic beliefs stress "ethical perfection" and "earthly bliss" for all humanity. However, they also contain strong nationalistic, social and political emphasis. These political and national longings are, in fact, indissolubly bound to Judaism's universal and spiritual urges.⁸⁹

The Progressive Development of the Jewish Messianic Ideal

According to Joseph Klausner in *The Messianic Ideal in Israel from the Beginning to the Conception of the Mishnah*, the notion of a Jewish Messiah was connected not only to the "Lord God," but also to Moses, who was referred to as "the first deliverer."⁹⁰ Moses—who the Talmud called the "savior of Israel"—is seen as "the great deliverer who ransomed Israel from its material and political servitude and redeemed it from its ignorance and spiritual bondage."⁹¹ Since Moses embodied many of the political and spiritual characteristics of the redeemer as they were portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, he was seen as the prototype or symbol of the absolute redeemer⁹² who was prophesized to come in the future.

There were other heroes, political or military leaders and prophets during Israel's history that filled the role of provisional Messiah and added to the concept of who the Mashiach or Messiah was destined to be. However, none of these had the spiritual attributes of Moses. The one exception was David, the second Israeli king, who was thought to embody the political, moral and spiritual qualities of the true prototype.⁹³ Thus the concept of the Messiah evolved over time into an illustrious person who could deliver the Jews and all humanity from political, social and moral evil through a combination of human and spiritual means. As

Klauser states, the Messiah of Judaism became a “preeminent man, of whom it was possible to say: “Thou has made him lower than God.””⁹⁴ Such a man, a man of supreme heroism, morality and power is to make Israel a great nation and a blessed light unto the entire world so that they are complete and “full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1-10).⁹⁵

The evolution of the messianic idea continued to evolve from the time of the prophets through the period of the Tannaim (10-220 CE) or rabbinical sages and teachers, and into the Middle Ages. One of the most highly regarded, influential Jewish rabbis and philosophers who contributed to the Jewish understanding of the coming Messiah was Maimonides (1135-1204). In the *Mishneh Torah* (Law of Kings)—widely regarded as his *Magnum Opus*—Maimonides states his unequivocal belief in a coming Messiah and includes it as one of his Thirteen Principles of Faith.⁹⁶ In 11:1 of the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides says:

In the future time Messiah will arise and restore the Davidic dynasty to its initial sovereignty... Anyone who does not believe in him [the Messiah] or does not await his coming not only denies [the truth of his coming, as stated in] the rest of the prophets, he denies Torah and [the prophecy of] Moses.⁹⁷

New messianic movements erupted with full force during the Middle Ages and continued into the mid-nineteenth century and beyond.⁹⁸ These movements retained their dualistic and apocalyptic character, due in large part to the difficult history and exile of the Jewish people, and to the Old Testament cataclysmic prophecies of punishment that were inflicted upon Israel and its enemies in the “end of days.” Restorative and utopian counter trends infused with the Kabbalistic and mystical elements also developed. The restorative vision (which some scholars see as having been promulgated by Maimonides in the *Mishneh*)⁹⁹ seeks to restore the ancient glories of a former Golden Age through a naturalistic or gradual evolutionary process. (Yet even the restorative ideal combined apocalyptic elements and images of war, revolution, famine and economic catastrophe.¹⁰⁰) Utopian strains also sought to bring

about a *tikkun* or repair of the worlds, although various heretical sects thought it necessary to employ radical means to force the appearance of the Messiah who would then usher in an entirely new age of perfection on the ruins of the old world order.¹⁰¹

A Future Golden Age or the Days of the Messiah

Despite these numerous contradictions and differences in understanding and emphasis regarding the Messiah and his coming, there are certain key features that describe the “Age of the Messiah” and the *Olam Ha-Ba* (World to Come). However, it should be noted here that although the Messianic ideal is still a living force in the world of Judaism, it is not central to every Jew’s belief system. One of the reasons for the decline in the messianic belief in Judaism was the heresy of the 17th century Sabbatai Zevi, the “apostate Messiah,” who converted to Islam and spawned a crypto-Jewish movement based on “redemption through sin.”¹⁰² Later, messianism began to take on a secular form in Jewish utopian and nationalist movements such as Zionism. A number of Jews abandoned their messianic beliefs with the establishment of the State, which they perceived to be the unfolding of the messianic promise and “the dawn of their deliverance.”¹⁰³

But among those who continue to hope for his coming, it is thought that the Mashiach will bring about the spiritual and political redemption of Israel and the Jewish people. Israel is expected to be exalted due to its spiritual superiority and ethical qualities. The first and second Temples of Solomon and Herod, which served as the center of Jewish spiritual life, are to be rebuilt by the prophesized Messiah who will restore the Shekinah Presence (the physical manifestation of the Divine Presence) on Earth. Wars, hatred and intolerance will cease and humanity will establish harmonious relations with predatory animals and beasts of prey. The Messianic Age and *Olam Ha-Ba* will be characterized by increased material prosperity, unusual productivity and agricultural abundance. Jewish scripture also prophesizes the elimination of suffering and disease, as well as the end to humanity’s ancient fear of

death. Knowledge of God will fill the world, in addition to justice, mercy, goodness and love.

A good deal of speculation exists with regard to what will prompt the Messiah's coming. Some scholars think that the Messiah will arrive when the world is already at peace, but others think that he is destined to appear in a time of great corruption and turmoil to inaugurate an age of amity and justice on earth.¹⁰⁴ The precise timing of his arrival is uncertain and attempts to predict a fixed date are strongly discouraged.

Most traditional Jewish scholars expect that the Messiah "will come once and only once, there will be no second coming."¹⁰⁵ Yet this too is a matter of some debate since Rabbinical Judaism maintains that there are "two anointed ones who come once."¹⁰⁶ This idea was also common among the Essenes who believed that there was to be a military messiah and a priestly messiah. The matter is further complicated by Messianic Judaism's belief that there is one Messiah who makes two appearances.¹⁰⁷ According to this view the first appearance has already taken place; the Messiah has accomplished his aims, was slain and is resurrected; he is expected to return again in great magnificence and power.¹⁰⁸

Judaism does not, however, accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The majority of contemporary Jews disallowed the belief in a false messiah (one who did not meet the requirements laid out by Jewish belief), and maintain this perspective today. Notwithstanding the diversity of expression regarding the Mashiach, and efforts on the part of certain ultra-orthodox groups to precipitate the End of Days, the messianic ideal in Judaism envisions a golden age of social and spiritual progress for all humanity, one not restricted to a particular nation, group or spiritual tradition.

The Christ

Perhaps no other prophecy in the New Testament has been given greater emphasis than the promise of Christ's Second Coming or "Parousia." Nearly all of the 27 books of the New Testament—from the Gospels to the Epistles to the Prophetic—are thought to contain revelations about the Second Advent. One

scholar counted 318 references in 210 of the New Testament's 259 chapters that reference Jesus Christ's reappearance on earth.¹⁰⁹

Although the centrality of this belief has waxed and waned and taken different forms in Christianity's long history, a large majority of Christians accept and anticipate Jesus Christ's coming again.¹¹⁰ The idea of Christ's return is inextricably linked to Christian eschatology, end times and millennialism and is based primarily on the canonical gospels. Having previously touched upon several of the many Old Testament prophecies containing references to an "anointed one," a future Messiah and the "Day of the Lord," this section will provide two scriptural passages from the Old Testament that would seem to affirm Jesus Christ's anticipated return. The following passage is thought to predict the advent of John the Baptist as the forerunner or precursor of the coming savior.

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

But who shall abide the day of his coming, who shall stand when he approaches. (Malachi 3:1-2)¹¹¹

What is particularly suggestive about this passage, as James Stuart Russell points out in *The Parousia*,¹¹² is that it seems to refer to a time of judgment and to the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple (first destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E) and therefore to the Messiah's second coming. This idea is in keeping with certain Jewish and fundamentalist Christian beliefs that say the "Temple of God" must be rebuilt on its original Temple Mount location as a precondition of the Messiah's return. Other less literal interpretations dispute these claims saying that "there is no need for another Temple in Jerusalem—just the reverse—the old Temple was declared redundant the moment Jesus died on the cross. The curtain separating the people from the Holy of Holies was torn in two – significantly from top to bottom."¹¹³

The second passage is from the Book of Daniel, which many Christians view as the Biblical foundation for Christ's future coming. In Daniel 7:13-14 the author relates a night vision or dream where he sees a transcendent figure or son of God emerge from the clouds at the end of the age to establish a righteous, worldwide kingdom on earth:¹¹⁴

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him.

And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.¹¹⁵

New Testament Prophecy

Although the New Testament inherited these and other Old Testament apocalyptic beliefs and prophecies pertaining to the future Messiah, it contains many other teachings that both build upon and supersede the Hebrew Bible. In discussing such prophecies, it is important to distinguish between prophecies related to his "First Coming" and those pertaining to his "Second Coming." As one author pointed out, it was a lack of discrimination between the "sufferings" of Christ and his future "Crown and Glory," and the "time space existing between the two" that caused some early Church fathers to reject the idea of the Second Coming.¹¹⁶ This same author maintained that while Christ's life and teachings are of special import, the prophecy concerning his reappearance is the doctrinal center of all New Testament scripture.¹¹⁷ Today, both inside and outside mainstream Christianity, this belief is becoming increasingly prevalent.

There are certainly ample testimonies in the New Testament to support belief in the Second Coming, some of which are thought to have come directly from Jesus Christ himself:

In My Father's House are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and

prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2-3).

For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his work. (Matt. 16:27).

Other Biblical passages are suggestive of Christ's return in visible and personal form:

And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11).

Additional New Testament passages explicitly referencing the Second Coming can be found in Hebrews 9:28: "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him,"¹¹⁸ and again in the widely used Nicene Creed (325 CE) or profession of faith, which affirms the belief that Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead."

The Christ of the Second Coming

The Christian Messiah, in contrast to the Kalki Avatar, Maitreya and the Mashiach, does not derive from an exalted or noble family. As the son of a carpenter from the Judean countryside, his origins are humble. And unlike the Jewish Messiah, who is believed to be an illustrious "human," Christians accept that Jesus Christ is both fully man and fully God. The savior of all humanity has a dual nature. As a "son of man" he is without sin and he exhibits the perfection of all human attributes. As a "son of God" he is an incarnation of the Lord Almighty who can reveal God directly. The belief that Christ is God incarnate is a central Christian doctrine. This concept is backed, in part, by comparing numerous scriptural passages from the Old and New Testaments that describe God and Jesus Christ in identical terms. For example, in Isaiah 41:14 God says, "I Lord am the first, and with the last I am he,"

while in Revelation 1:17, Jesus says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last." Or again in Isaiah 43:11, where God says, "I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour," and in John 4:14 where Jesus himself says, "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."¹¹⁹ Furthermore, there are various passages in the Bible where Jesus affirms his divinity of Godliness, such as in John 10:30, where Jesus says, "I and the Father are one."¹²⁰

In his first appearance on earth, Christ was characterized as a living source of grace, love and comfort and full of knowledge and truth. He was the patient and wise teacher, the perfected man who was free from the stain of sin. More significantly, he was perceived as taking the form of an exalted "Suffering Servant."¹²¹ But in his Second Coming, Christ is expected to descend from his heavenly home as a conquering King, a great deliverer who comes in power and glory to bring justice and make war against the wicked.¹²² This Christ emerges from the sky like lightning. He holds the keys to death and Hades and establishes himself and his celestial army as the ruler over all creation. The Book of Revelation further envisages him as having a head and hair "as white as snow" and eyes as "a flame of fire." "And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (Revelation 1:15-16).

Preconditions and Signs of the Second Coming

Other books in the New Testament, such as the Gospel of Mathew, Thessalonians, as well as Revelation, examine the conditions and prerequisites for the Messiah's return. In addition

to describing the signs of his second coming (24:1-14), Matthew contains numerous passages on the conditions that will exist prior to his return (24:27-31). According to Matthew, disregard for Christ's teachings, wickedness, hatred and lust, mental confusion, along with famine, earthquakes, disease and a lack of

love, are warnings that the time for Christ's coming is nigh. Luke 21:25 adds to this troubling portrait with his powerful descriptions of shaking celestial bodies and nations in anguish and terror "at the roaring and tossing of the sea."

References to Christ's second Parousia also appear at the end of nearly every chapter in 1 Thessalonians. But here the Apostle Paul adopts a most hopeful note for the "faithful" who believe in Christ and live in harmony with his teachings. In

his second letter to the Thessalonians, however, Paul takes up the strong apocalyptic themes associated with Second Advent and the "end of days." Like Matthew, Paul describes the preconditions for Christ's reappearance as a rebellion against God and the coming of "a man of lawlessness" and perdition, a "son of destruction" (the Anti-Christ), who will lead people astray and usher in a period of great tribulation. Vague allusions to the Christ's second coming are found throughout the first 18 or 19 chapters of Revelation. One of special note takes up the symbolism of the "sword" and the "Rider on the White Horse," likening the reappearance of the Christ to appearance of Kalki and Maitreya,

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed

in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11-16).¹²³

But it is not until 19:11—the climax of the entire work—that John gives full consideration to Christ’s descent from heaven and the establishment of God’s kingdom on the new earth. For some, but not all Christians, the setting up of the kingdom occurs in two important stages: the millennial reign on earth, and the eternal reign in the new heavens and new earth. Within these two stages several associated events regarding the end times are envisaged:

The Millennium: A golden age of peace lasting 1000 years during Christ’s rule.

The Great Tribulation: A short period of tumult and disaster mentioned by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse¹²⁴ and also referenced in Revelation. “End-time” Christians disagree on the order in which the Millennium and the Great Tribulation will occur. Opinion is therefore divided between the “pre-millennial” and “postmillennial” views.¹²⁵

An Armageddon: A series of violent events engulfing humanity, a horrific war between the forces of light and darkness described in Daniel 9, Matthew 24 and Revelation 4:9.

The Rapture: Where the Christ descends from the heaven and lifts up his believers to be with him.¹²⁶

Doctrinal Diversity Regarding the End Times

There is a great deal of divergence among Christians about the Parousia and the eschaton or End of Days. This is due in part to interpretations of scripture (either literal or symbolic), to doctrinal emphasis among the various Christian denominations, and to the fact that certain eschatological views, such as the Rapture, are

comparatively new. Views among Protestants vary widely. Futurist and literal interpretations of the Bible predict all four of the aforementioned events. However, mainline and liberal denominations do not expect the Rapture to take place in the same fashion as do their evangelical and fundamentalist brethren. Nor do they condone radical fundamentalist beliefs that the End Times can be forced by actively supporting the Zionist cause. There are also differences in opinion as to how and when events associated with the eschaton or End Times will unfold. For example, Lutherans reject the Rapture and the idea that Christ will visibly return to earth. While Presbyterians believe in the Second Advent and the Last Judgment or “Day of the Lord,” they too reject Millenarianism or Chiliasm and discourage idle speculation about the end of the age. Anglicans support the idea that there will be a time when the world as we know it will cease to be. However, they “argue that the end of the world does not actually mean that the world will cease to be but rather that the world will finally be fully restored to what it was in creation, with all creatures living in harmony with one another.”¹²⁷ But Anglican teachings on the subject of the Parousia and eschaton are minimal given what they believe to be a limited amount of information in the scriptures and the lack of consensus among the early church Fathers.¹²⁸ Although there is no stated doctrine regarding Christ’s millennial reign, Anglicans tend to reject the idea of millenarianism.

Roman Catholic doctrine resembles Anglican and other mainline teachings on the eschaton, but strictly associates the Second Coming with the end of the world and the Last Judgment. Therefore, “it is not associated with any earlier time such as to establish a “Millennium.”¹²⁹ Millenarianism or the belief that Jesus will establish a throne in this world and reign for a thousand years is specifically condemned by the Catholic Church. Instead, it teaches that Jesus Christ already reigns in eternity and that the Church serves as seed in this world for his reign.¹³⁰ With respect to the Rapture, while Catholics believe that the faithful will be “gathered together with Christ,” they do not employ the word “rapture” and do not believe that it will be fulfilled in a literal fashion.¹³¹

Despite significant debate and the tremendous doctrinal diversity within the Christian churches, the salvific function of Christ's anticipated return is one of the essential tenets of the Christian faith. Belief in the Second Coming, the End Times and Final Judgment is widely recognized and emphasized in nearly all Christian Denominations.

The Imam Al-Mahdi

All Muslims agree upon the fundamentals of the Islamic faith as set forth in the Qur'an. These Six Articles or Pillars of Faith include belief in the oneness of Allah or God and his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, belief in prayer as a direct link to God, the requirement of charitable giving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, the obligation to perform Haji or pilgrimage to Mekkah once in one's lifetime and a belief in a day of Reckoning or Judgment.¹³²

Another vital element in the teaching of Islam is the idea that humanity can be guided by Allah or God and has the capacity to respond to divine guidance. Humanity has an inherent ability to acquire knowledge of Allah in and of themselves, either by instinct or intellect. But since "divine law," which requires a living surrender to the Oneness of God, cannot be discovered by these qualities, Allah must reveal his law to those individuals who are divinely or rightly guided (muhtadin) so that they may lead humankind on the "straight Path to God."¹³³ *Al-Mahdi*, which means "the one who is guided by Allah," is such a one; the Awaited Savior or Reformer in Islam.

Belief in an awaited messiah who is anointed or appointed by Allah is eagerly anticipated among many faithful Muslims. Al-Mahdi or *Q'iam* (promised one) is the prophesied redeemer who emerges before the Last Judgment and Day of Resurrection or *Qiyamah*.¹³⁴ Al-Mahdi is a high and exalted teacher or leader, a holy existence created by Allah for the great and lofty aim of reforming human society. Pure of heart or essence and perfect in insight and intelligence, he is the "Master of the Age" who, together with Jesus or Isa,¹³⁵ is expected to fill the earth with justice and equity after it would have been filled with inequity and op-

pression.¹³⁶ The promised Imam is to bring a measure of progress to human civilization that has never been seen on the earth before. His advent is regarded as the greatest grace bestowed upon humanity by Allah.¹³⁷

Al-Mahdi's role as a universal reformer is analogous to that of the Hindu Kalki, the Buddhist Maitreya and the Jewish and Christian Messiah. He is the celestial "White Horseman" who comes to illuminate the horizon, to end error, evil and corruption, and restore sanctity and truth to a degenerate world. Although the concept of Al-Mahdi is not explicitly referenced in the Qur'an, there are a number of *hadith* or sayings ascribed to Muhammad that deal with his emergence. The following hadith says:

Even if the entire duration of the world's existence has already been exhausted and only one day is left [before the day of judgment], Allah will expand that day to such a length of time, as to accommodate the kingdom of a person ... who will be called by my name. He will fill out the earth with peace and justice as it will have been full of injustice and tyranny. The world will not end until a man of my household, whose name is the same as mine, holds sway.¹³⁸

Belief in the awaited Mahdi is a principle focus of Shi'a theology, but many Sunnis also believe in the advent of the rightly guided ruler sent by God. The following is a partial list of signs and beliefs associated with the Mahdi—many of them based on the hadiths—that are shared by both Shi'a and Sunni eschatology.

- The Mahdi will be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad of the line of Fatima (his daughter.)
- He will bear the name Muhammad.
- He will be accompanied by the raising of a Black Standard (black war flag).
- His coming will be accompanied by the appearance of Dajjal (the anti-Christ).
- There will be a lunar and solar eclipse within the same month of Ramadan.

- A star or comet with a luminous tail will rise from the East before the coming of the Mahdi.
- He will rule for seven, nine or nineteen years alongside Jesus (Isa in Arabic).
- He will redistribute the earth's bounties and wealth.
- He will fill the world with justice and peace at time when it is filled with suffering and inequity.¹³⁹

Despite these and other foundational beliefs shared by Sunni and Shi'a that make them "brethren in the faith," there are substantial differences between these two main groups concerning the question of succession after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴⁰ The initial rift between the two groups initially developed along historical and socio-political lines. Now, however, these differences have taken on an added spiritual significance concerning the timing of the Mahdi's advent, his character, and genealogy, as well as the nature of his guidance.

The Imam Mahdi in Shi'a Theology

Among the Shi'a and the Sufi Muslims, Mahdism has immense mystical, theological and political significance. Although the title of Mahdi had been applied to certain individuals in early Islamic history as an honorific designation, its theological or messianic usage in the Shi'a tradition—*al-Qa'im al Mahdi*—is meant to apply to the coming Twelfth Imam or "risen savior." The Twelfth Imam, and in the Shi'a tradition, the final Imam—*Muhammad al-Mahdi*—so deeply venerated by Shi'ites, is said to be a descendant of Muhammad who will be anointed by Allah to right all wrongs and establish a new world order based on Islamic teachings of justice and virtue.¹⁴¹ While the Shi'a savior is most often referred to as simply the Mahdi, he is also known as *Al-Qaim*, "He Who Rises Up"; *Sahib as-Zaman*, "Lord of the Age"; and *Al-Muntazar*, the "Awaited One."

But unlike the previously discussed Messiahs in the Hindu, Buddhist and Judaic traditions, the Mahdi is not waiting to be born at some future date. The Imam Mahdi was born in 869

C.E. in the Iraqi city of Samarra. Upon the death of his martyred father—Hasan al-Askari—in the year 872, when he was only three years old, the Mahdi was hidden from public view in a cave under his father's home out of concerns that he too would be persecuted. His whereabouts were only known to his deputies and access to him was exceedingly restricted.¹⁴² This concealment is considered by the Imamites or Twelve-Imam Shi'a sect, as the occultation or (*ghaybah*). The word *ghaybah* is used in both a physical and spiritual sense, since it comes from an astronomical term referring to one planetary body passing in front of another, such as an eclipse of the sun or the moon when the source of light is present but temporarily hidden or concealed.¹⁴³

Although the Mahdi disappeared from view, "his concealment is not permanent ... it is a temporary state, a suspension of presence in the world, rather than an absence."¹⁴⁴ Al-Mahdi, the Imam appointed by God, is not dead, but is hidden by Divine Command until he returns on the Day of Judgment to revive the true message of Islam and herald a new era of peace and victory over turmoil and wickedness.

The month and day of the hidden Imam's return is given as the tenth of Muharram—the first month of the Islamic Calendar and one of the four sacred months of the year—but the exact year is not known; suffice it to say that it will not be in an odd-numbered year. There is no consensus on where the Twelfth Imam will reappear; some believe it's in the city of Qom, while others believe it could be in parts of Iraq, or in Mekkah "between the corner of the Kaaba and the station of Abraham and people will witness him there."¹⁴⁵

As the aforementioned hadith shows, the belief in the return of the Mahdi is irrevocably linked to the *Qiyamah* or God's final assessment of humanity at the end of time. Such beliefs are based on a large number of Qur'anic verses as well as the many sayings of the Prophet. In fact, except for the theme of God's Oneness or Unity, the Qur'an says more about the expected *Qiyamah*—the Resurrection, the Day of Judgment, Day of Gathering—than any other topic. According to the Prophet Muhammad,

the Qiyamah is an inescapable time when the scales will be balanced, when truth and the thoughts and intentions of every heart will be revealed.

The trials and tribulation leading up to the Qiyamah have a great deal in common with the other apocalyptic and millenarian or chiliastic beliefs discussed thus far. Knowledge of God and religion (Islam) will decrease, while ignorance will escalate. Good deeds will be detested. Corruption, usury, wickedness and killing will prevail. Carnal desires will be pursued, transgressors will become leaders, and it will be difficult to distinguish falsehood from truth. A series of catastrophic events and earth changes, such as drought and famine, major earthquakes, the flattening of the earth and the collision of the sun and the moon, predate the Mahdi's appearance.¹⁴⁶ The overall sequence of events involves a period of world degeneration, cataclysms, a great war (which various Sunni and Shi'a Jihadist sects are trying to instigate), between the forces of good and evil fought and won by both the Mahdi and Isa or Jesus. These events result in a messianic kingdom or the creation of a new earth that "shall shine in the Light of the Lord."¹⁴⁷ Shi'as expect that this new earth will last for a period of twenty to forty years or, in some versions, up to three hundred years to be followed by a final annihilation of the world and the resurrection and judgment of all sentient creatures who have even the smallest atom of love in their hearts.¹⁴⁸

The Character of the Twelfth Imam

The Mahdi's character is equated to the Prophet Muhammad's. The Shi'a tradition depicts him as a man of great piety and patience. His calming countenance is likened to the morning breeze and his presence is said to be life-giving refuge.¹⁴⁹ He is described as a supernatural being with immense power, courage and daring. No obstacle hinders him from the deliverance and enlivening of truth. Not only is the Islamic messiah a defender of truth, the roots of ignorance are destroyed by him and he is steadfast in his defense of the rights and honor of every human being, especially the tortured and oppressed. The Imam is a man of true simplicity who renounces materialism and will

distribute the earth's hidden wealth and bounty among the deprived and needy people of the world.¹⁵⁰ He is free from every hurtful thought, word or action.

Shi-ism further characterizes the Islamic Messiah as the most knowledgeable and as having proficiency in all the sciences. As the Messenger of Allah, the Mahdi is the custodian of prophetic wisdom who will bring forth the corrected or true Qur'an. According to one 14th century Shi'a scholar; "al-Qu'im al Muntazar (the Awaited Saviour) will fill the hearts with knowledge (and affirmation) of the Unity of God (tawhid)."¹⁵¹

One contemporary Islamic scholar likens the Mahdi to another well-known messiah:

The twelfth *Imam*, the *Mahdi* ... mirrors in his personality and mission the judging and victorious Christ, the Christ who is to come on the clouds of heaven, whose return the community still awaits with anxious anticipation. The time of his concealment (*ghaybah*) is a time of travail, a period of disintegration which must precede the final restoration. Finally, like the second coming of Christ, his reappearance or return (*raj'ah*) will be a time of fear and remorse, of going astray and general chaos. All this, however, will be followed by a long period of peace, prosperity, and the final triumph of truth over falsehood when justice and equity will reign forever.¹⁵²

Sunni Perspectives

The advent of the Mahdi is a disputed concept within the Sunni tradition and has never become an essential element in Sunni doctrine. While many Sunnis generally accept the Mahdi doctrine, quoting various hadiths as justification, a minority reject it. Sunni Muslims do not consider the son of Hasan al-Askari to be the Madhi, nor do they accept the idea that he has been in occultation for the last 1000 years. Opponents of *ghaybah* say that God is able to create the Imam at the required moment and does not need to create him earlier.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, they believe that the Mahdi will come from Muhammad's family, more specifically from Hasan al-Askari's descendants. Therefore, Sunnis think that the Mahdi has not yet

been born and that his exact identity is only known to Allah. They envision him appearing at the end of the age, in a time of war and bloodshed, along with the second coming of Jesus, as part of the eschaton. Unlike the Shi'a Mahdi, who is the universal savior or messiah of all mankind, the interests of the Sunni Mahdi extend primarily to Muslims. Furthermore, Al-Madi is generally thought to be an ordinary man, with no superpowers, born to an ordinary woman.¹⁵⁴ He is not a prophet. However, he is expected to be a unique caliph, a great leader, warrior or statesman. His mission is to restore the faith and ensure the final triumph of Islam.

Sufi Conceptions of the Coming One

The Sufi view of the Mahdi doctrine places an emphasis on the mystical lineage of the Mahdi and his role as Sufi master. In general, the Sufi view of the hidden Imam is quite similar to the views enunciated by most other Muslims. (Sufism exists in all Islamic sects and generally transcends sectarian divisions.) Nevertheless, Sufi views differ in one primary respect, as Michael McCarron points out in the following quote from an essay on "Some Sufi Concepts of Resurrection or Qiyamah":

Whereas the Sunnis expect the return of a pious Muslim reformer, and the Shi'a expects the return of a vanished Imam, the Sufis generally expect the Mahdi to be the final link in a long chain of masters and disciples in the Sufi tradition. In that sense, this continuous chain or lineage begins with Muhammad and ends with the Mahdi. The Mahdi is therefore viewed as the final and most perfect Sufi master, who is able to guide Muslims to God. As the "divinely guided guide of humanity" he will occupy a place between the believers and God ... [H]e will serve as the axis of human faith in God, or stated differently, he will serve as a doorway of sorts on the path to God.¹⁵⁵

Other scholars, such as Annemarie Schimmel, compare the Mahdi to the *qutb*, the unknown or obscured Sufi spiritual leader—the perfect master and head of the Sufi spiritual hierarchy of saints—whose divine connection to God allows him to impart spiritual knowledge to the world.¹⁵⁶ The Qutb serves as axis or center of

spiritual energy upon which the existence of the entire world is contingent.¹⁵⁷ It is he who governs the universe along with a group of saints who are responsible for maintaining the world order.¹⁵⁸ Jelaluddin Rumi, a moderate and highly inclusive Sufi poet, who was often called the "Qutb of love," went so far as to declare, "He who does not know the true sheikh—i.e., the Perfect Man and *qutb* of his time—is a *kafir*, infidel"¹⁵⁹ or unbeliever. Elsewhere, he says of the Qutb that "the world cannot exist without a pole or an axis—it turns around him just as a mill turns around its axis."

The more traditional branches of Sufism believe that there is only one Qutb for each cycle or age and that he is only disclosed to a chosen group of mystics. The newer branches of Sufism maintain that when the Mahdi reappears he will be universally recognized as the Messiah, the Christ and Imam Mahdi. All three branches of the Abrahamic Faith along with all humanity will be brought together, irrespective of religious belief, in the Mahdi's peaceful and loving embrace. In Sufism, and in the Islamic tradition as a whole, the Imam Mahdi is seen as the ultimate salvation and "the Pole Star of hope upon which the gaze of humanity is fixed."¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

This article has attempted to show that the Messianic expectation is a common element found in every great faith and in every great culture. It has focused on several different beliefs about the Coming One in an effort to give the reader a general sense of the underlying continuity and unity of divine Revelation as it expresses in a multiplicity of religious forms.

The concept of the Messiah has certainly led to divisions among humanity, such as the cleavage between the Shi'a and Sunni or the break between Christians and Jews. But in spite of these cleavages and the seemingly insurmountable diversity of religious doctrine and practice, prophecies concerning the future Savior or Messiah reveal a universal nexus of belief that takes one on a journey across religious boundaries. The Coming Avatar or Savior—the God-Man with many different names and

faces— “stands resplendent high above the narrow walls in which humanity is cut up and divided.”¹⁶¹ These divine representatives belong not to one religion, but to the Church Universal. Their activities and teachings are far reaching in their inclusiveness and global in their implications.

Humanity’s belief in an Avatar or Savior is linked to an innate recognition that the universe evolves to progressively higher levels of complexity and organization and that this process extends to the spiritual progress of the earth itself. Spirit, therefore, is seen as a life-giving force that responds to humanity’s needs and its invocative cry for guidance and renewal. Each of the five traditions examined in this article expects the promised Savior or Messiah to open up a new line of communication between humanity and the divine. Each envisions a universal initiation that sheds new light on the true nature of religion, the secrets of existence and humanity’s own inner potential. The Messiah’s return heralds the opening of a new golden age or a new world order based on equity, justice and brotherhood in which all religions and all the people of earth are included. Thus the World Savior archetype is revealed as a potent unifying force, based not only on humanity’s hope for solace and succor in periods of travail and decline, but also on its belief in a compassionate higher power whose plan and purpose for the earth is based on the greatest good for the greatest number.

Yet the true significance of the Messianic ideal lies in the fact that it is an inexhaustible source of strength and resourcefulness that both supports and encourages men and women everywhere to create the right inner and outer climate or atmosphere for the Savior’s imminent return. To this end, all those who accept the fact of the Parousia or Second Coming are called to become lesser *qutbs* or Avatars of Love whose life intention is to help prepare human hearts and minds for the unique opportunity of this much anticipated event.

¹ Alice A. Bailey, *The Unfinished Biography* (New York: Lucis Trust Publishing Co., 1951), 288.

² Alice A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, (reprint, 1948; New York, NY: Lucis Trust Publishing Company, 1962), 6.

³ Psalms 91:1, King James Version of the Bible.

⁴ Alice A. Bailey, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, 6.

⁵ For information on the earliest evidence of the development of astrological, mathematical and mythological disciplines in Mesopotamia and their eventual intermingling with religion see: *Origins of Astrology* by Nick Campion.

⁶ See for example, *Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization* by David Frawley.

⁷ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1 (reprint 1888; Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1974), 152.

⁸ Helena P. Blavatsky, “The Chaldean Legend,” *Theosophy*, Vol. 52, No. 6, April, 1964, 175-182.

⁹ In “The Chaldean Legend,” Blavatsky claims that the Persians learned astrology and where given a version of the Stanzas of Dzyan (The Book of Numbers) from the Chaldeans or Neo-Babylonians in addition to a number of other teachings that were translated into Arabic and kept secret by the Persian Sufis.

¹⁰ Helena P. Blavatsky and G. R. S. Mead, *The Theosophical Glossary* (reprint 1882; Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2009), 195.

¹¹ Bishop James K. Allen, *The Long Journey Home: A Search for Truth and An Examination of Outside Influences that Altered Christianity and Materially Darkened God’s Word to a Lost World* (reprint 1944; Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2003), 54.

¹² Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Collected Writings*, Vol. 14, 322.

¹³ John M. Robertson, *The Pagan Christ: Studies in Comparative Hierology* (London: Rationalist Press Association, 1911), 228.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 384.

¹⁵ Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, *Maitreya, The Future Buddha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 54-56, 75.

¹⁶ *Historical Sketch of Buddhism and Islam in Afghanistan*, The Berzin Archives, http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/history_buddhism/buddhism_central_asia/history_afghanistan_buddhism.html. (accessed February 25, 2012).

¹⁷ Hannah M.G. Shapero, *Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity*, <http://www.pyracantha.com/Z/zjc3.html>, (accessed January 19, 2012).

- ¹⁸ See, for example, *Origins of the Written Bible*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/origins-written-bible.html> (accessed February 23, 2012). Also see: David Frowley, *God, Sages and Kings* (Salt Lake, Utah: Passage Press, 1991), 281.
- ¹⁹ Paul Kriwaczek, *In Search of Zarathustra: The First Prophet and the Ideas that Changed the World* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 196.
- ²⁰ Payam Nabarz and Caitlin Mathews, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005), 47.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., 48.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Gerald Berry, *Religions of the World* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1956), 57.
- ²⁵ The *Zand-i Vohuman Yasht* is a prophetic/apocalyptic commentary, written in the 6th century, that describes what will happen to the Persian people and religion in the future.
- ²⁶ Hannah M.G. Shapero, *Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity*, <http://www.pyracantha.com/Z/zjc3.html>, (accessed February 18, 2012).
- ²⁷ For detailed account of this theory, interested readers are referred to *Gerald Massey's Lectures*.
- ²⁸ See, for example, *The Quest for Sumer*, by Leonard Cottrell or *Egypt Tour*, by Marie Parsons.
- ²⁹ See, for example, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*, by Jean Bottero, University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- ³⁰ Helena Blavatsky and G. R. S. Mead, *The Theosophical Glossary*, 236.
- ³¹ Payam Nabarz and Caitlin Mathews, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World*, 4.
- ³² A Brief History of Iran and the Iranian Religion, <http://iransnews.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/a-very-brief-history-of-iran-and-iranian-religions/> (accessed February 21, 2012).
- ³³ Payam Nabarz and Caitlin Mathews, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World*, 14, 44-51.
- ³⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Chicago: KAZI Publications, 1999), 76.
- ³⁵ Helena Blavatsky, "The Chaldean Legend," 175-182.
- ³⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 138.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, 9-10.
- ³⁹ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, ed. Joseph Campbell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 129.
- ⁴⁰ Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, *Bhagavad Gita*, Book IV, Sutra 7, 8 (New York, NY: New American Library, 2002).
- ⁴¹ As quoted from *The Ten Incarnations of Vishnu* by Subhamoy Das, <http://hinduism.about.com/od/godsgod-desses/a/10avatars.htm> (accessed February 24, 2012).
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ *The Vishnu Purana*, translated by Horace Hayman Wilson (reprint, 1840; Oxford: Evinity Publishing Inc., 2009), 10.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 483-484.
- ⁴⁶ *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.3.25, http://www.archive.org/details/srimadbhagavata_m015439mbp (accessed January 19, 2012).
- ⁴⁷ See for example the *Kalki Purana*, the *Agni, Linga*, and *Bramanada Puranas* for further details on Kalki's appearance and activities.
- ⁴⁸ William Buck, *Mahabharata* 190:93-97 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).
- ⁴⁹ Grégoire de Kalbermatten, *The Third Advent* (New York, NY: daisyamerica LLC, 2003), 70.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ *Padma Purana* 6.71.279-282 www.gitasociety.com/scriptures/ALL18MAJORPURANAS.IGS.pdf (accessed January 19, 2012).
- ⁵² See the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 12.2.37-38 and the *Vishnu Purana*, Book IV, Chapter XXIV.
- ⁵³ Alexander Berzin, *Introduction to the Kalachakra Initiation* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997), 47.
- ⁵⁴ Taken from an *Introduction to the Kalachakra*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
- ⁵⁵ Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet, *The Gnostic Circle: A Synthesis in the Harmonies of the Cosmos* (London, ENG: Aeon Books, 1975), 213.
- ⁵⁶ Grégoire de Kalbermatten, *The Third Advent*, 68-69.
- ⁵⁷ Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism: An Historical Sketch*, Vol. II (reprint, 1928; Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1998), 149.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 51.
- ⁵⁹ Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 274-277.
- ⁶⁰ Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, 25.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 92, 110-132.
- ⁶² Ibid., 171, 172.

- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Alex Wayman, Ryujun Tajima, *The Enlightenment of Variocana* (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Ltd, 1992), 437.
- ⁶⁵ Paul Carus, *The Gospel of the Buddha* (Chicago, IL: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1997), 217 -218.
- ⁶⁶ Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, 55-56.
- ⁶⁷ Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-1984). Information on Lama Yeshe and Maitreya can be found at the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, www.lamayeshe.com/ (accessed January 22, 2012).
- ⁶⁸ The Maitreya is both a fully enlightened “Buddha” and a “Bodhisattva,” or one who returns to earth to aid all sentient beings.
- ⁶⁹ Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, *Maitreya, The Future Buddha*, 57.
- ⁷⁰ Cheng Chien and Cheng Chien Bhikshu, *Manifestation of the Tathāgata: Buddhahood according to the Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993), 47.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 72.
- ⁷² [Udaya Prasanta Maddegama](#) and [John Holt](#), *Anagatavamsa Desana: The Sermon of the Chronicle-to-Be* (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1993), 19-22.
- ⁷³ On a five-year expedition to the East in the 1930’s, the scholar Nicholas K. Roerich recorded the referenced lines as predictions of Tibetan Lamas. This information is taken from The Peoples Almanac by David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace.
- ⁷⁴ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin Classics, 1959), 241.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 83.
- ⁷⁶ The Buddhist Glossary, *Shambhalla Publications*, <http://www.shambhala.com/html/learn/features/buddhism/glossary/glossary-M-P.cfm>, (accessed January 22, 2012).
- ⁷⁷ See *Bridge to Maitreya: The Enlightenment Teachings of Lucille Cedercrans Schaible*, by Greg Tzinberg.
- ⁷⁸ From a sermon by Francis Frangipane entitled “Prophet, Priest and King.”
- ⁷⁹ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Ideal in Israel from the Beginning to the Conception of the Mishnah* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1955), 8.
- ⁸⁰ The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- ⁸¹ The Hebrew-English Bible, published by the Mamre Institute.
- ⁸² Ibid., Deuteronomy 18:15-18.
- ⁸³ The Tanach, the Hebrew Bible, contains the same books as the Christian Old Testament (without the Apocrypha) but in a different order.
- ⁸⁴ New International Version Bible.
- ⁸⁵ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Ideal in Israel from the Beginning to the Conception of the Mishnah*, 241.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ LIVIUS, *Articles on Ancient History*, <http://www.livius.org/>, (accessed January 8, 2012).
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Ideal in Israel from the Beginning to the Conception of the Mishnah*, 9.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 16.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid., 18.
- ⁹³ Ibid., 24.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid., 25.
- ⁹⁶ Maimonides’ *Thirteen Principles of Faith* are of vital importance to the Jewish faith. These principles must be acknowledged as “truths” in order for a person to become a Jew and to partake in the “World to Come.”
- ⁹⁷ *The Maimonides Research Page*, “The Laws Concerning the Messiah: Chapter 11&12.” <http://www.panix.com/~jjbaker/rambam.html> (accessed January 27, 2012).
- ⁹⁸ See the Sabbatian and Dönme movements in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* by Gershom Scholem.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., 24-27.
- ¹⁰⁰ See for example, Maimonides’ first canonical codification in the *Mishneh Torah*.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, NY: Schocken Books Inc., 1971), 143-166.
- ¹⁰³ See for example, Jerome Eric Copulsky, *As Dew Among the Nations: The Messianic Idea in Liberal Judaism*, 31.
- ¹⁰⁴ B. R. Burton, *Barukh haba B’Shem Adonai*, <http://www.messianicart.com/chazak/yeshua/barukh.htm> (accessed January 9, 2012).
- ¹⁰⁵ <http://www.becomingjewish.org> (accessed January 9, 2012).
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷ B. R. Burton, *Baraukh haba B’ Shem Adoni*.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁹ See the works of author and Islamic scholar Adnan Oktar, specifically *Jesus’s Return According to the Bible*.

- ¹¹⁰ According to a 2009 analysis conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 79 % of all US Christians believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
- ¹¹¹ King James Version Bible.
- ¹¹² John Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: The New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (reprint 1878; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983, 1999), 6.
- ¹¹³ See Stephen Sizer, *Zion's Christian Soldiers: The Bible, Israel and the Church*, from Inter-Variety Press, 2007.
- ¹¹⁴ Jan Arie Bastiaan Jongeneel, *Jesus Christ in World History* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang GmBH, 2009), 47.
- ¹¹⁵ The Hebrew-English Bible, <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0.htm> (accessed January 13, 2012).
- ¹¹⁶ Rev. Clarence Larkin, *The Second Coming of Christ*, reprint 1918 (New York, NY: Cosimo Inc., 2005), 5.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹¹⁸ The New International Version Bible.
- ¹¹⁹ Biblical references in this section are from the King James Version of the Bible.
- ¹²⁰ The New International Version Bible.
- ¹²¹ See Isaiah 52:13, 53:4-5, 12.
- ¹²² John MacArthur, *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ's Return and the End of the Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 74.
- ¹²³ Rev. Clarence Larkin, *The Second Coming of Christ*, 5.
- ¹²⁴ See Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-37 and John 16:1-13.
- ¹²⁵ Pre-millennialism holds that Jesus' physical return to earth will occur prior to the inauguration of the millennium. Postmillennialism, by contrast, views the millennial rule as occurring before the second coming.
- ¹²⁶ B. A. Robinson, *Competing Theories of Eschatology, End Times, and Millennialism*, <http://www.religioustolerance.org/millenni.htm> (accessed February 8, 2012).
- ¹²⁷ Quoted from: <http://conciliaranglican.wordpress.com/2011/12/23/ask-an-anglican-the-end-of-the-world/.n> (accessed February 10, 2012).
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁹ Colin B. Donovan, STL, *Endtimes, Millennium, Rapture*, <http://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/endtimes.htm> (accessed January 13, 2012).
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹³¹ Comparison of Christian Denominations' Beliefs, <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity-charts/denominations-beliefs.htm> (accessed January 13, 2012).
- ¹³² See, for example, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, by Seyyed Hossein Nasr.
- ¹³³ Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam* (San Antonio, TX: Muhammad Trust, 1982), 9.
- ¹³⁴ Jamshid, *The Fundamental Principles of the Qiyamat*, http://al-qiyamah.org/surah_1-2.htm (accessed February 28, 2012).
- ¹³⁵ Jesus (Isa, in Arabic) is not viewed as the Son of God, but rather a prophet who will return to Earth with the Imam Mahdi. Muslim's believe that Jesus never died or was crucified. Instead he was lifted into heaven still where he lives now. At the appointed time known only by Allah, Jesus will physically return to this world and together with the Mahdi will end all wars, and usher in an era of justice and peace.
- ¹³⁶ Allama Baqir Sharif al-Qarashi, *The Life of the Iman-Mahdi*, Translated by: Sayyid Athar Husain S.H. Rizvi (reprint 1427; Qum, Iran: An-sariyan Publications, 2006), 20.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁸ *Sunan Abu Dawud*, English version, Ch. 36, Tradition, No. 4271.
- ¹³⁹ Moojan Momem, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 166-168.
- ¹⁴⁰ See for example, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*, by Lesley Hazelton, 2009.
- ¹⁴¹ Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr and Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari, *The Awaited Savior* (Karachi, Pakistan: Islamic Seminary Publications), prologue 1.
- ¹⁴² Allamah Tabataba'i, *Expectations of the Millennium*, Chapter II: "Messianism and Mahdi," translated and edited by S.H. Nasr, H. Dabashi & S.V.R. Nasr (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989), 8.
- ¹⁴³ Lesley Hazelton, *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam* (London: Doubleday, 2009), 202.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁵ Moojan Momem, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 161.
- ¹⁴⁶ A hadith or saying of the Prophet Muhammad as reported in the *Mudkhal* by Mohammed Abu Abdallah Ibn al-Hajj al-Tilmisani (1258-1336).
- ¹⁴⁷ *The Holy Qur'an*, translated by A. Yusuf Ali (Lahore, Pakistan: SH. Muhammad Ashraff, 1975), 39:69.
- ¹⁴⁸ Allama Baqir Sharif al-Qarashi, *The Life of the Iman-Mahdi*, 47-53.
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