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"Are Jews still expecting the messiah?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

Years ago, there was a popular evangelical bumper sticker that read "I found it." My response was that the Jewish version would read, "I'm still looking for it." Or, in contrast to Christians who assert that the messiah has come, Jews were not only still looking but would never be satisfied with any applicants for the job. Despite claims to the contrary by some, messianic claimants have all fallen short in the past and will all fall short in the future.

In light of this conclusion, there isn't any point in waiting around impatiently for that far off illusive day of messianic redemption. It is a distraction from dealing with life's immediate challenges. Not only would life would pass us by in the meanwhile, but our real focus ought to be on bringing "messianic redemption" in our own lifetime and with our own two hands.

The idea of a messiah is detrimental for another reason. It supports a top-down model of power that invests far too much influence and responsibility in one, solitary super-mensch who will single-handedly save the day.

I prefer a different mythic construct that spreads the responsibility around and promotes the worth of every person. I am thinking of the legend of the Thirty-Six Righteous People on whom the world is sustained on account of their goodness and unpretentious deeds. Even more important, because the Thirty-Six are concealed – even to themselves – it is incumbent on each of us to treat everyone – our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, and ourselves -- as if they were one of them.

Just think what a ripple effect of added respect, kindness and compassion will bring to the world. It could even bring peace.