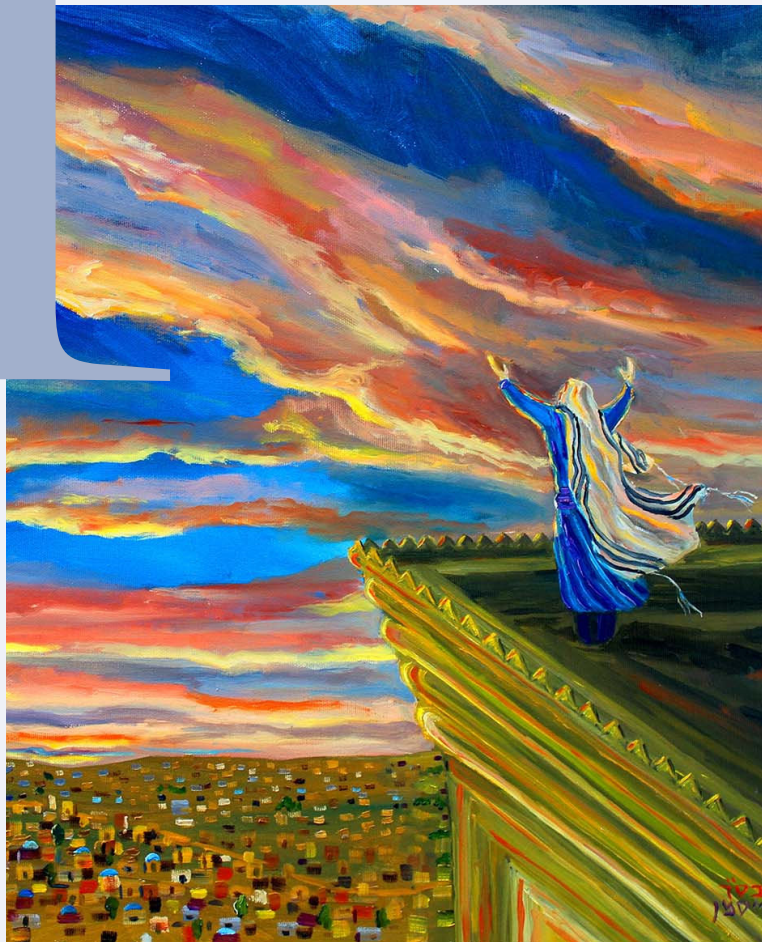


1

LESSON



START WITH THE SCIENCE

In a society marked by chaos and discord, it's hard to believe our world is actually better than it's ever been. Let's dive into the data of what's wrong—and what's right—with the world.

HERALD FROM THE ROOF
Yehoshua Wiseman, oil on canvas, Israel

I. BELIEF IN A MUCH BETTER TOMORROW

We Jews have many beliefs. We believe that G-d* created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. We believe that the Land of Israel is the most sacred parcel of land on earth. While these beliefs—and many others—are important components of the Jewish doctrine, these do not constitute *principal* Jewish beliefs. Some eight centuries ago, Maimonides, one of the most venerated Jewish philosophers of all time, distilled the most fundamental Jewish beliefs into thirteen principles. Interestingly, he devoted two of them to the belief in the ultimate Redemption that will be ushered in by the Mashiach (Messiah) and the subsequent Resurrection of the Dead. The belief in the future Redemption occupies what seems to be a disproportionate amount of space in the very core of the traditional Jewish belief system.

In this chapter, we will turn to the remarkable descriptions of the messianic era provided by the prophets of old.

* Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.



TEXT 1

The Twelfth Principle

Siddur, “The Thirteen Principles”

אֲנִי מֵאֲמִין בְּאַמּוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּבִיאת הַמָּשִׁיחַ.

וְאֵף עַל פִּי שְׂתִמְחֶמְהָ, עִם כָּל זֶה אַחֲכָה לוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם שְׂיָבוֹא.

I believe with perfect faith in the
coming of the Mashiach.

Although he may tarry, I await his arrival every day.

SIDDUR

The siddur is the Jewish prayer book. It was originally developed by the sages of the Great Assembly in the 4th century BCE, and later reconstructed by Rabban Gamliel after the destruction of the Second Temple. Various authorities continued to add prayers, from then until contemporary times. It includes praise of G-d, requests for personal and national needs, selections of the Bible, and much else. Various Jewish communities have slightly different versions of the siddur.



EXERCISE 1.1

What attracted you to this course? Are there any specific Redemption-related topics that you are most interested in clarifying?





TEXT 2

An Era of Abundance

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings 12:5

וּבָאוּתוֹ הַזְּמַן לֹא יִהְיֶה שָׁם לֹא רָעָב וְלֹא מִלְחָמָה.
וְלֹא קִנְיָאָה וְתַחֲרוּת. שֶׁהַטּוֹבָה תִּהְיֶה מְשַׁפֵּעַת הָרָבָה.
וְכָל הַמַּעֲדָנִים מְצוּיִין כְּעָפָר.

In that era, there will be no famine or war, no envy or competition. For goodness will be in abundance, and all delights will be as commonplace as dust.

RABBI MOSHE BEN MAIMON (MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM)
1135–1204



Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of halachic consensus.



THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM (DETAIL)
1845, Edward Hicks, American,
1780–1849, oil on canvas,
Yale University Art Gallery



TEXT 3

Eradication of Poverty

Zechariah 14:21

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה כְנֻעַנִי עוֹד בְּבֵית ה' צְבָאוֹת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא.

On that day, there will no longer be an impoverished person in the house of G-d.

ZECHARIAH

Biblical book. The book of Zechariah contains the prophecies delivered by Zechariah in the 4th century BCE to the exiles that had returned to the Land of Israel. Zechariah's prophecies comfort and encourage the people, exhort them to improve their religious observance, and foretell the future Redemption.



TEXT 4

Plentiful Food

Isaiah 30:23

וְנָתַן מִטֵּר זֶרַעְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע אֶת הָאֲדָמָה,
וְלֶחֶם תִּבְּרֹאת הָאֲדָמָה, וְהָיָה דֶשֶׁן וְשִׁמּוֹן.

G-d will give rain for your seed with which you shall sow the soil. [He will give you plentiful] bread, the yield of the land. And the land will be rich and abundant.

ISAIAH

Biblical book. The book of Isaiah contains the prophecies of Isaiah, who lived in the 6–7th centuries BCE. Isaiah's prophecies contain stern rebukes for the personal failings of the contemporary people of Judea and the corruption of its government. The bulk of the prophecies, however, are stirring consolations and poetic visions of the future Redemption.



TEXT 5

Disabilities Will Vanish

Isaiah 35:5–6

אֶז תִּפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי עִוְרִים, וְאָזְנֵי חֲרָשִׁים תִּפְתַּחְנָה.

אֶז יִדְלַג כְּאַיִל פֶּסֶחַ, וְתִרְנֶן לְשׁוֹן אֵלֶם.

At that time, the eyes of the blind will be opened,
and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

At that time, the lame shall skip like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute shall sing.



TEXT 6

Cessation of Hostilities

Isaiah 2:4

לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב, וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.

Nation shall not lift sword against nation,
nor shall anyone train for war anymore.



TEXT 7

Disarmament

Isaiah 2:4

וְכָתְתוּ חֶרְבוֹתָם לְאַתִּים, וְחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת.

Nations shall beat their swords into plow blades and their spears into pruning tools.



TEXT 8

Elimination of Crime

Isaiah 60:18

לֹא יִשְׁמַע עוֹד חֲמָס בְּאַרְצְךָ, שָׂדִי וְשֹׁבֵר בְּגִבּוֹלֶיךָ.

No longer will violence be heard in your land,
nor robbery or devastation within your borders.



THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS
BETWEEN JULIUS
CIVILIS AND THE ROMAN
GENERAL CERALIS

Otto van Veen,
1600–1613, oil on panel,
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

II. BACK TO THE PRESENT

How outlandish and far-fetched are the prophecies we just read? To answer this question, we will contrast the idyllic description of the messianic era with the times we are living in today. Let us attempt to evaluate the general current state of our world and the wider trends in several key quality-of-life areas.



EXERCISE 1.2

How would you rate the state of our world today compared to its state fifty years ago—have conditions generally improved or deteriorated?

- (a) Greatly improved
- (b) Somewhat improved
- (c) More or less the same
- (d) Somewhat deteriorated
- (e) Greatly deteriorated

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

- (a) Very optimistic
- (b) Somewhat optimistic
- (c) Somewhat pessimistic
- (d) Very pessimistic



FIGURE 1.1

A Nostalgic View

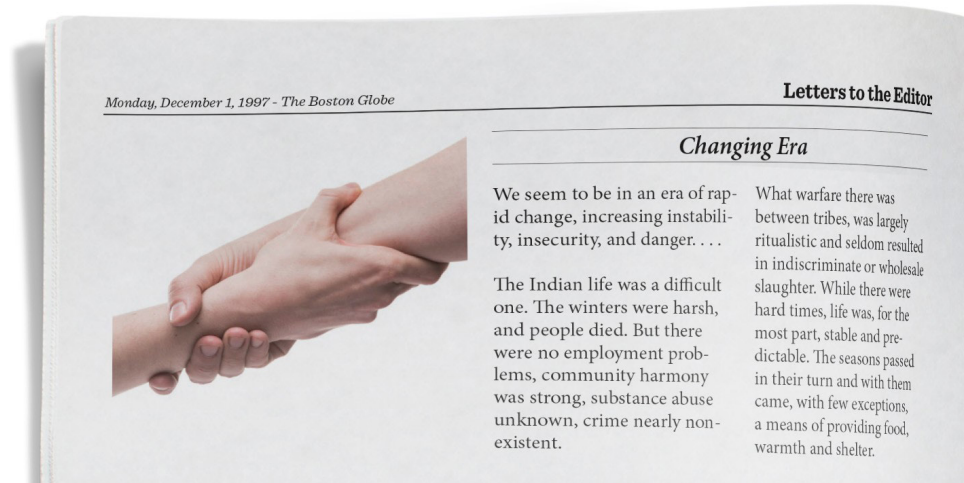




FIGURE 1.2

Perceptions of the State of Global Affairs

Chris Jackson, "Global Perceptions of Development Progress: 'Perils of Perceptions' Research," published by Ipsos MORI, September 18, 2017

Survey Question: "In the last 20 years, has the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty decreased, increased, or remained the same?"

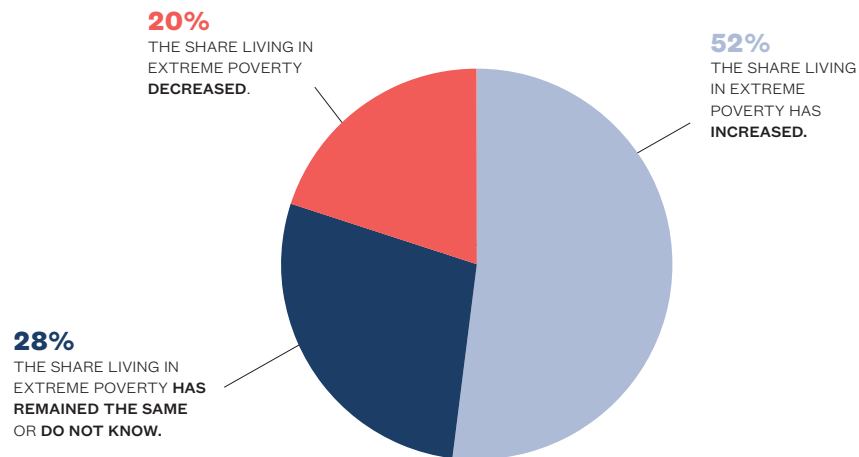




FIGURE 1.3

Perceptions of Crime Rates

news.gallup.com/poll/1603/crime.aspx

Survey Question: “Is there more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago, or less?”

	MORE	LESS	SAME	NO OPINION
2020	78	14	6	3
2019	64	24	9	3
2018	60	25	8	7
2017	68	19	9	5
2016	70	20	6	4
2015	70	18	8	4
2014	63	21	9	7
2013	64	19	9	7
2011	68	17	8	8
2010	66	17	8	9
2009	74	15	6	5
2008	67	15	9	9
2007	71	14	8	6
2006	68	16	8	8
2005	67	21	9	3
2004	53	28	14	5
2003	60	25	11	4
2002	62	21	11	6
2001	41	43	10	6
2000	47	41	7	5
1998	52	35	8	5
1997	64	25	6	5
1996	71	15	8	6
1993	87	4	5	4
1992	89	3	4	4
1990	84	3	7	6
1989	84	5	5	6

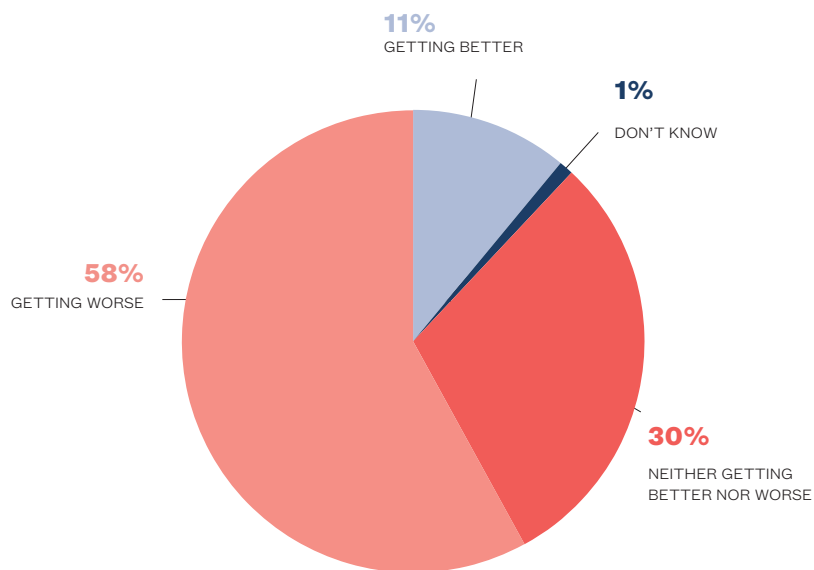


FIGURE 1.4

Expectations for the Future

YouGov 2015 Survey

Survey Question: “All things considered, do you think the world is getting better, worse, or neither getting better nor worse?”



III. THE FACTS

Unlike the popular pessimism, the Torah sees civilization as marching toward a radically *better* destiny. The prophesied Redemption will not be a sudden transition from complete darkness to light. Rather, as we approach the era of Redemption, we will notice changes in the world that are in line with the messianic prophecies.

In this section, we will examine the data and see how, hiding in plain sight, many of the messianic prophecies are beginning to materialize.



THE REDEMPTION
Yehoshua Wiseman, Israel



TEXT 9

A Foretaste of Redemption

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Torat Menachem 5725:1 (41), pp. 41–42

כָּל הָעֲנִיָּיִם דְּלַעֲתִיד לְבוֹא מִתְחִילִים עוֹד לִפְנֵי בִיאַת
 הַמָּשִׁיחַ. וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ הָעֲנִיָּן ד' "טוֹעֲמֵי חַיִּים זָכוּ", שֶׁבְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת
 טוֹעֲמִים מִמֶּאֱכָלֵי הַשַּׁבָּת, וְכֵמוֹ כֵּן בְּאֶלֶף הַשִּׁישִׁי, (עוֹד לִפְנֵי
 בִיאַת הַמָּשִׁיחַ) טוֹעֲמִים כְּבָר מֵהַגִּילויִים דִּימוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ.
 וְלֹא רַק בְּנוֹגֵעַ לְעֲנִיָּיִם רוֹחֲנִים... אֶלָּא כְּמוֹ הַדִּין
 ד' "טוֹעֲמֵי" בְּנוֹגֵעַ לְעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת כְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ, שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְטַעֵם
 מֵהַדָּגִים... הָרִי עוֹד קוֹדֵם בִּיאַת הַמָּשִׁיחַ תְּהִיָּה לְבִנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 רַבּוּי הַשְּׁפָעָה בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת, וְיוֹכְלוּ לַעֲבוֹד ה' מִתּוֹךְ הָרֶחֱבָה.

All of the experiences of the future Redemption begin even before Mashiach's arrival. Just as Jewish law encourages us to sample the Shabbat foods in the hours before the onset of Shabbat, similarly, in the sixth millennium—even before the onset of the Redemption—we can already sample the experiences that will fully materialize in the future.

In addition to receiving a foretaste of the *spiritual* delights we will experience then, the instruction to taste from the Shabbat foods means, quite simply, to taste the fish! The same is true of the era preceding the Redemption—we will then have *physical* blessings in abundance, and we will be able to serve G-d out of material prosperity.

**RABBI MENACHEM
 MENDEL SCHNEERSON
 1902–1994**



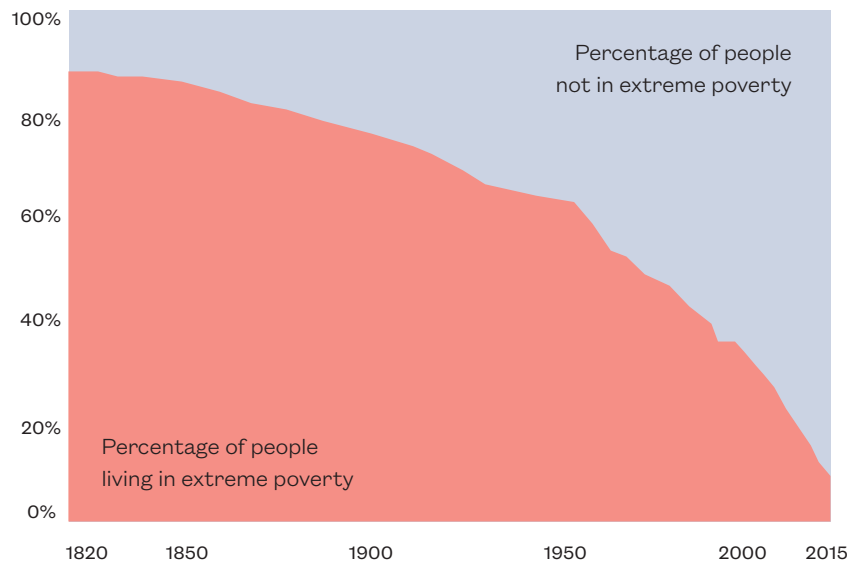
The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.



FIGURE 1.5

World Population Living in Extreme Poverty, 1820–2015

OurWorldInData.org



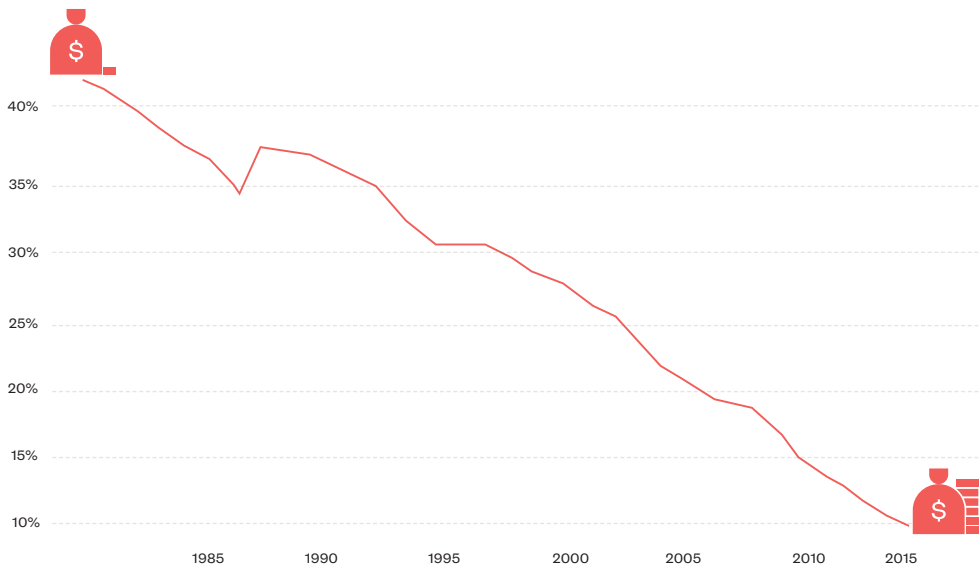
"Mashiach: It's Already in the News!" In this fascinating lecture, **Rabbi Ari Shishler** reshapes our imaginings of the Redemption prophecies: myjli.com/canhappen



FIGURE 1.6

World Population Living in Extreme Poverty, 1981–2017

World Bank, Development Research Group



**TEXT 10**

A Daily Upbeat Headline

Nicholas Kristof, "This Has Been the Best Year Ever,"
The New York Times, December 28, 2019

If you're depressed by the state of the world, let me toss out an idea: In the long arc of human history, 2019 has been the best year ever. . . .

As recently as 1981, 42 percent of the planet's population endured "extreme poverty," defined by the United Nations as living on less than about \$2 a day. That portion has plunged to less than 10 percent of the world's population now.

Every day for a decade, newspapers could have carried the headline "Another 170,000 Moved Out of Extreme Poverty Yesterday." Or if one uses a higher threshold, the headline could have been: "The Number of People Living on More Than \$10 a Day Increased by 245,000 Yesterday."



Mrs. Fruma Schapiro
explores the question
of "Mashiach:
Fantasy or Reality?":
myjli.com/canhappen



TEXT 11

A Most Underappreciated Development

Bill Gates and Melinda Gates, "We Were Making Headway on Global Poverty. What's About to Change?"

The New York Times, September 22, 2018

This huge drop in the number of people living on less than \$1.90 per day is among the most underappreciated and most important developments of our generation.



REMEMBRANCE
1914, Marc Chagall,
gouache, ink, and graphite
on paper, Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum, N.Y.

BILL GATES 1955-

William Henry Gates. Entrepreneur, investor, philanthropist. Gates is best known as the principal founder of Microsoft Corporation. In 2014, he stepped down as chairman of Microsoft and now pursues a number of philanthropic endeavors through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation primarily focuses on fighting disease and poverty in developing countries.

MELINDA GATES 1964-

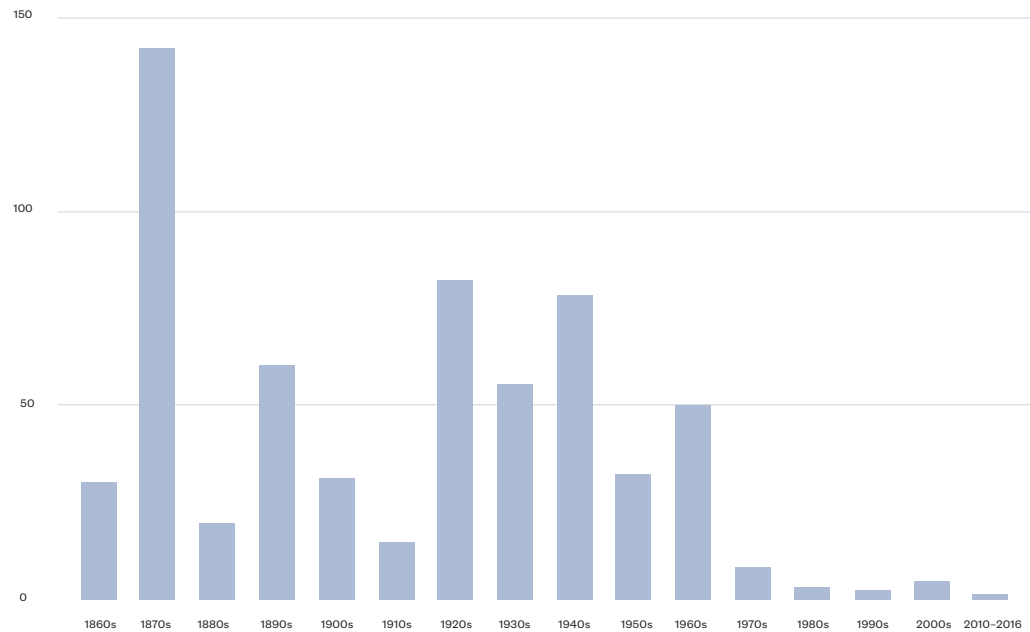
Philanthropist. Gates co-founded the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the world's largest private charitable organization, with her husband. She is the author of *The New York Times* bestseller, *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*.



FIGURE 1.7

Global Annual Rate of People Dying Due to Famine (per 100,000)

OurWorldinData.org





TEXT 12

Too Many Products?

“What to Do When There Are Too Many Product Choices on the Store Shelves?” *Consumer Reports*, January 2014

A new survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center confirms that option overload can be a hindrance as well as a help. Almost 80 percent of the 2,818 subscribers surveyed said they’d found an especially wide range of choices in the previous month, and 36 percent of those said they were overwhelmed by the information they had to process to make a buying decision. . . .

Between 1975 and 2008, the number of products in the average supermarket swelled from an average of 8,948 to almost 47,000, according to the Food Marketing Institute, a trade group. (In the past few years, that number has fallen slightly, in part because of a growth spurt among smaller stores.)

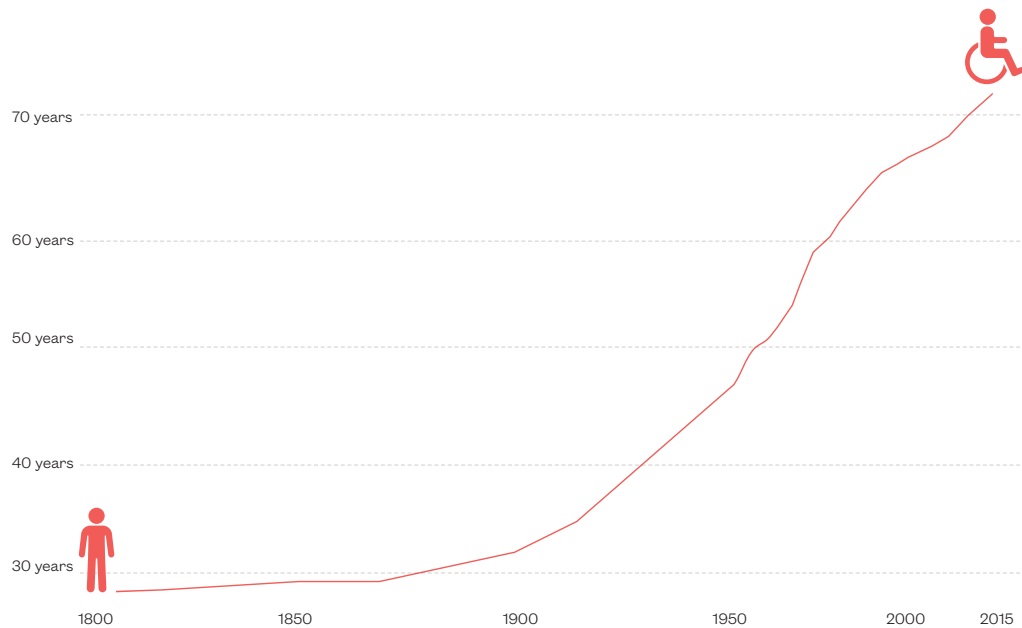
“Consumers have always had choices, but today options have exploded beyond all reason,” says Barry Schwartz, author of *The Paradox of Choice* (HarperCollins, 2003) and a psychology professor at Swarthmore College.



FIGURE 1.8

Global Life Expectancy, 1800–2015

OurWorldinData.org



In "On the Bright Side,"
Rabbi Mendel Rubinfeld
 challenges his listeners to
 look around themselves
 and see how news events
 point toward Mashiach's
 imminent arrival:
myjli.com/canhappen



FIGURE 1.9

Progress in Disease Eradication, Prevention, and Control



ERADICATED



REDUCED



MANAGEABLE

SMALLPOX

MALARIA

DIABETES

POLIO

MEASLES

AIDS

RABIES

TUBERCULOSIS

SYPHILLIS

HEPATITIS A

TETANUS

HEPATITIS B

MUMPS

**TEXT 13**

A Question of When, Not If

Peter Jaret, “An End to Blindness? New Technologies Could Save the Eyesight of Millions,” *AARP Bulletin*, 2015

If you had seen Lisa Kulik and her husband strolling the grounds of the University of Southern California’s Eye Institute last summer, you would have thought nothing of it. But for Kulik, that simple walk around the campus was “a miracle.” Blind for more than two decades from an inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa, Kulik was seeing again—clearly enough to make out the sidewalk and the grassy edge—thanks to a sophisticated microchip implanted in one of her eyes.

The device, called the Argus II, is just one of a growing number of bold new approaches to treating blindness, offering hope to the millions of mostly older Americans in danger of losing their sight from macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and other eye diseases. In fact, progress in ophthalmology is so rapid that some researchers have already begun to envision an end to many forms of vision loss. “We still have a lot to learn,” admits Stephen Rose, chief research officer for the Foundation Fighting Blindness. “But it’s not a question of if we’ll end blindness. It’s really just a question of when.”



FIGURE 1.10

Speaking of Muteness

nature

International weekly journal of science

nature news home

news archive

specials

opinion

features

news blog

nature

comments on this story

Published online 21 November 2008 | Nature | doi:10.1038/news.2008.1247

News

Brain implant allows mute man to speak

Patient with paralysis controls speech synthesizer with his mind.

Stories by subject

Brain and behaviour

Health and medicine

Stories by keywords

Brain-computer interface

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medgadget

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Artificial Larynx to Give Mute a New Voice

DECEMBER 3RD, 2009 MEDGADGET EDITORS ENT

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CULTURE

INDY/LIFE

INDYBEST

VIDEO

DAILY EDITION

CONVERSATIONS

News > Science

'Voice transplants' one step closer after scientists grow human vocal chords

'Voice is a pretty amazing thing, yet we don't give it much thought until something goes wrong'

Steve Connor Science Editor | @SteveAConnor | Wednesday 18 November 2015 21:34

Bookmarks

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Twitter

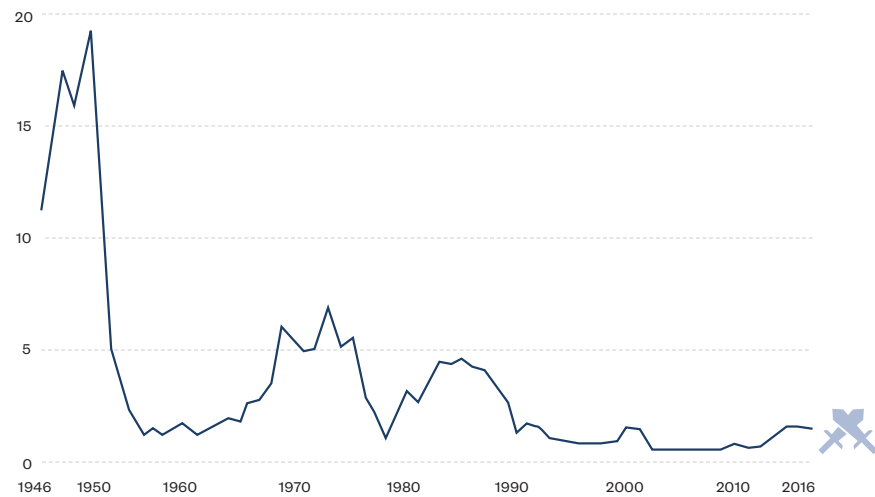
Email



FIGURE 1.11

State-Based Battle-Related Deaths Globally (per 100,000), 1946–2016

OurWorldinData.org





TEXT 14

Peace Is in Fashion

Joshua S. Goldstein and Steven Pinker, "War Really Is Going Out of Style," *The New York Times*, December 17, 2011

Armed conflict hasn't vanished, and today anyone with a mobile phone can broadcast the bloodshed. But our impressions of the prevalence of war, stoked by these images, can be misleading. . . .

For centuries, wars reallocated huge territories, as empires were agglomerated or dismantled and states wiped off the map. But since shortly after World War II, virtually no borders have changed by force, and no member of the United Nations has disappeared through conquest. . . .

Perhaps the deepest cause of the waning of war is a growing repugnance toward institutionalized violence. Brutal customs that were commonplace for millennia have been largely abolished: cannibalism, human sacrifice, heretic-burning, chattel slavery, punitive mutilation, sadistic executions. Could war really be going the way of slave auctions?

JOSHUA S. GOLDSTEIN
1952-

Political scientist and author. Joshua Goldstein received his doctorate in political science from MIT, and was a professor of international relations at American University. He is currently a research scholar in political science at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Goldstein is the author of a number of books and articles about international relations, war, and climate change.

STEVEN PINKER
1954-

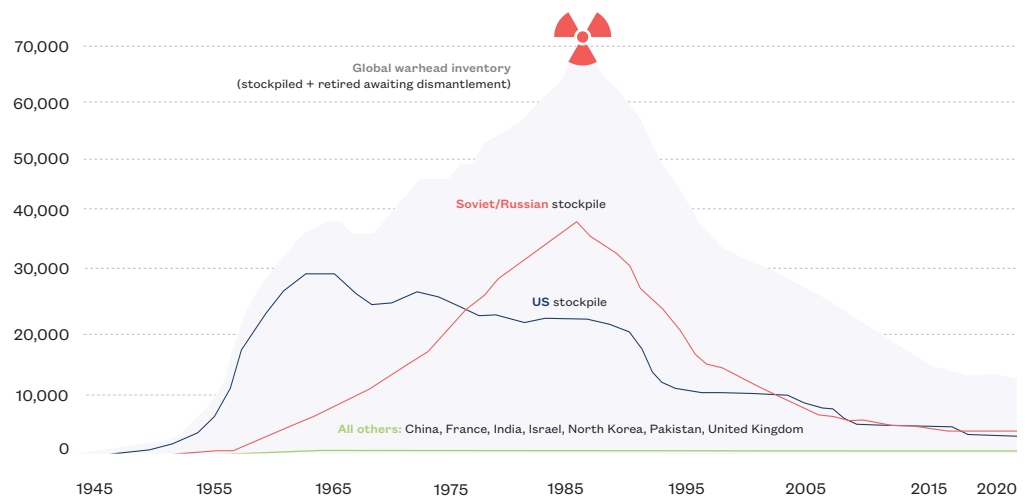
Psychologist and author. Born in Montreal, Steven Pinker received his doctorate in experimental psychology from Harvard University, where he now serves as a professor of psychology. Pinker's academic specializations are in the fields of mental imagery and the psychology of language, and he has published extensively on these topics.



FIGURE 1.12

Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories, 1945–2020

Kristenson/Korda/Norris, Federation of American Scientists 2020





TEXT 15

Soldiers Combating . . . Pollution

Samuel Osborne, "China Reassigns 60,000 Soldiers to Plant Trees in Bid to Fight Pollution," *The Independent*, February 13, 2018

China has reportedly reassigned over 60,000 soldiers to plant trees in a bid to combat pollution by increasing the country's forest coverage.

A large regiment from the People's Liberation Army, along with some of the nation's armed police force, have been withdrawn from their posts on the northern border to work on non-military tasks inland. . . .

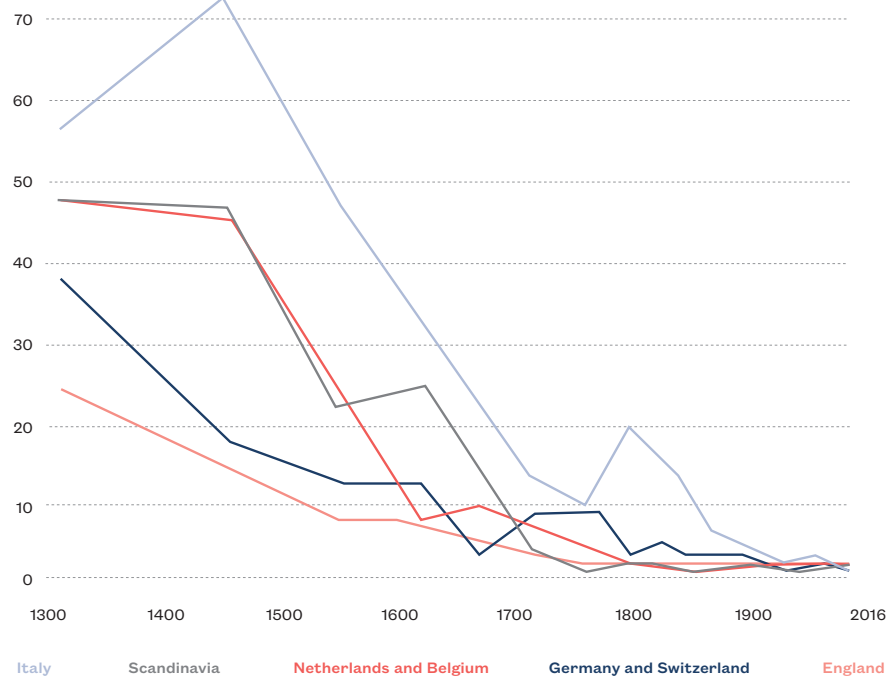
It comes as part of China's plan to plant at least 84,000 square kilometres (32,400 square miles) of trees by the end of the year, which is roughly equivalent to the size of Ireland.



FIGURE 1.13

Homicide Rates across Western Europe (per 100,000), 1300–2016

OurWorldinData.org





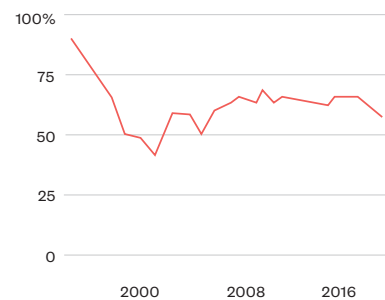
TEXT 16

Feelings vs. Facts

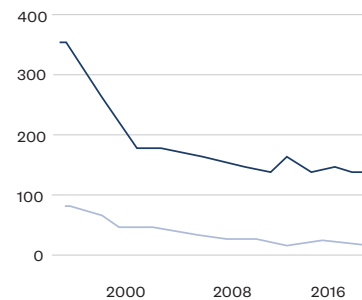
Maggie Koerth and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Many Americans Are Convinced Crime Is Rising in the U.S. They're Wrong," FiveThirtyEight.com, August 3, 2020

In 2019, according to a survey conducted by Gallup, about 64 percent of Americans believed that there was more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago. It's a belief we've consistently held for decades now, but as you can see in the chart below, we've been, just as consistently, very wrong.

Share of respondents who **believed U.S. crime had increased** from the previous year



Victims of **violent crime** (per 1,000 people) or **property crime** (per 1,000 households)



Crime rates do fluctuate from year to year. In 2020, for example, murder has been up but other crimes are in decline so that the crime rate, overall, is down. And the trend line for violent crime over the last 30 years has been down, not up. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that the rate of violent crimes per

1,000 Americans age 12 and older plummeted from 80 in 1993 to just 23 in 2018. The country has gotten much, much safer, but, somehow, Americans don't seem to feel that on a knee-jerk, emotional level.

"The biggest challenge really, and we're seeing this as a society across the board right now, is that even though our organizations, our businesses, our government entities are becoming more data driven, we as human beings are not," said Meghan Hollis, a research scholar at the Ronin Institute for Independent Scholarship.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Belief in the Redemption is central to the Jewish belief system. The Redemption consists of both physical and spiritual dimensions. In terms of the physical side, ancient biblical prophecies describe a fabulous era in which there will be an abundance of food and material goodness, poverty will be eradicated, disabilities will vanish, war and crime will cease, and weaponry will be repurposed for peaceful and productive goals.
- 2 The Redemption will not be a sudden transition from darkness to light. Rather, as we approach the era of Redemption, there will be steady improvements of our condition that in many ways reflect the promised experiences of the future Redemption.
- 3 Today, as we rapidly approach the time of Redemption, we witness a host of sweeping positive societal changes. Contrary to popular perception, the present is in many ways the best time ever to be alive.
- 4 The global population suffering from extreme poverty has drastically declined, food is more readily available and there are far fewer incidences of famine, the average human life span has nearly tripled, child mortality

rates have drastically decreased, many diseases have been eradicated or significantly reduced, remarkable strides have been made in ending or greatly reducing many disabilities, violent crime is down, the number of wars and war-related deaths has drastically declined, and the vast majority of nuclear missiles have been decommissioned and, instead, governments are devoting military resources for humanitarian purposes.

- 5 Despite the occasional setback, we are currently in a state of exponential positive growth. We can expect positive change to become even more rapid and exciting in the coming years. It will continue to accelerate until we reach the pinnacle, with the arrival of the Redemption.

ADDITIONAL READINGS



Where Is Our World Heading?

By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson

The Rebbe once said to a Gerer Chasid named Rabbi Neiman, “The world says that I am crazy about Moshiach—and they are absolutely right!”¹

Indeed, if there is one thing that the Rebbe and Chabad in general are known for, it is their fervent belief in the imminent arrival of Moshiach. This teleological driving force was at the root of everything the Rebbe said and did. But what does this actually mean, and what does it have to do with the Rebbe’s Positivity Bias?

Without getting too deep into the finer points of Jewish philosophy and prophecy, Moshiach is the main developing character, both perpetually absent and potentially present at all times, throughout our story of Creation and Redemption. His inevitable arrival will signal the ultimate redemption and goal of history, when the world will be made right and truth will be as clear as day for all to see.

The Rebbe’s belief in Moshiach as the culmination of the Divine/human drama gave him and all those he inspired more than a hope, but rather a vivid faith in the ultimately positive outcome to all of the world’s bitter exiles and alienations.

A foundational aspect of this is that we all have our work cut out for us in order for it to occur; we are charged with spiritually preparing ourselves and the world for redemption. From this perspective, history has been a millenia-long crash-course on bringing Moshiach into our midst from out

of the hovering realms of pure poetic potential.

It is this very combination of belief in G-d’s ultimate goodness and in our own personal power to positively impact the world that forms the basis of the Rebbe’s Positivity Bias.

The Rebbe believed that we are living in Messianic times. From when he was a small child, the Rebbe dreamed of that imminent great day, and despite the immensely challenging times he lived through, he never stopped nursing that dream. In a letter² addressed to Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, the second president of Israel, the Rebbe wrote:

From the time when I was a child attending cheder, and even earlier than that, there began to take form in my mind a vision of the future redemption—the redemption of Israel from its last exile, redemption such as would explain the suffering, the decrees, and the massacres of exile. . . .

In many ways, this dream is what made the Rebbe unique among other towering Jewish figures of our time. Most leaders see their life and impact in terms of their specific generation, but the Rebbe viewed his role through the wider lens of history in its entirety. He saw his generation as a whole, while at the same time also as a small but critical part of a much larger super-structure and meta-process.

RABBI MENDEL KALMENSON

Author, lecturer, and noted expert on Chasidic thought. Rabbi Kalmenson serves as the rabbi of Beit Baruch and directs Chabad of Belgravia in Central London. He is the author of the popular titles *Positivity Bias* and *A Time to Heal*.

Therefore, wherever you look in the Rebbe's teachings, there it is: the dream of Moshiach. Sometimes implicit, but more often explicit, in almost every one of his talks and letters, the Rebbe reveals the aspiration that is closest to his heart: A burning desire to see our imperfect world enter into an era of peace and wholeness, devoid of war and suffering, replete with revealed goodness and the pursuit of G-dly knowledge.

Indeed, the Rebbe most clearly articulated the contours of this dream on the very night he assumed the mantle of Chabad-Lubavitch leadership, 10 Shevat, 5711 (1951), in his discourse entitled *Bati L'gani*.

In this, his first public teaching as Rebbe, he cites centuries of Midrashic history, revealing this world's ultimate importance to G-d as His "garden" and most-desired "abode," as well as its simultaneous spiritual vacancy—"the Shechinah (the Divine Presence) is in exile"³—waiting to be welcomed back home. And this is where we come in. As G-d's entrusted "gardeners," it is our job to maintain and cultivate the world for G-d's eternal residence.

In the words of the Rebbe on the very night he assumed that name, after thousands of years of baby steps and quantum leaps, going all the way back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "it is up to us to complete the job and usher in the final redemption."

There it is: The Rebbe's world-redeeming dream. Nothing less than bringing humanity across the finish line of history and ushering in the Messianic era.

But how?

Not to Change Reality, But to Open Our Eyes

One of the axiomatic teachings regarding Moshiach that the Rebbe would often share is that Moshiach will not come to change reality; rather, he will expose reality for what it truly is.

In support of this idea, he would often say that the Hebrew word for exile has the same letters as the Hebrew

word for redemption except for the addition of the letter alef. Alef is the very first letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Numerically, alef equals one and therefore represents the Divine Oneness inherent within all of reality.

Paradoxically, the word *elef*, spelled the same as alef, means one thousand, implying multiplicity. Furthermore, the letter alef is essentially silent, having no sound of its own—merely giving breath to vowels and voice to movement.

Alef, therefore, represents the silent presence of ultimate unity concealed beneath the surface of the striving and suffering world of multiplicity, just waiting to be revealed. Moshiach will empower us all to hear and see the silent and invisible alef in exile, thereby transforming it into redemption, once and for all.

In this seemingly simple word-play, the Rebbe is pointing out a powerful paradigm shift in our understanding of Moshiach.

Moshiach does not mean the articulation of a totally different word or world. The letters or infrastructure of our lives and the universe will fundamentally stay the same, except that the alef will be revealed, quietly smiling at us out of the tumult of our experiences, revealing the garden of oneness within.⁴

Signs of the Times

The Rebbe was once asked: If you could choose any era in history in which to live, which would it be?

"This one," he answered immediately.⁵

Throughout his myriad spiritual teachings, his inspiring personal interactions, and his bold public outreach projects, the Rebbe spiritually developed and actively expressed the idea that we are "the last generation of exile and the first of Redemption."⁶

We are thus living on the transitional cusp of an unfathomable evolution of consciousness—a spiritual revolution. This is both an unbelievable privilege and an awesome responsibility, as our individual and collective lives are

literally and metaphorically laying the final stones for the bridge between exile and redemption.

Based on this eschatological understanding of where we are in the process of history, the Rebbe saw the signs of Moshiach's imminent arrival everywhere—from world events to social trends, and advances in technology and medicine. From his inaugural address, and on thousands of occasions thereafter, the Rebbe declared it his mission to empower others to see the world through a similar lens, to understand and appreciate the nature of the miraculous and meaningful times we are living through, to get a glimpse of the hidden alef within the world and events swirling around us.

Traditionally, the vast multitude of Biblical prophecies relating to the redemption have been viewed through a supernatural lens, and were thus considered as being irrevocably removed from our daily reality and experience. They were understood as miraculous “aberrations,” and therefore as clear signs of Divine intervention.

Today, however, according to the Rebbe, many of the prophesied “miracles” pertaining to the Messianic era have begun to come into existence at varying degrees of actualization. As such, the fulfillment of the words of the prophets no longer requires a wild imagination or blind leap of faith to behold. According to the Rebbe, it is more a matter of “opening our eyes” to see beneath the surface of “natural” events and advances, in order to recognize the Hand of the Creator at work in history.

For instance:

The Rebbe saw in the rise of feminism the beginning stages of Jeremiah's prophecy: For the Lord has created something new on the earth, a woman shall rise above a man.⁷

In many countries and cultures the world over there has continued to be a general shift in the direction of including and advancing women's voices, issues, and rights. Today, women are increasingly gaining political power and make up more than a fifth of members of national parliaments, and counting.⁸

Similarly, as we have explored, the Rebbe saw in the emergent counterculture of the 1960s, many examples of prophesied socio-generational shifts and conflicts that would occur leading up to the arrival of Moshiach; for example, the words of Isaiah that the youth will be insolent and rebellious towards their elders.⁹

Rather than interpreting those words apocalyptically, the Rebbe chose to focus on the potential positive outcomes of such radical expressions of youth, and thereby sought to validate them and strengthen their good points.

The Rebbe, along with various other Chasidic leaders, including his father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, felt what they considered to be the beginnings of the “birth pangs”¹⁰ of Moshiach in the various cataclysmic events of the 20th century, particularly World War II.

In related fashion, the Rebbe saw¹¹ the Six-Day War, and the corresponding mass spiritual awakening and immigration of impassioned Jews moving to Israel, as a symbolic nod to Isaiah's prophecy that It will come to pass on that day that the great shofar will sound. . . .¹² The prophecy goes on to describe the in-gathering of Jews “lost” and “dispersed” in exile, as they return to Jerusalem in the final redemption.

With the appearance of various communication technologies over the course of the 20th century—from the phone to radio to television to the beginnings of the internet—the Rebbe saw the potential, not for more discord and confusion, but for more communication and connection. Additionally, with the introduction of the World Wide Web, by making all information accessible to the furthest reaches of the globe, the groundwork has been laid for the world to be filled with the word of G-d,¹³ literally!

This redemptive view of the world is the ultimate expression of the Rebbe's Positivity Bias. Wars, revolutions, uprisings, rapid shifts in consciousness—as unsettling as these things may be to our lives in the moment and to the established order of the day—are ultimately leading us towards a more perfect union, a higher system of truth and harmony. This was the unyielding faith of the Rebbe.

The Time is now! The world is ready for more light! Are we?

Can we keep our composure and direction amid what appears to be the madness of a new world being born? Can we hold on to the promise of goodness and G-dliness revealed? Can we see through the brokenness and not lose hope? This takes work and faith. The work of developing and maintaining a positive outlook to keep moving toward the light. We need faith that the sparks really are there, waiting to be acknowledged and uplifted.

Indeed, despite what the pessimists will have us believe, we are actually living in unprecedented good times. Rather

than regressing, which is what it often feels like, our world is progressing, and at breakneck speed. But it often takes the cultivation of a positive and expansive outlook to see the resplendent forest through the smoldering trees.

In January 2018, *Time Magazine* welcomed Bill Gates as its first guest editor in its 94-year history. Gates designed the edition around a mindset that he had endorsed for years: optimism. He then invited the world's greatest minds and experts on world progress to share their findings. In an interview he gave explaining why he decided to edit an issue of *Time*, he explained:¹⁴

“Reading the news today doesn’t exactly leave you feeling optimistic. But many of the awful events we read about have happened in the context of a bigger, positive trend. On the whole, the world is getting much better.”

This is not some naively optimistic view; it’s backed by data.

According to Swedish economic historian Johan Norberg, who wrote an important book on the topic called “Progress”:

“If someone had told you in 1990 that over the next 25 years world hunger would decline by 40%, child mortality would halve, and extreme poverty would fall by three quarters, you’d have told them they were a naive fool.

“But the fools were right. This is truly what has happened.”¹⁵

And not just that:

For most of human history worldwide, life expectancy was around thirty years. Today, in most developed parts of the world, it is over eighty. By 2030, it will reach over ninety years in certain parts of the world.

In the 1990s there were more than 60,000 nuclear arms around the world, but by 2018, that number had fallen to approximately 10,000 nuclear arms.¹⁶

Two hundred years ago, 90% of the world lived in extreme poverty; today that number is 10%.

Indeed, according to the prominent Israeli public intellectual Yuval Harari, more people die today from eating too much than from eating too little.

Through too many medical advances to count, today the “lame are dancing” with the aid of prosthetics, the “blind can see,” as 80% of visual impairment has already been cured,¹⁷ and through stem cell research scientists are well on their way to curing deafness,¹⁸ bringing to life the Messianic

prophecies of Isaiah:¹⁹ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer. . . .

As pointed out by the Rebbe in one of his talks,²⁰ even the UN, despite its many intrigues and imperfections, channeled this Messianic energy of the time when it decided to prominently display the prophetic words of Isaiah in the entrance hall, expressing an intention to work towards the redemptive cause of lasting international peace: “And then they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and nations will learn war no more.”²¹

The list goes on. And each new “miracle” reveals the fulfillment on some level of yet another prophetic vision related to the dawning of the Messianic age of Redemption according to our prophets of old.

Gates concludes his interview: “This issue of *Time* [is] a crash course in why and how the world is improving. I hope you’ll be inspired to make it even better.”

Passing the Baton

On a cold Tuesday night in February, 1992, just two years before passing away at the age of 92, the Rebbe could be seen standing at the front of Chabad Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway for hours and hours on end. Personally greeting the thousands who had lined up, the Rebbe handed each person a freshly printed copy of what would be the very last discourse he edited and distributed before his passing.

Opening with the verse (Exodus 27:20) *Ve’atabh Tetzaveh*—And you will connect/command—this discourse has come to be considered the Rebbe’s last ethical will and testament.

Along with his first public discourse, Bati L’gani, it provides a kind of bookend to the more than forty years of his transformational teachings.

In it, among many other things, the Rebbe acknowledges²² and articulates certain unique historical and spiritual aspects of Jewish experience in the current day and age. The Rebbe cites the well-known rabbinic metaphor comparing the Jew to an olive, because his inner oil and light are only revealed when he is crushed. The Rebbe then states that historically speaking, the Jewish People were most “productive” and pious when they were “crushed” through harsh decrees, oppressions, and massacres.

These externally-imposed conditions activated a super-rational dimension of the soul, which allowed our ancestors to stubbornly and miraculously hold fast to their Jewish traditions and faith in the face of death, disgrace, and ostracization.

But we are all familiar with the saying, “It is easier to fight for one’s principles than to live up to them.” According to the Rebbe, this is precisely the existential situation in which contemporary Jews find themselves. For now, with the disappearance of the vast majority of daily, systematic threats to the Jewish ways of life, the modern Jew is faced with an even bigger challenge: To find the inspiration within to be willing to live as a Jew, and not just to be willing to die as one.

Additionally, following the European Enlightenment, the general societal trend in the Western World has been a decrease in organized expressions of religiosity and a corresponding increased slide towards secular humanism. While outwardly this may appear to many as a sign of spiritual degeneration, the Rebbe recognized it for the opportunity that it was. For this is but another way in which the Jew of today is free of many of the external pressures to engage and express his commitment to Jewish faith and identity that prevailed in the past. The modern Jew, according to the Rebbe, is increasingly left to his or her own devices to connect with their Jewish community, heritage, and tradition.

The Rebbe saw Jewish history through the lens of a human life. Like a baby, whose first steps and development require constant hands-on attention and reassuring affection, the Jewish People in their national infancy during Biblical times required overt miracles and revealed G-dliness to help them learn to walk out of Egypt. This spiritual caretaking continued as Israel grew up through Divine revelations, and under the wing of priests and prophets, judges and kings. But as time passed, the Jewish People continued to mature spiritually, and along with this maturation the revealed presence and providence of G-d diminished correspondingly. This journey has created the conditions for us to grow into our own faith and develop a connection with G-d and a spiritual worldview that comes from within, without external pressure or even revelation. This has given us the exceptional opportunity to manifest the ultimate, deepest, and highest level of faith.

“For so long as a Jew’s compliance with the Will of G-d is externally motivated—however commendable such

motivation is in itself—it is not yet quite complete,” said the Rebbe in 1991.

Indeed, it is clear from many public talks and pronouncements during this period, that the Rebbe was very consciously preparing his followers and future admirers for his departure. Through it all, one radical message consistently rings loud and clear: We all must become self-starters. We cannot rely on “help” from without, not even through faith-awakening hardship, let alone external positive support, constant guidance, and new teachings. We must find that eternal light within our own souls and ignite it, not once, but over and over again, through good deeds, the cultivation of a positive and providential perspective, and passionate expressions of holiness and faith.

“What else can I do so that all Jewish People should agitate, truthfully cry out, and effectively bring Moshiach in actuality. . . . We are still in exile. . . . and more importantly, in an internal exile with regards to serving G-d,” cried out the Rebbe in the spring of 1991. “The only thing I can do is give it over to you: Do all you can . . . to actually bring our righteous Moshiach, immediately and directly. . . . I have done my part, from now on you must do all that you can.”²³

Perhaps, in statements such as these, the Rebbe was alluding to the fact that the time had come, and we were now ready, for each of us to become a tzaddik and reveal the Rebbe within.

In the winter of 1992, around the same time as the publication of *V’atah Tetzaveh*, Gabriel Erem, the CEO and publisher of *Lifestyles Magazine*, approached the Rebbe as he distributed dollars. “On the occasion of your 90th birthday,” Erem told the Rebbe, “we are publishing a special issue . . . What is your message to the world?”

“Ninety,” the Rebbe replied, “is the value of the Hebrew letter tzaddik. The meaning of the word ‘tzaddik,’ is ‘a truly righteous person,’ [the highest spiritual attribution]. And that is a direct indication that it is in the power of every Jew to become a real tzaddik, a righteous person, and indeed they should do so for many years, ‘until 120’ (for the rest of their life).”²⁴

This message, the Rebbe added, applies equally to non-Jews as well.

Traditionally, the word tzaddik has been applied exclusively to saintly leaders of exceptional spiritual stature, but in this instance, and increasingly towards the end of his life, the Rebbe applied it to everyone.

It is no longer enough for an elite caste of holy leaders to tend to G-d's garden. We must, each and every one of us, accept G-d's invitation to play our role in the final phase of the meta-historical drama of world redemption.

This democratization of Divine responsibility is precisely the paradigmatic shift the Rebbe sought to inspire and strengthen within each individual, the Jewish People, and humanity as a whole.

From the redemptive dream of a precocious child to a daring vision of cosmic renewal, the stories and teachings explored throughout the course of this book all in some sense culminate in the Rebbe's clarion call to action:

Our generation is uniquely positioned to calibrate the conditions for monumental shift. The future is up to each one of us. Become the tzaddik you already are. The world is G-d's garden; we are each its humble gardeners. Care for it and beautify it in the way that only you can.

We are no longer waiting for Moshiach, Moshiach is waiting for us!

A new day is approaching; let's awaken the dawn.

²¹ 2:4.

²² For an English translation of the discourse see *Nurturing Faith* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Kehot, 2005).

²³ A free translation of this talk was published in *Sichos in English*, vol. 48 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: SIE). See "Helping to Bring Moshiach," 5751 (1991).

²⁴ Eli Rubin, "Everyone a Tzaddik: Miracles, Transmission and Ascent," www.Chabad.org/2619824.

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Read the rest of the book at www.chabad.org/4403994 and purchase a copy at www.chabad.org/books.

ENDNOTES

¹ *Sippurim Meichadar HaRabbi*, p. 76.

² Dated 11 Nissan 5716, the Rebbe's 54th birthday. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 12, p. 414.

³ *Mechilta* of R. Yishmael, Bo 14.

⁴ See *Sefer Hasichot* 5751, vol. 2, p. 520 ff.

⁵ As told by R. Tzvi Telsner.

⁶ *Sefer Hasichot* 5751, vol. 2, p. 595.

⁷ Jeremiah 31:22.

⁸ www.time.com/magazine/us/5087338/january-15th-2018-vol-191-no-1-u-s/

⁹ 3:5.

¹⁰ Isaiah 27:16.

¹¹ See *Torat Menachem—Sefer Hamaamarim* 5728, p. 10.

¹² Isaiah 27:13.

¹³ Habakkuk 2:14.

¹⁴ time.com/magazine/us/5087338/january-15th-2018-vol-191-no-1-u-s.

¹⁵ www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/feb/14/despite-many-obstacles-the-world-is-getting-better

¹⁶ ourworldindata.org/nuclear-weapons

¹⁷ www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/291090.php

¹⁸ www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100513123720.htm

¹⁹ 35:5-6.

²⁰ A free translation of this talk was published in *Sichos in English*, vol. 51 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: SIE). See "Swords into Plowshares: Disarmament as in Isaiah," 5752 (1992).



The World Is Actually Becoming a Better Place—And This Is the Data to Prove It (Excerpt)

By Julius Probst

Swedish academic Hans Rosling has identified a worrying trend: not only do many people across advanced economies have no idea that the world is becoming a much better place, but they actually even think the opposite. This is no wonder when the news focuses on reporting catastrophes, terrorist attacks, wars and famines.

Who wants to hear about the fact that every day some 200,000 people around the world are lifted above the US\$2-a-day poverty line? Or that more than 300,000 people a day get access to electricity and clean water for the first time every day? These stories of people in low-income countries simply doesn't make for exciting news coverage. But, as Rosling pointed out in his book *Factfulness*, it's important to put all the bad news in perspective.

While it is true that globalization has put some downward pressure on middle-class wages in advanced economies in recent decades, it has

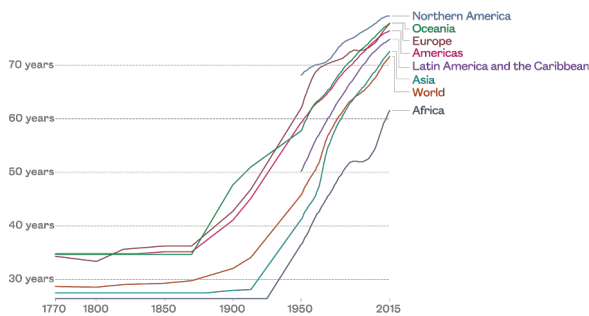
also helped lift hundreds of millions of people above the global poverty line—a development that has mostly occurred in South-East Asia.

The recent rise of populism that has swept across Western countries, with Trump, Brexit, and the election of populists in Hungary and Italy, among various other factors, is thus of great concern if we care about global welfare. Globalization is the only way forward to ensure that economic prosperity is shared among all countries and not only a select few advanced economies.

While some people glorify the past, one of the big facts of economic history is that until quite recently a significant part of the world population has lived under quite miserable conditions—and this has been true throughout most of human history. The following seven charts show how the world has become a much better place compared to just a few decades ago.

1. Life expectancy continues to rise

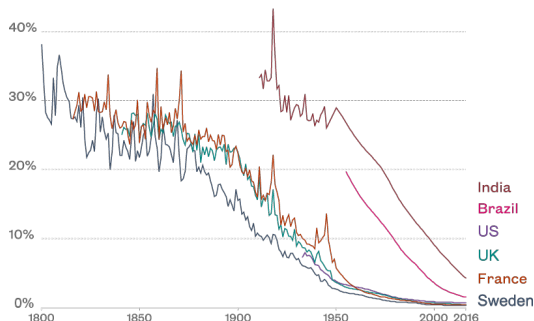
Even during the Industrial Revolution, average life expectancy across European countries did not exceed around 35 years. This does not imply that most people died in their late 30s or even 40s, since it was mostly very high levels of child mortality rates that pulled down the average. Women dying in childbirth was obviously a big problem too. So were some common diseases such as smallpox and the plague, for example, which now have been completely eradicated in high-income countries.



2. Child mortality continues to fall

More than a century ago, child mortality rates were still exceeding 10 per cent—even in high-income countries such as the US and the UK. But thanks to modern medicine, and better public safety in general, this number has been reduced to almost zero in rich countries.

Plus, developing economies like India and Brazil now have much lower child mortality rates today than advanced economies had at similar income levels about one century ago.



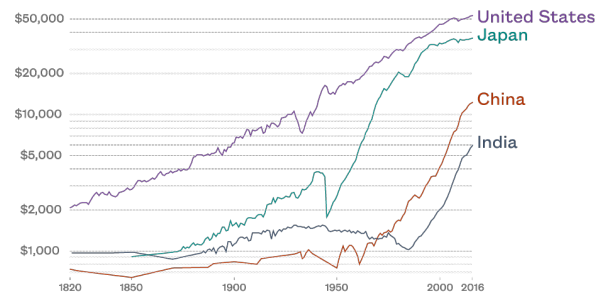
[...]

4. GDP growth has accelerated in developed countries

Technological leaders, the US and Western Europe, have been growing at about 2 per cent per year, on average,

for the past 150 years. This means that real income levels roughly double every 36 years.

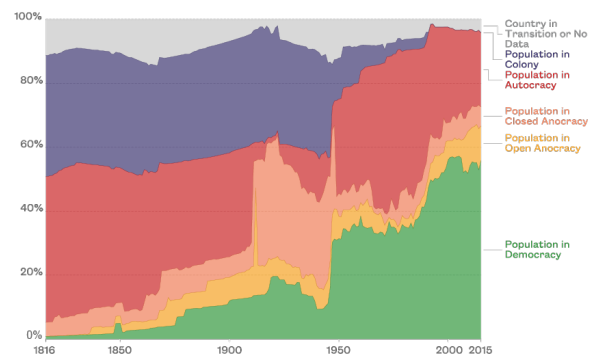
While there were many long-lasting ups and downs, like the Great Depression or the recent Great Recession, the constancy of the long-run growth rate is actually quite miraculous. Low-income countries, including China and India, have been growing at a significantly faster pace in recent decades and are quickly catching up to the west. A 10 per cent growth rate over a prolonged period means that income levels double roughly every seven years. It is obviously good news if prosperity is more shared across the globe.



[...]

6. More people are living in democracies

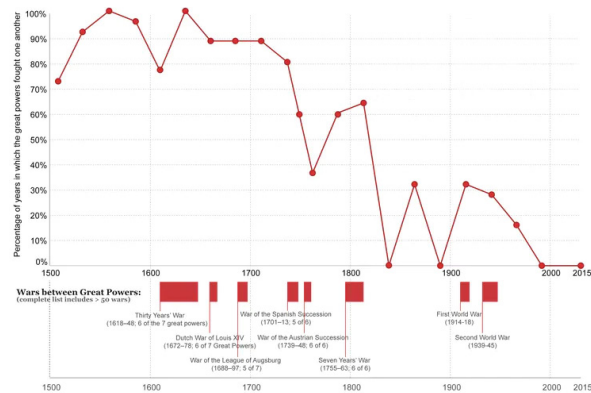
Throughout most of human history people lived under oppressive non-democratic regimes. As of today, about half of the human population is living in a democracy. Out of those still living in autocracies, 90 per cent are in China. While the country has recently moved in the other direction, there is reason to believe that continued economic development might eventually lead to democratization (according to modernization theory).



7. Conflicts are on the decline

Throughout history, the world has been riven by conflict. In fact, at least two of the world's largest powers have been at war with each other more than 50 per cent of the time since about 1500.

While the early 20th century was especially brutal with two world wars in rapid succession, the postwar period has been very peaceful. For the first time ever, there has been no war or conflict in Western Europe in about three generations, and international organizations including the EU and the UN have led to a more stable world.



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Riley (2005), Clio Infra (2015), and UN Population Division (2019)
- ² Gapminder (2017) & UN IGME (2018)
- ³ Gapminder (2017)
- ⁴ Maddison Project Database (2018)
- ⁵ Gapminder
- ⁶ World Population by Political Regime they live in (OWID (2016))
- ⁷ Steven Pinker (2011) - The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined. Based on data from Levy, J.S., & Thompson, W.R. (2011) - The Arc of War

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