

**Chabad Lubavitch:
The Centrality of the Rebbe in the Movement During His Lifetime and After His
Death**

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ABSTRACT

Chabad Lubavitch: The Centrality of the Rebbe in the Movement During His Lifetime and After His Death

Daphne Lazar

The Chabad Lubavitch movement provides modern-day sociologists and anthropologists with the opportunity to study a large, world renown messianic movement that identified its Messiah, namely their Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson only to watch him die shortly after. Two years after the Rebbe's death, the *Chassidim* (adherents) of this movement continue to grapple with their loss. Without a successor to guide Schneerson's followers and no new focus of attention, many of the *Chassidim* continue to proclaim the Rebbe as the Messiah. The remainder of the *Chassidim* continue to function as Lubavitchers but without special emphasis on public Messianic declarations. The discrepancies in the Messianic belief between the groups have created a split in the Lubavitch movement. What holds these two groups together is the fact that no single Lubavitcher denies the importance of the Rebbe to the Chabad Lubavitch movement despite his passing.

This paper will first provide a brief history of the development of Chasidism and Chabad Lubavitch leading up to the transition of the movement in the 1950's. The next section will provide a thorough examination of the major changes that Lubavitch underwent over the four decades that Schneerson led the movement. The final part of this paper will describe the numerous coping skills that the Lubavitchers have developed since the death of the Rebbe for the present and how they plan to confront the future.

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-Daphne Lazar

PREFACE

This past year I spent a significant amount of time researching the Chabad Lubavitch movement after the death of their Rebbe. This subject occupied much of my time and monopolised many of my conversations. I was motivated to pursue this project due to my past experience with the Chabad Lubavitch movement in combination with my deep admiration for the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I have watched the intense relationship between the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* and their Rebbe from afar and from up close. I have always been amazed by the *Chassidim* who discuss the Rebbe with a profound adoration and respect as though referring to a parent. The centrality of the Rebbe in this movement is obvious to any individual who is familiar with Chabad. Moreover, I was astonished by the fact that the Rebbe's importance to the movement has not diminished despite the fact that he passed away several years ago. In the past, I have had several personal experiences that have enhanced my curiosity vis-à-vis the *Chassid*-Rebbe relationship.

At the encouragement of my Lubavitcher family, I spent a significant amount of time in Crown Heights during the 1991-1992 school year. It was a priority of mine to visit with the Rebbe every Sunday that I was there to receive a blessing from him at "dollars". (It was the Rebbe's practice to hand out dollars every Sunday morning. While he would distribute these dollars, he would bless everyone who came before him.) I had approximately a dozen opportunities to meet with the Rebbe that year alone. During a conversation with my mother, she voiced her concern that I had never taken a single picture with the Rebbe.

Because it was so easy to arrange, it was very common to have pictures taken at "dollars". I decided that on my next visit to the Rebbe I would have my picture taken with him.

My next trip to Crown Heights was March 1, 1992. This turned out to be my last visit with the Rebbe. Looking back, this was a very well timed trip. On that particular Sunday, I used my family's connections to avoid an unusually long wait. Another incentive for me to see the Rebbe was that I was celebrating my Hebrew birthday that week and knew I was going to receive extra blessings in honour of this occasion. Finally, I was going to have my picture taken with the Rebbe which I knew would please my mother. Thanks to my connections I was able to pick up the photograph on that Sunday rather than having to wait until the next day. The next morning I flew home. Upon my arrival I was told that the Rebbe had suffered a massive stroke on that day.

As it turned out, I had one of the last verbal interchanges with the Rebbe. I was one of the last people to receive dollars and one of the last people to have my picture taken with him. During the ensuing weeks, everyone who knew that I had this picture taken would closely inspect it to see if the Rebbe looked any different than usual. They wanted to know if the Rebbe offered any hint or indication that he would fall ill the next day. Based on some of these people's comments, I got the impression that they were blaming themselves for not knowing that he was unwell. To this day people still examine that picture¹.

¹This photograph is included as Appendix A.

Over the next year and a half, discussion of the Rebbe's medical progress was a daily occurrence at home. Discussion of the uneasy state of the Chabad movement was also common. My family often discussed the fact that most Lubavitchers refused to consider the fact that the Rebbe could soon pass away, let alone address the issue of the continuation of the movement without the Rebbe. I frequently heard Lubavitchers say that everything would be all right with the *Aibishter's* (God's) help. Because of the intense Messianic fervour that had overtaken the Lubavitchers, cheers of *Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu ve-Rabbenu, Melech Ha-Moshiach le-Olam Vo-ed* (Long live our Master, our Teacher, King Messiah forever and ever) were chanted repeatedly in 770². Needless to say, for many Lubavitchers *gimmel Tammuz* was a source of tremendous shock and sadness. On that day when the Rebbe died, the entire movement fell into a massive depression.

In a conversation that I had with a professor of mine shortly after the Rebbe's passing I voiced my concern over the weak mental state of the Lubavitcher community. His response was "well, that's what happens when you put all your eggs in one *Moshiach* basket."³ At that point, the number of Lubavitcher who continued to proclaim that the Rebbe was the *Moshiach* were few. They needed time to recuperate from their loss.

²770 Eastern Parkway is the Chabad headquarters in Crown Heights. It functions as the Rebbe's office and the community's main synagogue. The Rebbe always delivered his speeches from and distributed dollars there. The Chabad headquarters also houses Lubavitch's archives and a rare collection of books saved from the previous Rebbes.

³Dr. B., Toronto, July 1994. Dr. B. is a professor in a university in Toronto.

Over the course of the first year after the Rebbe's death, much energy returned to many members of the movement. With a renewed fervour they reaffirmed the importance of the Rebbe in their lives. Some *Chassidim* took it upon themselves to compile a long list of proof-texts from past *sichas* (talks) and other ancient and medieval Jewish texts in order to prove why the Rebbe had to be the *Moshiach*. There soon began a rift in the movement dividing the people according to those who believe that the Rebbe was *Moshiach* i.e. the *Meshichistim*, and those who believed that when the Rebbe passed away that he no longer fit the criteria, i.e. the anti-*Meshichistim*. In truth, I was not interested in the politics of the movement at that time. But, during that first year after the Rebbe's passing, I spent four months in Israel where I witnessed vigorous *Meshichist* activity. I watched the Israeli *Chassidim* and their events from afar.

It was not until I returned from Israel that I read Dr. David Berger's article in the *Jewish Action* titled "The New Messianism"⁴ that my interest peaked. I was intrigued by Berger's rationale for negating the Chabad movement because of their messianic beliefs. At that point, I decided to take on the subject of the Chabad movement after the death of their Rebbe as the topic for my thesis. Because of his article, it was emphasised to me that the question of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's messianism was not a simple issue to discern for Lubavitcher Chasidim alone, it evolved into a Jewish theological issue.

⁴ Dr. David Berger, "The New Messianism," *Jewish Action* Volume 56, No. 1 (Fall 1995): Pages 34-44.

This chain of events has inspired me to conduct further investigation into the future of the Chabad Lubavitch movement after the death of their Rebbe. As often happens when tackling such a broad topic, the direction that my thesis has taken has evolved over the months. What started as a need to gain a deeper understanding of the merits and demerits of both the *Meshichistim* and the anti-*Meshichistim* has lead to me investigate the entire movement's relationship - regardless of the individual's political affiliations - to keep the Rebbe alive in spite of his death.

CHAPTER ONE:

METHODOLOGIES

The central focus of this thesis is the Chabad Lubavitch movement after the death of their leader, their Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Schneerson passed away in July of 1994 without leaving a successor to continue his work in the movement¹. At present, the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* (followers) have decided not to replace the Rebbe². Because of the lack of the physical presence of a leader, the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* have had to improvise with another form of leadership. For many of the *Chassidim*, the solution was to maintain Schneerson's status as the leader because they believe that spiritually he is present. Additionally, it is highly significant that many of the *Chassidim* have named Schneerson as *Mashiach ben David* (Messiah, the son of David) who is to redeem the Jewish people from their present state of exile. Because not all of the followers of this movement hold the same opinion with regards to the current status of the Rebbe, there has developed a split in the Lubavitcher movement. The two sides of this controversy have been named the "*Meshichistim*" (Messianists) and the "*anti-Meshichistim*" (anti-Messianists). The direction that Lubavitch will

¹In point of fact, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe did not leave explicit instructions for a successor either. But, because the circumstances were different i.e., there was an individual who met the requirements of being a Rebbe, the situation was remedied.

²According to my sources, after Menachem Mendel Schneerson's will was read (which omitted instructions to fill the role of Rebbe) it was decided that no one would take his place.

take in the future depends largely on which of these opponents gain the largest following.

Taking on this project in September of 1995 was as a great challenge. It appeared as though there were very few avenues of approach that could be applied in order to attain the necessary data to complete this project. There were methodological problems. Firstly, only a short amount of time had transpired after the Rebbe's passing. It was unclear whether or not the movement would continue to exist as a whole, or be reduced to a mass of fringe groups of people all calling themselves Lubavitchers. At this point I also recognised the possibility of the movement disbanding completely. Secondly, I had to consider the mind-set of the Lubavitcher *Chassidim*. At this time these *Chassidim* were still in state of shock because of their tremendous loss. Most of the *Chassidim* were unable to grasp that the Rebbe had actually died. Other *Chassidim* who had come to terms with the reality and finality of the Rebbe's death were severely depressed over his passing. At the start of this project I feared that some of the *Chassidim* would not be willing to accommodate me because of the sensitivity of this subject.

Another significant obstacle has to do with the nature of the Chabad movement itself. Chabad Lubavitch is very open to outsiders who wish to understand the teachings of the Rebbe and the philosophy of Lubavitch. This is because Lubavitch is a Jewish outreach movement whose purpose it is to educate the world on various Jewish subject matters in order to have all people embrace the "Torah" way of life³. However, the *Chassidim* of Chabad are also insular and

³"Torah" way of life refers to abiding by the commandment. For the Jews it means

guarded from outsiders who try to attain information that may create a shoddy portrayal of the Chabad movement and their Rebbe. This was mentioned to me by many Lubavitchers who had read published articles that denigrated the Chabad movement because of Chabad's Messianism since the death of the Rebbe.

Moreover, sociologists and anthropologists continually debate of the merits and limitations of researchers who are members of a community and who therefore cannot obtain enough distance for an objective study versus the researchers who remain outside of the movement and cannot understand what it is truly like to belong or understand the struggles of a movement such as Chabad. I have personally been both insider and outsider. I was raised to be a follower of the Chabad movement and the Rebbe during my earlier years, but as I reached adolescence and early adulthood I left the movement. Because of my upbringing, my "inside-information" has been of the most helpful of all of the tools of research that have been at my disposal. I am aware of the many Lubavitch customs and Lubavitch ideology. I understand their lingo. Also, I have a close relationship with many Lubavitcher *Chassidim*. Throughout this year, I have taken advantage of my past experience with the movement in order to gain a further understanding of where it is going. Conversely, because I have been conducting an academic study I have been able to maintain the distance between myself and the movement. The tools of social science have helped me to understand and place in context the religious phenomena associated with Lubavitch.

keeping all 613 mitzvot (laws) as outlined by Maimonides. Though "Torah way of life" is not the term applied for non-Jews, the message implied here refers to non-Jews adhering to the Noahide laws.

As well, there were some technical problems when I tried to attain various pieces of information. For example, there was no single *Chassid* who was able to provide me with an estimated number of Lubavitcher *Chassidim* world-wide.

"How do you define a *Chassid*?" was the general response. Some of the Lubavitchers who I interviewed would include as *Chassidim* those Jews who were not affiliated to any Lubavitcher community and who did not dress like *Chassidim* but who would do anything that the Rebbe asked of them. Other Lubavitchers said that the only real *Chassidim* were the Jews who followed the Code of Jewish Law and who studied the works of the Rebbe on a daily basis. Ultimately I had to rely on the published numbers of *Chassidim*.

There was no specific sequencing of my methodologies. I first gained the opinions and the testimony of Lubavitcher *Chassidim* that I had the easiest access to - my family and close family friends. I think that it is appropriate to add here that when I first began this study I was not clear what direction I wished to take with this project. There are many aspects that I could have explored throughout my research. I could have emphasised the importance of the women of the Chabad movement. I could have drawn comparisons between the actions and reactions of the *Chassidim* of Lubavitch that were born into the movement vs. those that became *Chassidim* (*Baalei Teshuvah*) later on in life. I could have compared the older and younger generation. I could have dealt with the various responses and attitudes of the non-Lubavitchers towards the Lubavitchers after the death of the Rebbe. Throughout my research, all of these questions came to mind and I explored the answers to them briefly. All of these topics merit further in-depth

study. But, as time went on, I found what interested me most about this area of study: the way that the Lubavitchers can and do keep the Rebbe alive even after his death became my central focus of my project. My findings include a comparative study based on the way in which the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* related to the Rebbe while he was still alive to the way that they relate to him after his passing..

As I have already stated, for the base of my research I first discussed my topic with the Lubavitchers closest to me, namely my family and family's friends. I consulted with them in order to get a sense of the extent to which I could question the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* during interviews. More importantly, I wanted to know what other *Chassidim* would be willing to be interviewed and observed. At all times I was completely open with my subjects and told them the exact purpose of my speaking to them. With one exception, I was never refused an interview once the intentions of my queries were revealed.

The personal contact that I had with the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* has been my most effective method of gathering data. Most of these connections were made in Toronto, Montreal and New York. In all three of these cities I attended Lubavitch synagogues and participated in several of their activities at the Chabad Houses (Chabad centres). Thus, I came into contact with a wide variety of Lubavitcher and Lubavitch affiliated people. The ages of this cohort ranged from twenty to seventy. With just slightly more men, there was an almost even breakdown of numbers between the two genders. The occupations of the people

included homemakers, teachers, business people, university professors and *shluchim* (emissaries).

I conducted approximately a dozen "official" recorded interviews with the *Chassidim* (both male and female). The use of a tape recorder was at times problematic. I feared that perhaps the *Chassidim* would not want to be open with me or would refuse to be recorded altogether which could have tainted the rest of the interview. The arrangement that I made with the *Chassidim* who had a problem with being recorded but who still agreed to be on tape was to omit their names from my list of references. Ultimately, I decided not to include the names of any of the people that I have interviewed. The bulk of the *Chassidim* that I interviewed were willingly taped if only because they wanted their message to be heard.

In retrospect, I do not think that using a tape-recorder hindered the quality of the testimony from my subjects. In fact, during several of my interviews I had to turn off the tape-recorder mid-way because some of the testimony was too intense politically and personally for the purpose of this paper. There was no need for me to keep record of some parts of these interviews. Once the interviewees realised I would turn the tape recorder off at their request, the process flowed smoothly.

At one point, a Lubavitcher Rabbi approached me after I had conducted one such intense interview and made a startling comment to me. He had only heard those parts of the interview that I deemed too risqué and did not realise that I turned off my tape-recorder. Worriedly that he said to me, "all that is

thought should not be said, and all that is said should not be written, and all that is written should not be printed"⁴. I tried to impress upon him that the purpose of my project was not to expose the movement to ridicule it. Additionally, it was not on my agenda to taint the image of Lubavitch. Clearly, his was exactly the kind of reaction that I feared while trying to conduct my interviews.

I conducted approximately twenty informal (unrecorded) interviews. Throughout the year I spent many *Shabbos* (Sabbath) and holiday meals with Lubavitcher families. During the course of these meals the subject of the nature of my studies would arise. After informing them what I was writing about, the Lubavitchers would initiate further in-depth discussion. These discussions were never recorded because it would have been inappropriate to use the tape recorder on the Sabbath or holiday. After the Sabbath or holiday ended, I always made sure to make note of these important conversations. The suspicion on the part of the *Chassidim* that I referred to earlier rarely affected the quality of the discussion during the informal interviews. There were a few times that the *Chassidim* were uncomfortable discussing the passing of the Rebbe. During those times I had to make adjustments in terms of terminology. For example, there are many Lubavitcher *Chassidim* who are uncomfortable with using the term "passed away" or "dead" when referring to the Rebbe. They prefer the term "*Gimmel Tammuz*" which refers to the anniversary of his death. Using terms like *Gimmel Tammuz* put the *Chassidim* much more at ease.

⁴Rabbi F., Montreal, 25 January 1996. Rabbi F. is a *shliach* (emissary) in the Montreal community.

I found it interesting to gauge the responses from the *Chassidim* after they discovered the subject-matter of my project. The reactions that I have received have ranged from wariness to excitement. In the earliest stages of my research, many of the *Chassidim* were still deeply depressed over the physical loss of the Rebbe and voiced this sentiment. These *Chassidim* were not unwilling to discuss the issue with me, but I had to be extremely careful not to say or ask anything that might offend them. Other Lubavitchers expressed excitement over my choice of topics and have tried to impress me with their knowledge in the field in order to *mekarev* (bring me closer) me to Chabad. In many cases the attempt to convince me to include myself in the ranks of Chabad also included the attempt to have me take on the belief of the Rebbe as *Mashiach*.

I did not adhere to a rigid set of questions during any of my interviews. Based on the initial responses on the part of the *Chassidim*, I would change the course of my questioning or the vocabulary that I used when referring to various events and figures of the Chabad movement. Often, I would just let the Lubavitchers tell me the extent of their experiences with the Rebbe both before and after he passed away. What interested me was how they considered the Rebbe's message to be universally and eternally applicable. I was amazed at how these *Chassidim* hung on to the Rebbe's every word despite the fact that they were said years ago when most of these *Chassidim* were not even present.

Other pertinent information that I extracted from them included how involved they were in the Lubavitcher community in their respective cities. I also wanted to know how often they had visited the Rebbe while he was alive, how

often they had been to the cemetery where he had been buried. Other pertinent information included which of the Chabad publications these *Chassidim* read and what (if any) videos of the Rebbe they watched and even owned. Additionally, I wanted to know the extent and number of times that the *Chassidim* communicated with the Rebbe while he was alive and after he passed away. The concept of the Rebbe being the Mashiach was always an important issue that was raised either by myself or by the people being interviewed.

Gender also affected the quality and content of the interviews that I have conducted. There were several contributing factors to the differentiation in treatment because of gender. Firstly, Chabad Lubavitch supports segregating boys from girls at a very young age. Thus the conditioning of the men and women in the Chabad Lubavitch differs between the genders. For example, the education for the men emphasises *limudei kodesh* (holy texts) with a special emphasis on Chabad's philosophical text, the *Tanya*, while the women spend more time on secular studies thus detracting from their learning *limudei kodesh*. Because of these specific differences in education for the males and females I might have thought that the women of the movement lacked the fervour of their male counterparts. I have realised that the enthusiasm over the Rebbe is the result of a combination of education at school and at home. In the home, the love and appreciation for the Rebbe is exhibited equally by both the parents and the offspring. The women of Chabad have tended to be equally, if not more active as Messianists than the men.

The issue of the disparity in secular education between the Lubavitcher men and women was most problematic when I distributed to a number of surveys

relating to my thesis⁵. While both sexes may have had emotional difficulty answering the questions, the men to whom I submitted the surveys had a more difficult time since their English reading and writing skills were very poor.

This survey was developed midway in my research. The questions and terminology reflected the information that I gathered pertaining to the divisions within the community. It also reflected the analytic categories that will be useful in interpreting this phenomena for later work. Because I distributed the surveys late into the year, I was only able to collect a small number of responses. There were forty-seven questionnaires that were returned to me. Of these forty-seven, twenty of the respondents were men and the other twenty-seven were women. The ages of many of the respondents ranged between eighteen and thirty. Some of these people were students and the remainder of the respondents were in the work force. Because most of my interviews were conducted with people over the age of thirty, this was a good way for me to compare and contrast the beliefs and opinions between the younger generation of Lubavitchers with the older generation. Based on the small sample of surveys, I was able to establish that the younger generation generates a strong enthusiasm for Lubavitch's messianic beliefs more so than the older generation of Lubavitchers. The findings of this survey were not included in this project, but will be included in future work.

The fact that I am a woman has also affected the treatment that I received by the people that I interviewed. Because of the segregation between the men and women in Chasidic movements, there is virtually no casual conversation between

⁵The survey is included as Appendix B.

the sexes. Fortunately, because of the fact that Chabad Lubavitch is an outreach movement, these social boundaries are somewhat less restrictive. As I have previously stated, I was viewed as a potential Lubavitcher and so all measures were taken to ensure my return to the movement. The easiest groups for me to target were the women (both married and single), as well as married men. Obviously, the most difficult group for me to target was the group of "*bochrim*", the single male crowd. Admittedly, there is a gap in my research because of my inability to do a thorough investigation of the younger generation of Lubavitcher unmarried men and male youth.

In terms of gender issues, the quality of my interviews ranged depending on several factors. If I had contacts with my subjects either male or female prior to interviewing them, the interview would run smoothly. For those with whom my interview with them was a first encounter, the discussion was not as candid. Many of the men did not take me seriously. They assumed that I was younger than I was and when they found out my age they were completely taken aback wondering why my priorities were with my studies rather than finding a husband. Similarly, there were women who would tell me that I was wasting my time and that I should be focusing my attentions on getting married rather than on my studies. Only after some of these *Chassidim* interviewed me for a few minutes was I able to question them for my project. Despite the initial discussions, the *Chassidim* accommodated me by providing me with the information that I sought.

Another important resource at my disposal is Lubavitch's immense video-library. Fortunately the Lubavitcher Rebbe was very keen on taking advantage of

all available tools of technology in order to gain world Jewry's attention. Thus, there have been many videos produced about the Rebbe throughout the many years of his leadership. The first visual tapes of the Rebbe date back to when he first took over the movement forty-six years ago. These tapes have helped me to gain further insight on a symbiotic Chassid-Rebbe relationship. Through the use of videos, television and the use of satellites, Lubavitch world-wide has been united. More importantly, I have seen how the *Chassidim* who live outside of Crown Heights have been able to bring the Rebbe into their homes on a daily basis even though he rarely left New York. Finally, because of certain video productions, I have been able to gain a sense of the rise in popularity of the Rebbe even after his death.

Closely related to the use of the video is the use of photographic imagery of the Rebbe. Many families that have been touched by the Rebbe will hang at least a single photograph or portrait in their homes. Since the death of the Rebbe, the use of his picture for commercial goods has increased. The Rebbe's picture can now be found on goods ranging from plaques with the blessing for the arrival of the Messiah, to school supplies, to wall clocks and other such paraphernalia. In addition to this, some photographers have taken the Rebbe's picture and spliced it into another scene in order to send a specific message across. An example of this use of trick photography places the Rebbe on the path of a country road with the phrase "the Rebbe will lead us to *Geulah* [redemption]." The popularity of these items that have been produced and sold to Lubavitchers has helped me to

understand how the *Chassidim* have been able to maintain the Rebbe's presence in their homes, schools, and Chabad Houses.

Apart from keeping a video-library of images of the Rebbe, the administrators of Chabad have also kept a strict record of the Rebbe's speeches that he delivered throughout the years. It is of great importance that such strict records were kept of the Rebbe's words and wishes for both the Meshichistim and the anti-Meshichistim. There are many excerpts of the Rebbe's *sichas* (conversations) that can be interpreted in ways that lend support to both sides of this ongoing debate. By studying some of the pertinent *sichas* I have been able to understand the sources on which the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* base themselves for keeping the Rebbe alive despite his passing. Apart from reading past literature relating to the development of Chabad under the guidance of this last Rebbe, I have read other literature relating to the origins of Chasidism and of the Lubavitcher movement.

In addition to all of the above mentioned modes of methodological study, I have also been consulting with other professors and students who have been conducting research on the Chabad movement after the death of the Rebbe. One of the purposes of these meetings were to ensure me that I was utilising all of the available tools of methodology. Furthermore, it was important for me to discuss my findings with other researchers of Chabad who were aware of the changes within the movement as they occurred. Over the last few months I have found myself being challenged by these correspondents. Thus I have been asking and

answering questions pertinent to my thesis that I otherwise might not have considered.

My final access to information on Chabad has kept me steadily informed of the activities and development of ideologies of the Chabad movement world-wide. I made it a priority to read Chabad's own publications. Weekly journals and magazines such as the "Bais Moshiach", "Kfar Chabad" and "Chabad Magazine" were easily attainable and read consistently throughout the year.

In addition to these publications, I have been reading the steady flow of articles and books that have been published about Chabad since the Rebbe suffered his first stroke in 1992. Some of this literature has helped me to understand the need of the *Chassidim* to keep their Rebbe alive despite the fact that he was exhibiting the signs of mortality.

All in all, there are many methods available to me to attain the information necessary for this project. What has been most difficult in researching this topic was when to quit "research mode" and shift into "writing mode". Despite the fact that time was a factor, I wanted to be able to include as many Chabad related events as possible and have found myself researching pertinent events within Chabad to this day. I hope to use the research that has not been included in this thesis in future work.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF CHASIDISM¹

(FROM THE BAAL SHEM TOV TO THE SEVENTH REBBE)

In order to understand a movement at its present state, there needs to be an understanding of its past. What were circumstances under which it originated? Is the movement the same now as it was at its start, or have its ideals and priorities changed? With respect to the Lubavitcher movement these are pertinent questions. Today, Lubavitch is a Messianic sect whose adherents pay special attention to its last leader. Was Lubavitch always a Messianic sect? Did they always pay this kind of attention to their leader after the leader's death? The changes that this movement has undergone helps to shed light on why its participants have taken the actions that they have today.

There were severe mitigating circumstances that first led to the growth and the flourishing of the Chassidic movement during the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe. Life was difficult for the Jews during this era. There were times when the Jews were threatened by pogroms and oppressed by anti-Semites who ruled over them. In many cases the Jews were confined to living in ghettos in the cities or

¹Most of the historical data that I have presented in this chapter is taken from the point of view of active participants in the Chasidic movement. The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the history of Chasidism and Chabad in a tone that is similar to the rest of the project, namely from an insider's point of view. Because the information that is presented here is an internal view of the Chassidim's own history, few prominent sociologists and Chasidic experts are referred to in this chapter (or in the other chapters). For a fuller comprehensive critical reading list, please see the bibliography under the section titled "Sources of Sociology of Religion".

shtetls (Jewish villages) in the more rural districts. Because of these living arrangements and various civil codes, Jews could not partake in most professions. Generally, the Jews lived in poverty. Because of their weak economic state, only a privileged few could afford to have a proper *Yeshivah* (Talmudic) education. There developed a bifurcated class system in the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. One class system was defined in terms of economic status and the other had to do with the level of education that one received in the *Yeshivah*. The wide disparities in the class systems produced a snobbism towards the poverty-stricken, uneducated Jews. The over-attention that was paid to the importance of the Jewish legal scholars and to the detailed *Yeshivah* studies provoked a split in the Jewish community. There arose the *Chasidic* movement and consequently the opposition to the *Chasidim* (literally pious one, but referring to those who adhere to Chassidism - Modern Jewish Mysticism), the *Misnagdim* (literally, those who oppose).

The founder of the Chasidic movement was the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good name/ Good Master of the name). Little is known about the *Besh't's* (an acronym of Baal Shem Tov) early life. His name was Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer and he was born in southern Russia in 1698². His family was poor and he was orphaned at a young age. Even though he did not receive a higher education in

² Jerome R. Mintz, Legends of the Hasidim (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 16.

the *Yeshiva*, he did acquire for himself a tremendous wealth of Torah knowledge³.

Until he reached his mid-thirties, the Baal Shem Tov lived in anonymity.

At the age of thirty-six, the *Besht* was said to have exhibited miraculous powers using the name of God. But these powers were not what primarily gained him attention from the Jewish communities. The Baal Shem Tov was a charismatic leader who readily provided an education, guidance and support for average Jews. This was of particular importance during those years because it was very difficult for an average Jew to gain the attention of a Jewish leader when difficulties arose. Often, it was difficult (though not impossible) for the impoverished Jews were uneducated, and therefore, unworthy of being granted an audience with a community Rabbi.

The *Besht* was able to relay lessons of Torah and Talmud in simple terms so that any Jew, no matter how much they lacked an education could understand. In addition to breaking from the traditional Jewish education system, he also instilled in his students a more joyous attitude toward life despite all of their hardships. The Baal Shem Tov taught that all Jews had an equal potential of reaching the highest states of spiritual enlightenment regardless of how small an amount of time they spent in the formal education system. He advocated for a system of thought based on the *Kabbalah* (Jewish mysticism) that stressed

³ Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1984) 8-9.

There is an ongoing debate on how educated the Baal Shem Tov really was. Most scholars claim that because he received no higher education that he did not possess a deep Torah knowledge. Kaplan and many other Jewish community leaders dispute this and claim that the Baal Shem Tov was self-taught.

personal piety, humility, charity and a joyful attitude toward life. Eventually, the Baal Shem Tov attracted a following of Jews on all scholastic levels. During the *Besht's* lifetime, modern Chasidism gathered a following that numbered 10,000. Once the roots had been planted, branches of modern Chasidism grew all over Eastern Europe.

The successor of the Baal Shem Tov was Dov Baer of Mezritch. Known as the *Maggid* (speaker) of Mezritch, he led the movement for 12 years. What was most significant about Chasidism during the years that Dov Baer led the movement were the numerous opponents that attacked his movement. Many of the higher institutions of education and Rabbinical leaders were threatened by the popularity of Chasidism and were appalled by the breakdown in their Jewish education system. During the years under which Dov Baer was the Rebbe, the *Misnagdim* (literally opponents) took strong measures to excommunicate the *Chassidim*. The *Misnagdim* also burned many of the Chasidic writings, including the popular Chasidic book titled *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* (Generations of Jacob Joseph)⁴.

An important lesson that the *Maggid* taught was based on the mystical teachings. He addressed the issue of breaking the barriers between the spiritual and the physical being through prayer. He proclaimed that "the main vehicle for this is prayer, into which one must place all his thoughts, is the full awareness that he is communing with God. The main for which one must pray is the ability to

⁴Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1984) 18.

experience God, and thus touch the Infinite Love."⁵ Because Dov Baer was able to infuse his disciples with a vigorous energy, Chasidism continued to grow.

The third leader in the Chasidic dynasty was Shneur Zalman. Lubavitchers refer to him as the first leader of the Lubavitcher dynasty. He is commonly referred to by Lubavitchers as the *Alter* (Old) Rebbe. There are two pieces of literature which brought the *Alter* Rebbe fame. His first book was his recodification of the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) which was later named *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*. This tremendous undertaking transpired with the support and guidance of the *Maggid*. The reason that Lubavitchers consider him to be their first Rebbe is because of his second piece of work, the *Likutei Amarim*, or the *Tanya*. Shneur Zalman spent twenty years compiling this piece that combined and systematised the teachings of Chasidism with earlier Kabbalistic works.

Lubavitch is also referred to as "Chabad". The term Chabad is an acronym of "*Chochmah, Bina, Da'ath*" (Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge). Based on mystical teachings, Shneur Zalman proclaimed that these were the three elements that would help one to understand and control the driving source of the two part Jewish soul (of good and evil). The *Alter* Rebbe said that "Wisdom [and], Understanding are the primary sources of the emotions, since it is from them that the emotions are derived.... [and] Knowledge is the basis of all emotions and the source of their existence"⁶. Shneur Zalman proclaimed that these were the tools

⁵Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1984) 38.

⁶Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing

necessary to combat the evil soul in order to achieve a state of holiness and Godliness. He said that each soul should naturally "yearn to separate itself and depart from the body in order to unify with its origin and Source... the fountainhead of all life"⁷. Achieving this state of holiness was Shneur Zalman's lifelong goal.

The next Lubavitcher Rebbe was Shneur Zalman's son Dov Baer. This Dov Baer was also known as the *Mitler* (Middle) Rebbe. There are several noteworthy facts about the *Mitler* Rebbe. Firstly, it was he who relocated the movement to the small Russian town named Lubavitch. Even though the *Alter* Rebbe is considered to be the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, in point of fact, it was his son who truly earned this title. More correctly, the *Alter Rebbe* should be referred to as the first Chabad Rebbe.

Like his father and the previous Rebbes, Dov Baer displayed a genuine show of concern for his *Chassidim*. Apart from tending to their spiritual needs, Dov Baer was equally conscious of the Jews' material needs. He encouraged his followers to take on professions that would provide for their physical well-being. Dov Baer tried to persuade them to learn trades such as farming and other crafts that would provide for them a stable and steady income. Dov Baer was also responsible for providing financial aid to the Jewish communities in the Holy Land.

Corporation, 1984) 97.

⁷I obtained the source from: Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1984) 90. Kaplan draws this material from *Likutei Amarim* (Brooklyn: Kehot, 1963) 1,2.

Dov Baer continued to learn and teach his father's teaching. In addition to these mystical texts, Dov Baer compiled his own works. One of these works was titled *Kuntres HaHitpaalut* (Book of Wonders). The purpose of this work was to distinguish between physical and spiritual "ecstasy". Another book that Dov Baer wrote was the *Kuntres HaHitbonenut* (Handbook of Meditation). The focus of this book dealt with God's relationship to His physical creations and the spiritual world.⁸

During the nineteenth century, Europe was undergoing major changes. There were political upheavals, shifts in the economy and cultural variations. These were the challenges that the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, Menachem Mendel faced when he became the leader of the movement in 1827. Similarly, the fourth Rebbe, the Rebbe *Maharash*, Shmuel had to help his followers overcome the same hurdles and temptations after he became the Rebbe in 1866. Despite all of these changes in Europe, the Lubavitchers remained loyal to Judaism, and to their Rebbes.

During the 1880's, the Rebbe *Maharash* and his son Sholom Dov Baer, the Rebbe *Rashab* threw all of their energies into preserving European Jewry, both Chasidic and non-Chasidic. At this time, the Jewish people's well-being was being threatened from many directions. Apart from the constant danger of anti-Semitic attacks that threatened to destroy the physical well-being of the Jews, the Enlightenment movement continued to pose its threat by influencing the Jews.

⁸Aryeh Kaplan, *Chasidic Masters* (Jerusalem, New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1984)159.

These two Rebbes fought against the *Maskilim* by excommunicating them. Their intention was to keep the *Maskilim* from doing further harm to the Chasidic as well as the non-Chasidic Jews. Another problem that these two Rebbes acted upon were the number of Jews who were immigrating to North America.

Lubavitcher leadership stood firmly against this mass migration. Both Shmuel and Sholom Dov Baer considered America to be full of the same evil, and posing the same threat as the Enlightenment movement.

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the *Freidicke* Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson continued his predecessors' work. He assumed leadership of the movement in 1920. His perseverance in protecting the Jewish right to worship made him the unofficial leader for all of Russian Jewry. Not surprisingly, Russia's anti-Semitic secret police the NKVD plotted against Yosef Yitzchak because of his contributions to Jewish spiritual life. Eventually, the NKVD arrested him for "counterrevolutionary" activities and sentenced him to death. It was only because of the intervention of America, Germany, Latvia and France that Yosef Yitzchak was spared. He was released from jail and permitted to leave Russia with his family and close supporters. Yosef Yitzchak re-established Lubavitcher headquarters in Warsaw.

Over the next twelve years, the *Freidicke* Rebbe travelled from city to city in Europe where he instituted Lubavitcher schools and synagogues. He even had occasion to visit the Holy Land. Many Lubavitchers credit their sixth Rebbe with initiating the transformation of Lubavitch into an internationally linked network. Because of his extensive travels, Yosef Yitzchak was able to recognise that there

was no future for the Jews in Europe. He began to encourage all of his followers to emigrate. After the Nazi's rise to power, Yosef Yitzchak was smuggled out of Europe. He arrived in New York in 1940 whereupon he concentrated his efforts to get the rest of his family out of Europe. After a concerted effort, he was able to get two of his daughter's with their husbands to America. His third daughter and her family perished in the Holocaust.

Until the appointment of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Lubavitch had not placed a significant emphasis on messianism. The bulk of their teachings have revolved around Torah, Talmud and Tanya study. Their mystical teachings were supported by Lurianic *Kabbalah*. It was Isaac Luria's⁹ thought that provided the basis for transforming the Kabbalah into a popular, messianic movement which infused the rabbinical tradition and affected all Jewry, especially Chasidism. Despite the Messianic tone attributed to the foundation of these mystical studies, there is no evidence of a sense of urgency to hurry the Messianic redemption as was the case with the seventh generation of Lubavitchers. The recurring themes that the first seven Chassidic leaders (this count includes the Baal Shem Tov and the *Maggid*) shared included ensuring the survival of education for the Jewish people, ensuring their physical preservation and composing writings and developing a philosophy based on Jewish mysticism. Even though the belief of the impending Messianic redemption is a fundamental belief in Judaism, until

⁹Luria was also known as *HaAri*, the Hebrew word for lion. *Ari* is also a Hebrew acronym for "the Godly Rabbi Isaac".

Lubavitch arrived on American shores, there is no record of their Rebbes making an active effort to speed up the redemption.

After the *Freidicke* Rebbe arrived in America, he made several references to the imminent arrival of the Messiah. Seven weeks after Yosef Yitzchak arrived in New York, he established the *Machne Israel* (Camp of Israel) sect¹⁰. This sect thought of itself as the exclusive avenue to *Geula* (redemption) because of their self-proclaimed elitist religious practices. Even the sect's periodical was only planned to run for a short period of time because the redemption was expected to occur immediately. Indeed, that Rebbe identified September of 1942 as the last year of exile. In another instance, at a lecture that *Freidicke* Rebbe gave on the holiday of *Shavouth* (Pentecost), he also made references to the impending arrival of the Messiah. He began his speech with "now happens to be the time near for *Moshiach* to come, so we have to make preparations for the guest"¹¹ and then continued with another topic related to the weekly Torah reading. The *Freidicke* Rebbe passed away in 1950.

The Successor of the *Freidicke* Rebbe was Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Of all of the Rebbes, the most is known of Menachem Mendel's past. He was born in Nikolaev, Russia in 1902. All bibliographical accounts of Menachem Mendel

¹⁰ Gershon Greenberg, "Redemption after Holocaust According to Mahane Israel - Lubavitch 1940-1945," *Modern Judaism* 12 (1992): 61.

¹¹ Meir Eichenstein, "The Previous Rebbe's Bombshell in 1941," *Bais Moshiach* May 23, 1996: 115.

assert that he was recognised to be prodigy from the time that he was an infant¹². It is said that when Menachem Mendel was born, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe Dov Baer sent his parents explicit instructions on how to raise the youngster. Menachem Mendel's parents realised that if the fifth Rebbe would display so much interest in this infant, it was surely a hint of the greatness that he would accomplish later on in his life. At two years old Menachem Mendel was asking the four questions at the Seder table, and at two and a half he was reciting his prayers like a typical learned adult. As was the custom of the time, at the age of three, Menachem Mendel's mother sent him to *cheder*. At the age of eleven he completed his *Cheder* studies because his teachers had no new lessons to offer him. After Menachem Mendel left the *Cheder*, his father Levi Yitchak became the sole tutor. By the age of seventeen, Menachem Mendel was ordained as a rabbi by virtue of his mastery of the entire Talmud and the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In 1923, Menachem Mendel and the *Freidicke* Rebbe were introduced to each other. Clearly, the sixth Rebbe was impressed with Menachem Mendel because in 1928, Menachem Mendel married the *Freidicke* Rebbe's second daughter Chaya Moussia. Soon after Menachem Mendel and Chaya Moussia were wed they moved to Berlin. There, Menachem Mendel enrolled in the University of

¹² Edward Hoffman, Despite all Odds (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 19-46.

Simon Jacobson, Toward a Meaningful Life (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995) xxiii-xxv.

Anonymous [only acknowledged as "The editors of Wonders and Miracles"], Wonders and Miracles (Kfar Chabad: Maareches Ufaratzta, 1993) 7-10. All of these books provided very similar biographies of Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Berlin where he studied mathematics and physics until 1933. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Menachem Mendel and his wife were forced to flee to Paris to ensure their safety. There, he enrolled into the Sorbonne and studied engineering. It is said that in both universities Menachem Mendel excelled in his difficult studies despite the fact that he spent the bulk of his spare time studying *limudei kodesh*. The secular studies were only a secondary importance to Menachem Mendel. (Years later, when Menachem Mendel became the Rebbe, he instructed his *Chassidim* not to send their children to university because it would lead to *bitul zman* - wasted time - but more importantly, because of the lack of morality in the university.)

When Menachem Mendel reached his thirties, he was already recognised as a formidable scholar in the Chabad community. Menachem Mendel would often travel to the cities where his father-in-law resided. There he would function as the *Freidicke* Rebbe's secretary. It became his responsibility to edit the *Freidicke* Rebbe's letters to the Lubavitchers left behind in Russia. Additionally, Menachem Mendel was one of the editors of Chabad's new international journal the *Hatamim* (The Upright), published in Warsaw.

In 1940, Menachem Mendel and his wife fled to the south of France after the Nazis occupied the northern parts. From North America, the *Freidicke* Rebbe exhausted all of his efforts to secure safe passage for his children. Despite the sudden upsurge of anti-Semitism in France, Menachem Mendel refused to succumb to his enemies' pressures and continued to live as a Chasidic Jew. It was so important for him to be meticulous in the keep of all of the *mitzvot* that before the

holiday of *Succoth* (Tabernacles) he stole into Italy in order to obtain the *etrog* (citron) necessary to complete the rituals pertaining this holiday. Being caught would have meant immediate death for Menachem Mendel. After the *Freidicke* Rebbe's extraordinary effort, in 1941 Menachem Mendel and his wife arrived on American shores. The couple moved to Crown Heights to be with the rest of the Lubavitchers.

In Crown Heights, Menachem Mendel continued to work for his father's-in-law movement. He compiled several rabbinical texts and a special Passover *Hagaddah* (prayer book for the occasion). He also edited many other Rabbinical and Chasidic texts. Additionally, he conducted several classes in Jewish mystical thought which were said to amaze the elder Lubavitchers. These classes and the writings gained him fame all over North America.

In 1947, Menachem Mendel was able to locate his mother Chana, who during the war was left behind in Russia. By 1947 Chana was located in a displaced person's camp with a few hundred other Lubavitcher *Chassidim*. Menachem Mendel serviced these refugees' needs as a teacher and spiritual leader for three months. At the end of the three months he returned to Crown Heights with his mother to attend to the administrative responsibilities that he left behind.

In 1950, the *Freidicke* Rebbe passed away. For a year, the Chabad Lubavitch movement had no official leader. The *Freidicke* Rebbe left no explicit instructions as to who would succeed him. It is not clear whether the *Chassidim* unanimously decided that Menachem Mendel should take on the role as Lubavitch's seventh Rebbe, but it is clear that he tried to withstand the pressure on

the part of the *Chassidim* to take on this role. However by 1951, on the *Freidicke* Rebbe's *yahrzeit* (anniversary of his death) Menachem Mendel officially accepted that he would fill the role of the next Lubavitcher Rebbe.¹³

In the beginning of this chapter the origins of the movement were outlined. At this juncture, it is helpful to draw a comparison of the Chabad movement between the way it was in the past to the way it is at the present. Some significant parallels can be drawn. For each of the Rebbes, their predecessors served as role models. Each of the Rebbes emphasised the importance of providing a proper Jewish education. The writings of the previous Rebbes are taught in all Lubavitcher educational systems. Just as the past generations created a momentum which the coming generations were to continue, the sixth generation of Lubavitchers successfully laid the ground-work for the seventh. But here the similarities end. The seventh generation of Chabad Lubavitch expanded both in terms of the number of *Chassidim* and in terms of the scope of their agenda: Lubavitch was to become an international outreach movement. One of the main reasons for this development was to satisfy the Rebbe's desire of re-introducing the concept of an imminent Messianic redemption to the Jewish people.

The actions and words on the part of the sixth generation in combination with historical events such as the Holocaust and occurrences in the State of Israel provide an insight as to why the seventh generation was successful in inducing a Messianic fervour. However, the seventh generation under the rule of Menachem Mendel Schneerson surpassed all of the achievements of its predecessors. In order

¹³Edward Hoffman Despite All Odds (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 41.

to answer some of the questions that I asked in the beginning, it is necessary to conduct a close examination of the Chabad movement as it functioned from 1950 to 1994.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE CHABAD MOVEMENT UNDER THE SEVENTH REBBE:

1951-1994

It is an undisputed fact among the *Chassidim*¹ that the most influential Rebbe who led the Lubavitcher movement was the seventh Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Even prior to his arrival to the United States, Menachem Mendel showed potential as strong leader. He functioned in the capacity of secretary for his father-in-law, the *Freidicke* Rebbe. A year after his father's-in-law passing Menachem Mendel officially became the seventh Rebbe. Under the direction of the seventh Rebbe, Chabad Lubavitch became a world-renowned organisation.

Despite the fact that Chabad Lubavitch is based on the mystical teachings of previous Rebbes, it has taken on a much broader set of goals. Under the guidance of this last Rebbe, the agenda of Chabad has become far more detailed and far-reaching than ever before. Even though the sixth Rebbe instigated similar programs, these endeavours received more attention shortly after the seventh Rebbe was appointed. It is precisely because of Menachem Mendel's strong influence on the movement that when sociologists such as William Shaffir² and Jerome Mintz³ try to gain an understanding of contemporary Chabad Lubavitch,

¹ All of the *Chassidim* that I interviewed stated that Menachem Mendel Schneerson was by far the most influential Rebbe of all of the Lubavitcher Rebbes.

² William Shaffir, "Jewish Messianism Lubavitch Style: An Interim Report," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* vol. 35, no. 2 (December 1993): 115-128.

³ Jerome R. Mintz, *Hasidic People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard

they focus only on the Chabad movement as this last Rebbe guided and developed it.

There were two major goals on the seventh Rebbe's agenda. The first objective was to hasten the arrival of the Messiah. As soon as Menachem Mendel accepted the position of Rebbe he began to stress the importance of this concept to his *Chassidim*. In his first speech as the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel proclaimed:

Just as until now it was clear to each one of us that the Rebbe would lead us to greet our righteous *Moshiach*, so should it be clear now. That which happened* is only from our material point of view. It is nothing more than a *nisayon* (trial), one of the trials of the birth-pangs of *Moshiach* (Messiah) which need to occur before the arrival of the righteous Redeemer. The sole purpose of these trials is to conceal the truth (of the workings of God in the world).

We are left with a question why the Torah requires now the recital of *Kaddish* [prayer recited when an immediate relative passes away], and similar mourning practices.

The intent of the *nisayon* is to draw out the powers and strength necessary to overcome it. This in turn removes the concealment and reveals the truth (as explained in Chassidic teachings).

Through strengthening our connection to him by means of studying his teachings and following his instructions, we will immediately merit (since we are on the edge of Redemption) to see the Rebbe again, in the material sense, and that he should lead us to the Redemption."⁵

The second objective for this Rebbe was to inform the world of the importance of serving God by adhering to His commandments. According to Menachem Mendel's instructions, the *Chassidim* created programs by which they

University Press, 1992) 43-50, 92-99, 348-364.

*Menachem Mendel refers to the death of his predecessor in this passage.

⁵ Chayalei Bais Dovid (Students of the Central Lubavitcher Yeshivah Tomchei Temimim, 770), And He Will Redeem Us (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mendelson Press, Inc., 1994) 11.

could educate Jews. This educational process was called "*kiruv*⁶ work". This *kiruv* work entailed conducting programs that were held in Chabad Houses (Chabad centres) and public areas in New York and all over the world. The purpose of this outreach work was two-fold. Not only was it a priority to provide Jews with a Jewish education emphasising the importance of the *mitzvos* (positive precepts of the Torah), but it was important to "bring about a brighter world permeated with the light of Torah and the observance of mitzvos [positive precepts]".⁷ Menachem Mendel thought it equally important to make the non-Jews aware of a Higher Being. This Rebbe highlighted the importance of teaching the non-Jews of a higher level of morality through the Torah by encouraging them to adhere to the seven Noahide Laws. This is a departure from the previous Chabad Rebbes. Whereas in the past the Rebbes were concerned with the spiritual and material welfare of the Jewish people, Menachem Mendel considered it additionally important to educate the non-Jews of a higher level of morality through the Torah. Menachem Mendel believed that inspiring the entire world to live a morally Torah inspired life would hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Even though Menachem Mendel often spoke of the imminent arrival of the *Moshiach* (though not always in terms of his father-in-law being the *Moshiach*), his first actions as a Rebbe involved creating a momentum of *kiruv* work in order

⁶The word *kiruv* literally means "to bring closer" but here refers to the outreach work that Chabad conducted by encouraging otherwise affiliated Jews to become Orthodox.

⁷ Rabbi Zalman Ahron Grossbaum, "Lubavitcher Rebbe Was Far More Than a Teacher," Canadian Jewish News 20 June 1996, sec. Perspectives: 9.

to encourage world Jewry to adhere to the *Halachah* (Jewish legal system). Under the best of circumstances this would have been a complicated undertaking, but during the fifties the Rebbe's task was even more difficult. At that time, much of the world's Jewish community was under extreme duress. Most of the *Chassidim* who had newly immigrated to the United States were survivors of the Holocaust. The world Jewish community on a whole was deeply scarred because of this tragedy both physically and theologically. This Rebbe recognised his enormous responsibility of rebuilding the Jewish community both locally and internationally. But Menachem Mendel was not to be discouraged. It became a major priority for Menachem Mendel to restore faith to these people. Moreover, by creating this *kiruv* movement in North America and the rest of the world, the Lubavitchers were successful in counteracting the assimilation of the Jews that was a growing trend even prior to the Holocaust.

Those Jews who were convinced by Lubavitchers to examine their Jewish roots and accept the responsibility of adhering to the *mitzvos* became known as Chabad's *ba'alei teshuvah*⁸. The number of *ba'alei teshuvah* grew during the mid fifties. One Lubavitcher Rabbi noted that the popularity of the *kiruv* work that was performed by the *Chassidim* increased with the rise in popularity of Chubby Checker. Certainly, the cultural changes in America had an influence on the Rebbe vis-à-vis the urgency of fighting the trends of assimilation especially among the younger generation. To help combat the influence of these cultural changes,

⁸The term *ba'alei teshuvah* literally means "masters of atonement" or "masters of the answers" or "masters of return".

Menachem Mendel officially established the Lubavitch Youth Organisation in the 1950's in New York. Other chapters of the Lubavitch Youth Organisation opened wherever a Chabad House (Chabad community centre) was established. Indeed, Chabad set a precedent of *kiruv* work for the rest of the Jewish community.

Soon after Menachem Mendel became the Rebbe, he sent out his *shluchim* (literally those that were sent, but referring to his emissaries) to establish Chabad Houses in cities in North America and in countries as far away as Morocco and Australia. In many cases these *shluchim* provided the only Jewish resources in their region. Thus, the Rebbe had to insure that the *shluchim* be properly trained to run these Chabad Houses. These *shluchim* had to acquire administrative skills to run a Chabad House. They also had to develop proper social skills in order to interact with the Jews (and non-Jews) that they were to encounter. Most of the *shluchim* and their families had little exposure to communities outside of their own Chabad circles. They had to accustom themselves to changes in the community that they moved into i.e. the lack of Jewish school systems and kosher foods and most significantly that they were to become the centre of their community. The task of being on *shlichus* was especially difficult for the families that established Chabad Houses overseas because their support system (Crown Heights and the Rebbe) was so far away. Additionally many of these emissaries had to learn new languages once they settled in their new homes in cities abroad.

The various Chabad communities throughout the world shared several common denominators. They were all Orthodox Jews. Many of them understood and spoke Yiddish and Hebrew. All of the Lubavitchers adhered to Lubavitcher

philosophy. But all of these components of the Lubavitcher community world-wide were secondary to the one factor that tied them all together namely, the Rebbe. All of the *Chassidim* looked to the Rebbe as a child does to a father - full of wonder, love and respect and only aiming to please.

Because these emissaries were so far removed from the larger Chabad community in Crown Heights, and more importantly from their Rebbe, they learned to compensate for these gaps in their lives by bringing the Rebbe into their homes. Paradoxically, despite the physical distance between these Lubavitchers and their Rebbe, they often maintained an equally intense relationship to him as did the many Jews who lived in Crown Heights. The Lubavitchers had many means by which they kept the Rebbe in their homes.

A typical Lubavitcher home could be easily recognised from the inside. On the *shliach's* bookshelves would lie several Lubavitch related books. Often this collection included at least a single volume of the *Tanya* and volumes of the Rebbe's published letters and discourses. At least a single picture of the Rebbe will hang on the wall. Some families also hang framed the photos of themselves with the Rebbe. Many families that have received written correspondence from the Rebbe, will laminate and mount these letters. In every Chabad institution, portraits of the Rebbe would also be on display. Because of the number of people that would use the Chabad facilities, the Rebbe became an internationally recognised personality. Seeing his still image was not enough for the Lubavitchers who had minimal physical and visual contact with him.

Because Chabad took advantage of all tools of technology, every time the Rebbe delivered a speech (apart from his usual Sabbath discourses), the various Chabad Houses would "hook up" to 770 via satellite in order to be able to hear his words and analyse them afterwards. Additionally, because of their extensive use of modern technology, the Rebbe was filmed speaking to large groups and singing with his *Chassidim*. Many of these videotapes were sold and distributed to the various Chabad Houses and to Lubavitchers with televisions in their homes⁹.

The detailed videography of the Rebbe was of particular importance for those who lived outside of Crown Heights. Children were able to envision the Rebbe's movements and hear his voice even though they may have never had any contact with him. Similarly, those who were becoming introduced to Chabad and who were interested in seeing the role-model for the *shluchim* were also able to visualise the Rebbe and witness the throngs of people who hung onto his every word. Finally, the *shluchim* as well as the other congregants had to satisfy themselves with this type of interaction with their leader. The *shluchim* found it important to emphasise the importance of the Rebbe by popularising him to everyone.

Lubavitch has a number of important dates such as the birthdays and *yahrzeits* of the various Rebbes that are commemorated in a variety of ways. In Crown Heights, the Rebbe used to give a speech in 770 in front of a large

⁹When the Rebbe promoted the use of technology, he promoted it for the use of educational purposes only. Watching television for leisure purposes was not encouraged and so many Lubavitchers did not keep televisions in their homes. Instead, many homes were equipped with video-cassette-recorders and television monitors.

audience. Outside of Crown Heights the community would "hook-up" to 770 while attending a party in honour of these occasions. On such occasions, the non-Lubavitcher-affiliated Jews were especially invited to partake in these events. For one Lubavitcher *ba'alas teshuvah*, this was one of her first introduction to the Chabad community:

I went to the Chabad House to pick up my sister and found myself standing in the middle of a party. When I asked about the occasion for which this party was being held, I was told that it was the Lubavitch Rabbi's birthday. I looked around to wish him a happy birthday, only to be told that he was not there. 'What a chutzpah' I thought to myself. 'He couldn't even be bothered to show up to his own birthday party?!' Later, it was explained to me that Chabad Houses all over the world held parties just like this one. I was already interested in being *frum* [Orthodox] and was even more intrigued by this event. I decided to go back [to the Chabad House] and learn some more about the movement and *frumkeit* [being religious].¹⁰

Over the years the number of *ba'alei teshuvah* has increased sharply. Most of the *ba'alei teshuvah* took all of their initial cues from the *shluchim* in relation to all of their religious endeavours. This included the manner in which they related to the Rebbe. The *ba'alei teshuvah* modelled themselves after their *shluchim*. They too wrote to the Rebbe for advice and blessings. They too yearned to go and have a moment of time with the Rebbe, or even to see him from afar. They too hung pictures of the Rebbe in their homes and watched videos of him. They too studied his works.

All of the Chabad communities located outside of the New York area shared a longing to be with their Rebbe. Often these Lubavitchers organised group trips to visit the Rebbe all year round. On *Shabbos* (Sabbath) those visiting Crown

¹⁰Mrs. R., Toronto, 2 July 1996. Mrs. R. a homemaker and a former Lubavitcher.

Heights would crowd into 770 to pray with the Rebbe and listen to his *farbrengen*¹¹. After *Shabbos* the visitors would be able to arrange private meetings. These private audiences with the Rebbe were called *yeichidus*. Generally, there was no preferential treatment whether one was a devoted Chassid, a secular business person or a visiting dignitary. Women like men, were able to access and attain his attention very easily.

In later years the Rebbe stopped having *yeichidus* with his visitors except for very special circumstances. Instead of keeping private appointments with his *Chassidim* and other admirers, the Rebbe increased the number of public talks that he gave. More significantly every Sunday morning, (beginning on his birthday in April 1986¹²) the Rebbe would distribute dollars and his blessings in 770. Thousands of people would gather to receive the Rebbe's blessing. The type of people who stood in line to meet the Rebbe ranged from the Rebbes' *Chassidim* (both locally and internationally) to heads of State. Business tycoons and other famous personalities would also wait to share a moment of the Rebbe's time. Interested individuals who heard much of the Rebbe would also line wait to be blessed by the Rebbe. Some of these people were seeking spiritual inspiration, others advice on how to handle a particular problem. The rest of the people just

¹¹ A Lubavitcher *farbrengen* is a gathering that would take place in 770 on Sabbath afternoons, Jewish holidays and other dates that are significant to the Lubavitchers. At these gatherings the Rebbe discussed various Torah and mystical related topics.

¹² Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995) 101.

wanted to have an opportunity to meet the Rebbe. At these weekly events the Rebbe would hand each person a brand-new dollar bill, to be given to charity while blessing him/her. From 1986 to 1992 the Rebbe handed out hundreds of thousands of dollar bills. It was very common to have pictures taken with the Rebbe on these Sundays. The photographs and dollars that were received remained treasured possessions to those who received them. Another dollar would be given in place of the one handed over by the Rebbe.

In addition to the distribution of the dollar bills on Sundays, the Rebbe would also apportion either a piece of cake at the start of the Jewish New Year, or a small container of wine at the end of every Jewish holiday. These items of food were also considered to have merit. This piece of cake was called *lekach*. *Lekach* literally means "to take". In this context, the belief was that giving *lekach* would insure that no unattainable needs or debts would be acquired during the coming year. The wine was called *kos shel Brachah* which literally means "a cup for a blessing". In order to keep this wine and cake for a long period of time, the *Chassidim* would pour the drops of wine into a larger bottle and the bits of cake into a cake batter. The same would be done to the remnants of this wine and cake. The piece of cake and drop of wine that the Rebbe distributed could have a lifetime use in a Lubavitcher household. These gifts from the Rebbe would also be distributed further to community members who did not have the opportunity to visit with the Rebbe

However, many of the *shluchim* and other Chabad community members who were only able to make live visual and physical contact with the Rebbe once

or twice a year because of the distance between Crown Heights and these overseas Chabad communities. The most popular time to visit Crown Heights and the Rebbe was during the High Holidays. During those few weeks Crown Heights would fill up with visitors from near and far who came in order to pray and celebrate the year's most momentous occasions with the Rebbe. Thousands of people would pack into 770 to catch a glimpse of the Rebbe praying, singing and encouraging his *Chassidim* to dance. Even during those tumultuous times in 770, the Rebbe could command the attention of the room full of thousands of people.

In order to compensate for some of the *shluchim*'s feelings of isolation, and to remind them of the goals that they were working towards, Chabad began sponsoring international *shluchim* conventions. On these conventions the *shluchim* would gather in Crown Heights and have the opportunity to be addressed by the Rebbe with regards to the importance of their activities. Many of the *shluchim* were able to have a moment of the Rebbe's time to discuss various issues. During the late eighties, Chabad tried another way to create a world-wide connection between the Chabad Houses. For several years, on the holiday of *Chanukah* a group of approximately seven cities from all over the world were televised while lighting the *Chanukah menorah* simultaneously with the Rebbe at 770. Despite the distance between the cities, the variations in language and the differences in time, Lubavitch's world community were momentarily united in honour of the Rebbe.

Another way that the *Chassidim* (both the *shluchim* and regular Chabad community members) were able to maintain contact with the Rebbe was by written

correspondence. In cases where there were extreme emergencies, the party involved would pass a message to the Rebbe through his secretaries and await his answer. Writing letters to the Rebbe was a very common and convenient way of consulting with him. The *shluchim* and the *ba'alei teshuvah* (who took their cues from the *shluchim*) wrote to the Rebbe for advice on all serious, and some not so serious matters.

Because the Chabad Houses functioned under the auspices of the Rebbe, the Lubavitchers first consulted with this chief administrator before making any changes in community programming. The *Chassidim* also wrote to him in request for a blessing for occasions including birthdays and upcoming marriages. They also wrote to seek the Rebbe's advice about whether a certain medical procedure was necessary, whether to buy a house in a certain neighbourhood, or even whether or not to change professions. The *Chassidim* would also write to the Rebbe to inform him of the successes of various programs. In addition to this, in accordance to the structure of the hierarchy of the Chabad movement, the Rebbe was also the chief *halachic* decisor. Any question that was asked to a Lubavitcher *shliach* would be answered based on how the Rebbe would rule. In cases when the *shliach* himself could not decide a complex halachic issue, he would consult with the Rebbe's secretaries or the Rebbe himself. Finally, they would write to him for spiritual inspiration. In most cases, the Rebbe would reply with a written response or have his secretary respond by telephone. The *Chassidim* entrusted themselves to the Rebbe because they believed that he acted as an intermediary between the people and God.

The relationship between the Chassid and the Rebbe can be explained in the following terms: "In Chabad, the connection with a Rebbe is an all-encompassing one. it does not depend on "what the Rebbe has done for me," but is rather a deep, inner bond, based on the realisation that the Rebbe can guide every facet of a person's spiritual development. On the other hand, the tangible benefits that often result from a connection with the Rebbe cannot be ignored."¹³

There is a stereotype of *Chassidic* groups that implies that only the men are of importance. In many cases, this stereotype is entirely false, and certainly with Chabad. The seventh Rebbe emphasised the importance of every single Jew regardless of their age or gender. In fact, he helped to establish organisations to meet the needs of Lubavitcher women and the younger generation of Lubavitch. He created a forum which encouraged the women and youth of Chabad to voice their concerns as well as celebrate their occasions.

In 1952, the Rebbe founded the Lubavitch Women's Organisation. He inspired this group to establish learning classes as well as various workshops, publications and social programs. The Lubavitch Women's Organisation continues to hold two annual conventions, one in Crown Heights and the other in a North American city outside of New York. Every year the Rebbe would address the women specifically at the Crown Heights convention. During each talk, the Rebbe would re-enforce to the women that it was their duty to take an active role in the community and in their children's education. During the seventies, the Rebbe

¹³ Eliyahu and Malka Touger, To Know and To Care (Brooklyn, New York: Sichos in English, 1993) 34.

instructed the Lubavitch Women's Organisation to encourage all affiliated and non-affiliated girls and women to light *Shabbos* candles every Friday before sundown¹⁴. The Rebbe's rationale behind this commandment was to rid the world of evil and darkness. While giving these instructions he added "imagine how much light is added to the world every Friday when women and girls world-wide light those millions of candles."¹⁵

Also during the seventies, the Rebbe advised the women to educate all non-affiliated women of the laws of *Taharas HaMishpachah*.¹⁶ The rationale behind maintaining these laws was to insure family harmony. There was a dual purpose for these two campaigns. Firstly, they would encourage Jewish women to accept the responsibility of adhering to these laws, possibly inspiring them to keep the rest of the *mitzvos*. Inspiring the Jews to keep the Law could only hasten the arrival of the *Moshiach*.

At a young age, Lubavitcher children whether or not they lived in Crown Heights were taught to recognise and revere the Rebbe. At the Rebbe's prompting, every Chabad House developed some form of a Lubavitcher educational system for the children of the community. Examples of the various educational institutions that the various Chabad Houses developed included afternoon schools, day schools, *cheders*, women's teaching seminaries and

¹⁴Lighting the candles on Friday evening signifies the commencing of the Sabbath.

¹⁵ Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995) 179. Jacobson does not provide a source for this quote.

¹⁶*Taharas HaMishpachah* refers to a complex set of laws relating to a woman's menstrual cycle.

yeshivahs. Apart from the usual *limudei kodesh* and secular studies, the children were taught the Rebbes' works and of Lubavitch holidays. In all but the afternoon schools, the majority of the children came from Lubavitcher homes. Thus, the lessons taught in school were reinforced at home. In the afternoon schools, it was the hope of the Rebbe that the children would educate their parents in the hopes of inspiring them to become practising Jews.

The Rebbe did not believe that a child's education should be limited to the school months. At his suggestion summer day camps were opened. Apart from the usual sports and outings in which all day camps partake, the Rebbe encouraged that a few minutes each day be reserved for learning some aspect of Judaism. Additionally, the children sang a number of Jewish-related songs. Some of the more common songs included "We Want Moshiach Now", as well as tunes given to the Rebbe's twelve *psukim* (passages)¹⁷. At the end of these rounds of singing, the camp would break out into cheers of *Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu VeRabenu*¹⁸ (long live our master, teacher and Rabbi). These summer camps were of great importance for Chabad's *kiruv* work. Many of the children who attended these day camps did not come from Orthodox homes. It was his hope that just as in the case of the afternoon schools, that the children provide their parents with at least a minimal Jewish education.

¹⁷None of these passages were innovated by the Rebbe. The Rebbe promoted them in order to enforce important lessons such as loving your fellow Jew and remembering that the Jews were once slaves in Egypt.

¹⁸Only in 1992 was the term *Melech HaMoshiach LeOlam Vo'ed* added to this phrase.

In Lubavitch's overnight summer camps, the Rebbe's presence was even more pronounced. As one woman recounted her experiences at camp she said:

Everything we did had to do with the Rebbe. If the camp was ever a mess, the camp Rabbi would yell at us saying that we should not dare to disgrace the Rebbe's place. In common-room on camp grounds there hung a portrait of the Rebbe. During Colour War [an activity in which the camp is divided into two teams where they compete in song, dance, art-work and sports] all of our songs and cheers had to with proclaiming the greatness of the Rebbe. Our team's banner had a picture of the Rebbe on it. Even during the most basic events of the day, like during *bentching* [the blessing after meals] where Lubavitchers add the sentence that says *HaRachaman Hu Yevarech Es Adoneinu, Moreimu VeRabbeinu*¹⁹ (the Merciful One should bless our Master, Teacher and Master), we had to stand up from our seats and point to the Rebbe's picture where it hung in the dining hall.²⁰

Apart from summer camps and schools there were several other Chabad House related establishments created at the encouragement of the Rebbe. Most community Chabad Houses served the community as a synagogue too. In the past most Lubavitcher synagogues would not charge a membership fee for participating in Chabad's services. At worst, in order to defray some of their costs, the Chabad House might have charged a minimal fee during the High Holidays. On the High Holidays (the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement) this was of particular importance because many non-affiliated Jews made it a priority of theirs to attend prayer services. Because it is widely known that Chabad has an open door policy and many available seats, many non-affiliated Jews would use Lubavitch's facilities.

¹⁹Again, the latter part of the phrase was only added in 1992.

²⁰Ms. L., Toronto, 20 December 1995. Ms. L. is a woman Lubavitcher and is currently working in the Jewish educational system.

At times, the non-affiliated families would be invited to Lubavitcher homes to enjoy a festive meal and listen to *divrei* Torah (lessons on the Torah) based on the Rebbe's works.

Just as in other Orthodox synagogues, Lubavitcher services provide separate seating for men and women. But there is a slight variation in the text of the prayers. The prayers are conducted specifically in the Lubavitcher *musach* (format) which is *al pi musach Ari* (based on Luria's style of prayer). All Orthodox synagogues will provide a weekly sermon based on the weekly Torah reading. In Lubavitcher synagogues most of the sermons that were preached were based on the teachings that the Rebbe preached that week.

Synagogues are important to all Jewish communities. However, in many Lubavitcher communities the synagogue may take on extra importance. Because many of the Chabad communities are situated where there are few other Jews, the Chabad synagogue will become a community centre where Jews can gather to meet other Jews. It will also function as a resource centre where adults can find out about various educational programs either for themselves or for their children.

Another function of the Chabad House was its need to service university students. In small town campus oriented student communities, these Chabad Houses had the responsibility of providing the Jewish students with all Jewish services and resources. The Chabad House would insure the availability of kosher food on campus. If a quorum of ten men was available, they would provide prayer services. The *shliach* and his family would often host groups of students for *Shabbos* and holidays. Additionally the *shliach* of the Chabad House would offer

a variety of *shiurs* (lessons) in Torah and *Tanya*. In extreme cases, the *shliach* provided counselling services. A *shliach* on a campus Chabad House commented on the difficulty of his job.

College students have many problems today. They lack direction. I see all kinds of terrible things come through my office: drugs, physical abuse... it's just terrible. And they have so little Jewish knowledge. It makes my job much harder, but when I accomplish something good, the rewards are very satisfying.²¹

It is for these reasons that the Rebbe emphasised the importance of focusing attention on the younger generation in order to help rid them of the negative feelings that they possess. The Rebbe once said that "the rebellion of youth must be directed against the status quo and toward the sublime, toward God, and toward a higher meaning."²²

Other tasks that the Rebbe encouraged his *Chassidim* to undertake included the various *mifzolim*²³ campaigns. The most popular campaign for the women was the candle-lighting campaign. Lubavitcher women would set up tables in supermarkets and shopping malls and hand out candles and candle holders as well as literature on Chabad. The most popular *mifzoh* campaign for men was *mifzoh tfillin*. This campaign began in 1967 just prior to the Six-Day-War between Israel and its neighbouring countries. Many Lubavitchers believe that in the merit of Israel's soldier donning these religious articles on the eve of a major

²¹Rabbi M., Montreal, 2 November, 1996. Rabbi M. is a *shliach*

²² Simon Jacobson, Toward a Meaningful Life (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1995) 39.

²³*Mifzolim* refers to the act of proselytising in the Jewish community.

war helped them to miraculously win. This campaign continues to the present.

Lubavitcher teen-age boys and men would stand on street corners, approach men and offer to bless the *tfillin* with them.

Finally, there were a number of weekly and monthly periodical Lubavitcher publications. On an international level, there was the "Kfar Chabad" magazine in Hebrew and the "Chabad Magazine" in English. These magazines wrote of the current events in the Chabad world, as well as external events that related to the Chabad movement, or to the Rebbe's words. Additionally they published the Rebbe's *sichas* from that week. They also informed the public of any upcoming international Chabad events. Moreover, each Chabad House would locally produce their own publications.

In the late eighties, the Rebbe began to speak of the coming of the *Moshiach* in more concrete terms. It was the custom in Lubavitch to create acronyms for the corresponding number of the year in the Jewish calendar. In 5748 *TShMKh* [1988], the Rebbe proclaimed it to be the year to be *Tehe shnas cherus Moshiach* (it should be the year of freedom and Messiah). In 5749 [1989], according to the acronym *TShMT*, the Rebbe matched the name *Tehe shnas Moshiach tova* (it should be a good year for the Messiah). Later on in that year the Lubavitcher Rebbe assured his followers that the coming of the Messiah was close at hand and only the community's lack of repentance delayed his arrival. On one of his *Shabbos* discourses, the Rebbe pronounced:

Not only do we have the capacity to permeate our lives with light, we also have the ability to transform the darkness of *Golus* [exile] into light.

This ability to transform darkness into light is especially pertinent in this year, 5749 [1989].

The *Kabbalah* states that each of the six days of creation correspond to one thousand years of the world's existence. We are currently almost at the end of 749 years in the sixth millennium. Furthermore, the year 5750 has been coded in Jewish writings as the predestined date of redemption. Ostensibly we are in the final moments of exile; the coming of the Messiah is not only imminent, it is actually due now. The Talmud states that the redemption is dependent on *teshuvah*. This may also be interpreted to mean that, in essence, the Messiah is here for our work has been done. We lack only *teshuvah* for Hashem to return us to *Eretz Yisroel* [the land of Israel].²⁴

The Messianic fervour of the Lubavitcher community increased at a rapid rate. Talk of the imminent arrival of the *Moshiach* was common. As the Rebbe expressed more excitement, so did his *Chassidim*. By 1990, some Lubavitchers were already starting to speak in hypothetical terms of their Rebbe being the *Moshiach*. Most of the *Chassidim* were not ready to voice this sentiment. But, by 1991 the Rebbe's excitement over the imminent redemption turned into a deep frustration. In April of 1991 the Rebbe addressed his *Chassidim* in an unusual harsh tone and use of terminology. He asked,

How is it that *Moshiach* has still not come? Why is our world still a place in which evil and suffering prevail? Why is it acceptable that redemption should not come tonight, nor tomorrow, nor the day after? You must do all that you can to bring our righteous redeemer immediately! It is not sufficient to mouth slogans. It is up to each and every one of you to bring the ultimate redemption with your actions. It is in your hands to bring about the harmonious, perfect world of *Moshiach*.²⁵

²⁴"Synopsis of the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shlita, Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai, 22 Iyar 5749," Vaad Hanochos Hatmimim. Quoted from Mintz, page 351.

²⁵ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Chol HaMoed Pesach, 770 Eastern Parkway, 11 April 1991.

After that speech, many *Chassidim* were convinced that the *Moshiach* would arrive and reveal himself by the end of the holiday. Even when that was not the case, the *Chassidim* did not lose faith in their Rebbe's words. At that time, more Lubavitchers were willing to concede to the possibility of their Rebbe being the *Moshiach*. Many Lubavitcher women took heed to the words of the Rebbe and took action to help speed the redemption. All over the world, women were signing petitions begging Hashem to allow the Rebbe to reveal himself as the *Moshiach*. These petitions were then handed to the Rebbe. Still, the redemption did not occur. But the concept of the Rebbe being the *Moshiach* became more popular in the movement. Lubavitchers were often heard to be chanting *Yechi Adoneinu Moreinu VeRabeinu Melech HaMoshiach Le'Olam Vo'ed* (long live our master, our teacher, our Rabbi, the King Messiah, forever). The Rebbe never confirmed nor denied whether or not he was the *Moshiach*. Yet, by February of 1992, he was thoroughly troubled by the lack of the *Moshiach's* appearance. In yet another intense monologue, this time sounding more angered, the Rebbe cried out,

...We must scream to God to end the so very long Golus [exile].
 How long???

We must beg, demand and do whatever possible to immediately bring about the true and complete Redemption through our righteous *Moshiach*., for then will be fulfilled the promise "those that dwell in the dust will awaken and sing²⁶," beginning from the righteous who will be the first to be resurrected....

Bnei Yisroel [the Jewish People] are suffering in Golus more than nineteen hundred year, and *Moshiach* has still not come!...

Everything that was meant to be accomplished in *Golus* was

²⁶Isaiah 26:19

already completed. Everything was done in every possible way. We don't know what else can possibly be done. Even so, another week passes, another day, another minute, and the redemption is still not here.²⁷

Three weeks after this sermon, on March 2 1992, the Rebbe suffered his first major stroke. After the Rebbe fell ill, many more Lubavitchers accepted the belief that the Rebbe was the *Moshiach*. They began to compile sources of validation for this belief from various classical Jewish texts, as well as from the talks of the Rebbe. Additionally, the women prepared themselves for the coming of *Moshiach* by acquiring for themselves tambourines with which they were to celebrate his arrival in the same manner as the women celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea after the Jews were redeemed from Egypt.

Meanwhile, the *Chassidim* proclaimed the Rebbe's illness to be just another test of their faith. The *Chassidim* prayed and patiently awaited for his return to the podium. But rather than sit in his usual seat, the Rebbe was confined to a wheelchair because of severe paralysis. A special balcony with a curtain was built for the Rebbe to sit on where he could watch his *Chassidim* from above. For hours people attending synagogue wait until the curtain would be pulled back so that they could catch a quick glimpse of their leader. Each time the Rebbe came out, the *Chassidim* would break out into a loud rendition of *Yechi Adoneimui Moreimu VeRabbeimu Melech HaMoshiach Le'Olam Vo'ed* until the curtain was lowered.

On *gimmel Tammuz*, June 12, 1994 Menachem Mendel Schneerson passed away.

²⁷ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 770 Eastern Parkway, 4 February 1992.

Throughout his four decades of leadership, the Rebbe established more than two thousand new educational institutions across the globe. Lubavitchers maintain that only because of their Rebbe's concentrated motivation and extensive efforts was it possible to save world Jewry and expand it both qualitatively and quantitatively. At the time of the Rebbe's death Lubavitchers boasted a following of 200,000 Jews. But what they were to do without this central figure and without any likelihood of a successor led them to take drastic measures. Until this point, the succession of the *Chassidic* leaders was based on either scholarly merit or family connections to the previous Rebbe. Because Menachem Mendel Schneerson had no children, and because the Lubavitchers did not find a suitable figure to replace the Rebbe, Lubavitch was left with no spiritual leader.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE DEATH OF THE REBBE

"What happened on *gimmel Tammuz*?"

"There was a *levaya* [funeral] and the Rebbe is still with us."¹

GIMMEL TAMMUZ

For close to a year and a half, Chabad Lubavitch's last Rebbe tried to recuperate from a series of serious strokes. On *gimmel Tammuz* 5754 (the Hebrew date corresponding to June twelfth 1994) Menachem Mendel Schneerson passed away. On that last night, the *Chassidim*'s beepers² were filled with messages to pray for the Rebbe because of his grave condition. At 1:35 a.m. the beepers read a final message: *Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echod. Baruch Dayan Emes* (Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. Blessed be the True Judge). This event was a source of upset, trauma and confusion for the Lubavitcher *Chassidim*. For several years prior to the Rebbe's death, most Lubavitchers publicised their belief that the Rebbe was *Moshiach*. His passing caused much turmoil for the *Chassidim*. Not only had their Rebbe left them, but their hopes of him revealing himself as the *Moshiach* were dashed. Worst of all, they were left "orphaned"³ with no guide them and give them support as the Rebbe had in the past.

¹ Rabbi S., Crown Heights, 16 March 1996. Rabbi S. is a high ranking, well established Lubavitcher Rabbi in the Crown Heights community.

²It was customary for the Lubavitchers to wear a beeper so that they would be informed immediately if the Rebbe was giving an unscheduled *sicha*. After the Rebbe became ill, the Lubavitchers kept their beepers on in order to receive medical updates on the Rebbe's condition.

³Almost all of the Lubavitchers who I interviewed told me that losing the Rebbe

The reactions on the part of the *Chassidim* were extreme. As the siren sounded throughout Crown Heights⁴ signalling to the Lubavitchers the death of Rebbe, the *Chassidim* assembled in the streets and filed into 770. Not knowing what else to do, they sat and prayed, recited Psalms and wept over their loss. For these Jews, what happened on *gimmel Tammuz* was unbelievable. Numb from the shock, Lubavitcher Jews from all over the world flew to New York at the earliest possibility. As the sun rose and television crews came to report the event, the Lubavitchers began preparing for the worst day of their lives.

On that Sunday morning, thousands of Jews and non-Jews came to pay their final respect to the Rebbe. *Chassidim*, admirers of the Rebbe and dignitaries all gathered in Crown Heights. Hundreds of police officers patrolled the streets and controlled traffic in order to prevent any accidents due to the over-flow of people. The sounds of weeping men and women resounded throughout Crown Heights.

Finally, the Rebbe's body was returned to 770 whereupon the burial preparations took place. The burial committee built the casket out of pieces of the Rebbe's most valued furniture. Once they completed the task of cleansing the body and placing it into the casket, the Lubavitchers were permitted to spend a final moment with their Rebbe in order to ask for forgiveness and bid him farewell. The continual flow of mourners continued without interruption until it was time to place the Rebbe into the hearse. The *Chassidim* tore their garments in accordance

was like losing both parents.

⁴Crown Heights had a siren that was used on Friday evenings to remind people of the arrival of the Sabbath.

with the laws of mourning. The entire scenario took on a surreal feeling⁵. One Lubavitcher woman described the scenario on *gimmel Tammuz* in Crown Heights in these terms:

"It was the most horrible and bizarre experience of my life. Thousand of people were in front of 770. When they brought out the casket the sun was shining and then it began to rain. When I looked up into the sky there was a rainbow. Everyone was flipping out - LITERALLY! Screams were roaring in the air and there was a feeling of insecurity, sadness, shock, confusion and dumbfoundedness."⁶

The funeral was scheduled to take place that evening at 4:00 p.m. As the Rebbe's casket was carried out of 770 and into the hearse, a sharp and bitter cry was heard in the streets. People began to run after the hearse. Others rode in their cars to the funeral. The rest of the people who attended his funeral walked in a long, silent procession to the cemetery where the Rebbe was laid to rest. By the time the *Chassidim* were permitted into the area of the Rebbe's grave, he was already buried. Weeping mourners recited their prayers barefoot⁷ and distraught. After the funeral, the mourners returned to 770 where they sat *shivah* (the physical act of mourning) for their Rebbe. Over the weeping, a cry was heard saying "our father has left us. We are orphans."⁸ Indeed, despite the fact that the Rebbe never

⁵ Anonymous, "Before During and After the Funeral," Chabad Magazine June 1994: 10-18.

⁶ Mrs. M., Montreal, 6 May 1996. Mrs. M. is a woman in her twenties. She is on *shlichus* with her husband in Montreal.

⁷ It was customary to remove one's shoes before entering the immediate area of the grave-site.

⁸ Mrs. D., Crown Heights, 16 November 1995. Mrs. D. a homemaker and the wife

sired his own children, he was considered to be the father of the entire Lubavitcher movement.

And then, away from all of the usual displays of sadness and mourning there gathered a small group of *bochrim* who began to dance and drink *l'chayims* (the Jewish version of making a toast - To Life!) while a group of women cheered them on with tambourines⁹. What was even more bizarre was these *Chassidim's* vivaciousness as they sang *Yechi Adoneimu Moreimu VeRabeimu Melech HaMoshiach Le'Olam Voed*. Though this was just a small number of Jews who behaved in this manner at the funeral, their actions was an indication of how many Lubavitchers would soon refer to their Rebbe despite his passing. After *Chassidim's* initial shock wore off, there developed two main views pertaining to the Rebbe's death. One rationale was a fierce denial that anything in the movement changed despite the fact that there was a funeral. These Lubavitchers believed that the Rebbe could still be the *Moshiach*. Indeed, some of these *Chassidim* began to preach that the Rebbe did not die at all. The other perspective was diametrically opposed to the first belief system. The remainder of the Lubavitchers believed that the Rebbe had passed away on *gimmel Tammuz* and recognised their loss. Eventually, the clash of these two ideologies created a rift in Lubavitch. The two distinct belief systems were represented by the *Meshichistim* and the anti-*Meshichistim*. But what united these two groups was the love and respect for the

of a former *shliach*.

⁹Allan Nadler 'King of King's County', *The New Republic*, 11 July 1994, pp. 16-17.

Rebbe as well as the belief that the Rebbe continued to influence and motivate the members of the movement

Soon after *gimmel Tammuz*, all of the *Chassidim* who travelled to Crown Heights for the funeral returned home. Though they were still deeply saddened and troubled by the death of the Rebbe, their daily activities resumed. Their love and respect for the Rebbe was not diminished. If anyone, the *Chassidim* began to blame themselves for the Rebbe's death (or change in living status for those who refused to refer to him as dead).

In point of fact, it was probably easiest for the *Chassidim* who were on *shlichus* to maintain the status quo vis-à-vis their relationship to the Rebbe. They functioned under the auspices of the Rebbe, but never with him side by side. The *shluchim's* instructions were dictated to them by the Rebbe while he was alive. At a very basic level, nothing was to change for them. They were able to maintain the same relationship with the Rebbe after his death. Ironically, it was the Crown Heights community who had to grow accustomed to living in a Lubavitcher community without the Rebbe. In essence, Crown Heights took on all of the elements of a *shlichus* community. After *gimmel Tammuz*, they had to learn how to relate to the Rebbe from afar.

The Lubavitchers continued to display pictures of the Rebbe and watch his videos. They continued to learn the Rebbe's works and teach in his name. The *Chassidim* continued to send their children to Lubavitcher schools and summer camps. They continued to go to Crown Heights and 770 for support from the larger community. But to pay homage to the Rebbe, they travelled to the

Montefiore where he lay buried. Many *shluchim* continued to bring their *Chassidim* and would-be *Chassidim* to Crown Heights and to the cemetery. The *Chassidim* were infused with a new energy and continued to open Chabad Houses all over the world¹⁰. However, during the first few months after the Rebbe's death, many *shluchim* remained uncertain about the *Moshiach* issue. To date, the *shluchim* who remain uncertain or uncomfortable with the *Moshiach* issue continue the Rebbe's projects and campaigns. These *shluchim*'s neglect of Lubavitch's messianism have been named the anti-*Meshichistim*.

ADDRESSING THE REBBE'S MORTALITY

Once the initial shock wore off, some groups of the *Chassidim* were able to reinforce the original proofs that stated why the Rebbe was the *Moshiach*. Because of these Lubavitchers' zealous faith in the Rebbe, they maintained that despite his death, he still had to be the *Moshiach*. "If the Rebbe promised, then the Rebbe will keep his promise. The Rebbe is beyond lying and bringing us false hopes,"¹¹ was the reasoning behind this integral belief. Ultimately, that small group of Jews who celebrated at the Rebbe's funeral were to begin a new trend of thought in the Chabad movement. Eventually, the various Chabad communities began to identify each other as *Meshichist* and anti-*Meshichist* based on their extent of their messianic beliefs.

¹⁰In my introductory chapter I mentioned the problem of lack of precise statistics. This is a problem that pertains here. Neither myself, nor any of the Lubavitcher Rabbis with whom I have spoken, nor any of my colleagues have been able to come up with an exact number of new Lubavitcher institutions.

¹¹ Mrs. D, Crown Heights, 16 November 1995.

"*Zayn gut und tracht gut* (Think good and it will be good)" the Rebbe always said. With this in mind, many of the *Chassidim* continued to say *Yechi* at public Lubavitcher gatherings and in the privacy of their homes. They continued to speak of the Rebbe in the present state rather than past tense. At the initial stages after his death, the *Chassidim* looked for sources in classical Judaism that justified the paradox of *gimmel Tammuz* and the state of the Rebbe. The most reliable source was the Rebbe's words themselves.

In 1950 when the Rebbe eulogised his father-in-law, he explained that a Rebbe is a leader that like a shepherd never abandons his flock.¹² Even though the leader had passed on, the *Freidicke* Rebbe was "even more present than during his lifetime, since his soul is freed from the physical constraints of time and space."¹³ The *Chassidim* truly believe that "when a *Zaddik* (righteous person) is *niftar* (departed), he is found in more worlds than when he was physically alive. Before he was constrained by a physical state."¹⁴

The *Meshichisti Chassidim* modelled their behaviour after the relationship between the Rebbe and the *Freidicke* Rebbe. During the Rebbe's lifetime, he always referred to the *Freidicke* Rebbe in the present tense. Almost daily, he would take the letters that his *Chassidim* had written him to the grave-site of his father-in-law in the hopes that his father-in-law would act as an intermediary

¹² Simon Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995) 117.

¹³ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Sicha of Shabbos Terumah*, New York, 5750 [1950].

¹⁴ Rabbi S., 16 March 1996.

between himself and God. A story is told of the Rebbe and his father-in-law. After the Rebbe's wife passed away in 1990, he was invited to the home of one of his *Chassidim* to conduct the Passover *Seder* (literally order, but referring to the traditional Passover meal) with them. The Rebbe politely refused the invitation. When the potential host continued to invite the Rebbe saying that it was not a good time to be alone, the Rebbe continued to refuse the invitations. After expressing his thanks for the invitation, the Rebbe explained that he would not be alone at the seder table. "Pointing with his finger he said 'I'll be here with the *Shver* [father-in-law] on the night of the seder.'"¹⁵ The *Chassidim* learned to apply this type of relationship to themselves.

In another discourse, the Rebbe devoted his time to explain the concept of Jacob the Patriarch's death. According to Talmudic texts, Jacob did not die despite the fact that he was buried, embalmed and mourned. This belief was justified because Jacob's being was encompassed by Torah. Just as nature could not lessen the holiness of the Torah, nature could not affect Jacob¹⁶.

On several occasions the Rebbe proclaimed that the *Nesi HaDor* (the leader of the generation) was the *Moshiach*¹⁷. The Rebbe explained that the word *Nesi* was really an acronym for *Netzutzei shel Yaacov Avimu* (the sparks of

¹⁵ Rabbi Chesed Halberstam, "I'm Not Alone, I'm With My father-in-law," Bais Moshiach 15 March 1996: 72-73.

¹⁶ Likkutei Sichos, Shabbos VaYechi, 5751 [1991].

¹⁷ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "Shabbos Parshas VaYera, 18 Cheshvan 5752 [18 October 1992]," Sefer HaSichot, Kehot: 95. (This is one of the earliest references).

Jacob our Patriarch)¹⁸. A connection was made by the *Chassidim* between these discourses. If the Rebbe was the *Nesi HaDor* (and clearly, the *Chassidim* held the Rebbe in this high esteem), then he was also the *Moshiach*. And because the Rebbe was the *Nesi*, he possessed those same characteristics as Jacob did, namely, that he could not die. The publicising of this concept created heated debates within the Chabad community. Some Lubavitchers thought that it was important to put a stop to the spreading of these beliefs. They believed that these theories could do harm to the movement and to other Lubavitchers who might be discouraged from maintaining their connection to Lubavitch and to Orthodox Judaism in general. One Lubavitch rabbi commented:

Some Lubavitchers see this behaviour as extreme. They believe that they are bringing disgrace to the Rebbe's name. "Not only was it our fault that he died, because we were not worthy of having him reveal himself to us as the *Moshiach*, but now we're making it worse because Jews all over the world are laughing at us and ridiculing the Rebbe." These Lubavitchers (who later became known as the anti-Meshichistim) feared that they would lose some of their *ba'alei teshuvah* because of the messianic fervour. But the *Meshichistim* have countered this belief. "Generally speaking, if I tell you it didn't affect anyone, I'd be lying to you. But I don't know anybody who lost their faith or converted out of *Yiddishkayt* [Judaism]. No one shaved their beard, stopped putting *t'fillin*, or took off their *shytl* [wig]... To say that there aren't problems that people have to deal with, *bin eech kein mentsh nit* [I am not human]. We're not pure *neshomo* [soul]."¹⁹

¹⁸ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichos* (Brooklyn, New York: Kehot, 1977) 1051. The Rebbe included this concept in footnote # 18 when he referred to *Sefer Kehillat Yaakov*.

¹⁹ William Shaffir, "When Prophecy Is Not Validated," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* Volume 37: No. 2 (December 1995): 125.

Reinforcing this opinion, another Rabbi noted that most "interesting about this opposition is that those who believed that the Rebbe was *Moshiach* wholeheartedly before *gimmel Tammuz* are going on and still believing that the Rebbe is *Moshiach*. But those who doubted that the Rebbe was *Moshiach* before *gimmel Tammuz*, they are the ones that now lack direction and have lifeless attitudes."²⁰

However, there has been an ongoing debate within the Lubavitcher community on whether or not to continue with this *Moshiach* campaign. This debate is based largely on a statement that the Rebbe made in a letter to a *shliach* in South Africa asserting that all of their communities campaigns should be publicised *b'oyfen HaMiskabel* (in a manner that will be acceptable for everyone)²¹. Fearful of being rejected and ridiculed for actions that could be deemed extreme by their own Lubavitcher communities and by the mainstream Jewish community, some Lubavitcher *shluchim* have opted for a toned down version of Lubavitch's messianism. Keeping with the way in which Lubavitch functioned prior to the escalation of their messianic fervour, these Lubavitchers maintain that emphasising the importance of the *mitzvos* to the general Jewish population is more effective and less confrontational than emphasising the identity of the *Moshiach's* identity.

²⁰Rabbi M, Crown Heights, 16 March 1996. Rabbi M. is a scholar and lecturer who teaches in Lubavitch educational centres and lectures adult groups.

²¹ Rabbi Chaim Cohen (adapted from one of his lectures), "Moshiach? Unraveling the Web of Confusion," Chabad Magazine 20 March, 1996: 14-17.

Closely related to the topic of the Rebbe's immortality is the question of which appendixes should be added to the Rebbe's name. Before *gimmel Tammuz*, the Rebbe was always referred to as "the Rebbe *Shlitah*". *Shlitah* is a Hebrew acronym for *SheYichyeh LeYamim Tovim Arukim* (He should live a long and good life). This is an acronym that was commonly appended onto the names of great Jewish scholars. However, after *gimmel Tammuz* most of the *Chassidim* dropped the word *Shlitah* and continued to refer to him only as "the Rebbe". A small portion of the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* continue to refer to the Rebbe as "the Rebbe *Shlitah*" because they believe that the Rebbe is indeed still alive. But many *Chassidim* were uncomfortable with their new way of referring to the Rebbe. It did not seem respectful to the Rebbe to discuss him without giving him any kind of "status".

The *Chassidim* debated the issue further. Some said that the title "Rebbe" was status enough because there could be no higher state of being than being a Rebbe. Others appended the letters *Zatzal* when referring to the Rebbe. *Zatzal* is the Hebrew acronym for *Zecher Tzaddik Livrachah* (this righteous person's memory should be a blessing). *Zatzal* is commonly linked to the names of all righteous men after their deaths. Regardless of their belief of whether or not the Rebbe was alive or dead, most of the *Chassidim* did not like referring to the Rebbe in these final terms. The term *Zatzal* continually reminded them of their loss, a reality that needed no further reminder. Eventually, this appendix was replaced with *ZY"AY* which is the Hebrew acronym for *Zechuto Yagen Aleimu* (His merit should protect us). This appendix appeased many of the *Chassidim*. *ZY"AY*

still entrusted the Rebbe with the power to oversee and protect his *Chassidim*. But for a large segment of the *Chassidim* (specifically the *Meshichistim*), they still did not feel that this appendix described the Rebbe's full potential in his new state of being. Thus, the most commonly used appendix that was added on to "the Rebbe" were the letters *MH"M*. *MH"M* is the Hebrew acronym *Melech HaMoshiach* (King Messiah). It has become very popular for Lubavitchers append this term to "the Rebbe" when they use his name in print, at public functions, or even during the course of conversation.

A more sensitive issue for Lubavitchers vis-à-vis their Rebbe is how to discuss the subject of his death. On the day of his passing, no Lubavitcher was able to utter the word "death". Even as they were preparing for the funeral the Rebbe's secretary informed everyone planning to attend the funeral that they would "leave 770 at 4:00"²² because expressing the word *levaya* was too difficult. There are some Lubavitchers who do not refer to his passing at all. When others discuss the day of the Rebbe's death, they allude to it as *gimmel Tammuz*. The remainder of the Lubavitchers say that the Rebbe was *nistalek* (disappeared) or refer to his death as the *histalkus* (disappearance). No Lubavitchers describe the Rebbe as "dead", rather, as someone who is no longer there.

In the past, all Lubavitchers joined in with singing of *Yechi Adoneimu Moreimu VeRabeimu*. It was a phrase that was taught to youngsters in Lubavitcher schools and summer camps. It was also chanted in Chabad synagogues around the

²² Anonymous, "Before, During and After the Funeral," *Chabad Magazine* June 1994: 11.

world. Later on, the phrase *Melech HaMoshiach Le'Olam Vo'ed* was appended. The new version of *Yechi* was sung by many Lubavitchers with an additional liveliness. The *Chassidim* felt that the Rebbe was encouraging repetition of these words when he commented that the declaration of *Yechi* "confers an increase of life and vitality on the king, and brings about the resurrection"²³. Many Lubavitchers assumed that when the Rebbe spoke in messianic term, he always referred to himself.

Immediately after the Rebbe passed away, most Lubavitchers stopped reciting this phrase. Once the *Chassidim* recovered from the initial shock, some returned to chanting *Yechi*. Throughout the Chabad movement there ensued a heated debate over whether or not to continue the repetition of this phrase. Some of the *Chassidim* felt that the public declaration of *Yechi* would alienate Lubavitchers from the rest of the Jewish community. One Lubavitcher Rabbi commented:

Right now, I don't believe in saying *Yechi*. What do they think? That they need to say this to have the Rebbe resurrected? That by saying *Yechi* they will infuse the Rebbe with a life force? *Gezuntahait* [Bless them]! *Halachically* [according to the Jewish legal system] it is sound. It's just not normative. Let them say it in their basements, or add it in their *shmoneh esreh* [a silent prayer recited thrice daily]. I don't understand... The most important prayer that we *daven* [pray] is *shmoneh esreh* and that we are taught to say quietly and while standing still. If they think it is so important to say *Yechi* as a form of prayer, then let them say it quietly to themselves rather than scream it in the streets.²⁴

²³ Anonymous, "Dictionary Corner," *Bais Moshiah* 29 December 1995: 52.

²⁴ Rabbi E. from Toronto, 4 February 1996. Rabbi E. is a high ranking Rabbi in

Conversely, there are many vocal *Chassidim* who do chant *Yechi* at every time an opportunity presents itself. Those Lubavitchers who sang *Yechi* with a strong enthusiasm before the Rebbe passed away have been able to cope with his passing. Regardless of whether or not the Rebbe is there, they are still serving him. By saying *Yechi*, they are strengthening the Rebbe's instructions and beliefs. They recite it at public gatherings. At night, before they go to bed they recite it with their children. Moreover, they recite it during their prayers. On Friday nights, various Lubavitcher synagogues will break out into songs of *Yechi*. When they do, it infuses the *Chassidim* with an energy and reminds them of the days when the Rebbe was physically with them. One woman who observed the Lubavitchers during their Friday night prayers noted:

I was amazed by the whole situation. There I stood on Friday night in 770. It was my first time there since the Rebbe passed away. After they finished singing *Lecha Dohdi* [a prayer that welcomes the Sabbath] they started to sing *Yechi* and gather to dance. It was just like when the Rebbe was alive. Before the Rebbe would come into *shul* [synagogue] the *Chassidim* would just sit, some would talk but there was no real concentration on prayers. Whenever the Rebbe would walk into *shul* they would all of a sudden become attentive. The same thing here. It's as though when they sang *Yechi* they were welcoming the Rebbe back into *shul*.²⁵

Finally, there were times that *Yechi* was recited as a form of prayer. One Lubavitcher publication cites a story where a *shliach* from overseas was visiting

Toronto, though not on official *shlichus*.

²⁵ Ms. L, Toronto, 18 March 1996.

New York and had purchased many holy books. At the airport, he suddenly got very nervous because his luggage was very overweight and he would have to pay a fine. His mother, sensing how anxious he was suggested that he should access the Rebbe's help simply by saying *Yechi*. As he reached the ticket counter the airline worker told the *shliach* not to bother putting his luggage on the scale because it was out of order.²⁶

COMMUNICATING WITH THE REBBE

"The Rebbe is with us.
People go to the *ohel*.
We have the *Igros*.
The Rebbe answers us."²⁷

Visiting the Rebbe's Grave

Groups of *Chassidim* and friends of the Rebbe have continued to visit him at the grave-site. In order to accommodate the throngs of visitors, Lubavitch purchased the house adjacent to the cemetery. Each room in this house had its own special function. In the first room of the house there was no furniture except for several tables covered with paper and pencils. These were to accommodate the visitors of the Rebbe who wished to communicate their wishes to him. Just as in the past they would have written a letter and sent it off to 770, here they could write of their concerns and hand them directly to the Rebbe. The next room was

²⁶ Mrs. Y. Engel, "The Rebbe Shlita After Gimmel Tammuz," **Bais Moshiach** 8 March 1996: 73.

²⁷ Rabbi S, Crown Heights, 16 March 1996.

somewhat similar to the first. There too lay tables with papers and pencils strewn all about them, but in the corner of the room stood a television that played a continuous recording of the Rebbe handing out dollars blessing all those who came before him. This is to signify that the Rebbe's blessings' effect last forever. This video's purpose also had a calming effect on those who were still deeply depressed over the Rebbe's passing and who could not come to terms with his death. Because that video signified that the Rebbe would always remain an ever-present fixture in their lives. In the house there was a small room that functioned as an office for the administrators of the Chabad movement. Finally, there was a kitchen that provided a sink for the traditional washing of the hands that is associated with going into a cemetery. From the kitchen there was a door that led out directly to the cemetery and the Rebbe's grave-site. The Rebbe was laid to rest next to his father-in-law in a four-walled roofless structure, also known as the *ohel* (literally tent).

In January 1996, a group of Chabad Houses on various college campuses gathered to meet in Crown Heights. The focus of that week-end was studying the Rebbe's works. At the end of the trip, the group was taken to the cemetery. On the bus ride to the Montefiore cemetery they were given explicit instructions by a non-Lubavitcher woman who had already made trips to the cemetery on her previous visits to New York.

OK. You may not like what we are about to do, but it will have a lasting effect on your life. After the last time I came here [referring to the ohel], I feel like my life has changed forever. Last time I came, just like everyone else in the group I wrote a letter to the Rebbe. I did not know what I should write about though. It

seemed like all of my problems were too trivial to write to the Rebbe about. I thought to myself 'hey! I'm a smart girl and I don't lack any material goods.' And then it dawned on me what I should write for. And so I wrote to the Rebbe that my relationship with my parents was not always so good. We didn't fight much, but there was also never any real display of affection between us. I wrote to the Rebbe that I felt as though I lacked this. And you know what? The next day my mother called me up just to tell me that she loves me. Imagine that! This was something that she had never done before.

Before you visit the face of the grave-site, you will pass through the kitchen where you will perform the ritual of washing your hands six times, three times on each hand alternating between the two, starting on the right hand. Then you will go into the cemetery, but before you enter the four-walled structure, you have to take your shoes off²⁸. Then you go in and you leave your letter behind and you pray. After, you will come back in to the kitchen and wash your hands again."²⁹

Writing Letters to the Rebbe

As was stated in the previous chapter, the most common way to communicate a message to the Rebbe was to write it in to him at 770. Because the *Chassidim* believe that the Rebbe is still available to answer questions, they continue to write letters to him with their requests, but instead of sending them to 770, the letters are faxed to the small office in the house adjacent to the cemetery. More commonly, the *Chassidim* write letters to the Rebbe and place them in one of the volumes of the *Sefer Igros HaKodesh*. These volumes are a compilation of

²⁸It was never clarified to me why the hands needed to be washed and the shoes taken off before entering the *ohel*. Usually, these are acts that are associated with entering Holy sites, but anything that is physically connected to death is automatically impure.

²⁹ Ms. R, New York, 17 March 1996. Ms. R. is a college student in the United States. She does not consider herself to be a Lubavitcher, but she is a strong admirer of the Rebbe.

published letters that the Rebbe wrote in response to the letters that his *Chassidim* wrote to him. The *Chassidim* would write their requests and place them into a volume of the *Igros* where they would hope that the page that was turned to would address their concern. A Lubavitcher avid believer in this practice once stated that "if a person is a true *shliach*, the Rebbe still answers him"³⁰. Indeed, there have been a number of *Chassidim* who claim to have received direct answers to their queries. But, it should be noted that not all *Chassidim* who believe that the Rebbe still maintains the potential of revealing himself as the Messiah write into the *Igros*. "It's not for me," commented one Lubavitcher woman. "Whether or not I believe that the Rebbe could still be the *Moshiach* has nothing to do with how I relate to him now. This is just too spiritual for me. If I want to go and pray at the Ohel, I will. Otherwise, I have to get used to addressing all of my concerns directly to God."³¹

The *Chassidim* believe that by visiting the Rebbe's grave and writing to him in the *Igros* that they are in fact generating his blessings. In addition to these actions, some of the *Chassidim* maintain spiritual contact with the Rebbe and induce his blessings by keeping personal articles that are associated with him nearby. Some of these items include photographs of the Rebbe, dollar bills, letters from him, *lekach* and *kos shel Brachah*. After the Rebbe passed away, another custom that developed among some of the *Chassidim* was the distribution of the

³⁰ Mrs. N., Montreal, 12 October, 1995. Mrs. N. is a Lubavitcher adult educator.

³¹ Mrs. R., Toronto, 2 July 1996.

Rebbe's *mikveh* water. The *mikveh* is a pool of water that is used for ritual purification. Men and women use the *mikveh* to fulfil their respective customary and legal obligations. The Rebbe used to attend the *mikveh* several times a week. Similarly to the distribution of the *lekach* and the *kos shel Brachah*, some Lubavitchers have also collected the water from the Rebbe's *mikveh* and distributed among themselves. They believe that by drinking this water they are invoking the Rebbe's blessings because this water was the substance that purified him almost daily.

CHABAD'S NEXT GENERATION

There is one belief that has caused no debate within Lubavitch since the death of the Rebbe namely, the question of a successor. Most Lubavitchers agree that there will never be a successor to continue Menachem Mendel's work. All of the *Chassidim* were very close to the Rebbe and to try to transfer that relationship would be impossible at this point. One Lubavitcher Rabbi in Toronto commented that "at this point there cannot be a replacement for our Rebbe for two reasons. Firstly, there is no one who is qualified enough to continue the Rebbe's work on his own. Second, Lubavitchers at this point would not be willing to accept the authority of anyone but the Rebbe. They just wouldn't."³² Another Toronto Rabbi added that "it's not a question of loyalty. It's a question of love. You either love the Rebbe, or you don't, but if you don't, you were never a Chassid to begin

³²Rabbi D. Toronto, 14 January 1996. Rabbi D. is a high ranking Rabbi in the Lubavitcher community in Toronto.

with, and if you do, then there is no way that you will accept someone else sitting in the same spot and giving us instructions. Not that we don't respect great learned Rabbis, of course we do. It's just that he wouldn't be *our* Rebbe."³³

But on a different level, many Lubavitchers have given reasons based on the Rebbe's *sichas* because "there are things we know and things we don't know, but everything we believe comes from the Rebbe's *sichas* themselves"³⁴. Because the Rebbe did not specify a successor in his will, the *Chassidim* understood this to mean that there could not be a successor. Of course, the *Chassidim* also look to the *sichas* from the past that reinforce this belief. A week after the Rebbe's wife passed away, during his weekly talk he hinted towards his own mortality. He indicated that in anticipation of such a scenario, the community members of Crown Heights should vote for themselves a *beis din* to answer their *shaylos* (questions)³⁵. Devoted Lubavitchers took this to mean that there should never be one single person to be responsible for the community as the Rebbe was. No one was to take his place.

But the lack of a successor has created a different set of problems for the Lubavitchers, namely, how to keep the next generation involved. The younger children who never had the opportunity to meet the Rebbe at dollars, or hear him speak in person are posed with the threat of losing the essence of what the older

³³ Rabbi E, Toronto, 4 February 1996.

³⁴ Rabbi M., Crown Heights, 16 March, 1996.

³⁵ Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "Shabbos Parshas Terumah, 2 Adar 5758 [20 February 1988]," *Sefer HaSichot*, Kehot ed.: 87.

generation is fighting so hard to keep alive. Thus, the older generation has been putting much more emphasis on providing their children with a full Lubavitcher education. The children watch videos of the Rebbe. They have numerous pictures of the Rebbe all over their bedroom. Their parents make sure to speak of the Rebbe at every available opportunity, whether it is telling of their experiences with him or relaying his *divrei Torah*. For those families who say *Yechi*, they make sure to recite it with their children every night before going to bed when the night-time prayer *Shema* is recited. However, there are a number of Lubavitchers who are not phased by this question. "What next generation?" a Lubavitcher mother asked. "The Rebbe promised that he was going to be the *Moshiach* and that he was coming now. I cannot relate to long term goals. OK. So maybe my four-year-old does not remember the Rebbe, but it does not matter, because the Rebbe is coming back soon enough."³⁶

CONCLUSION

Even though the Lubavitchers continue to debate each other in private and at times in public vis-à-vis the messianic issue, there is no doubt that they all continue to hold the Rebbe in high esteem. Perhaps the one day a year that causes them to look inwards and share a solemn moment together is *gimmel Tammuz*, the anniversary of the Rebbe's death. As a researcher I looked forward to this day so that I could observe how the Chassidim, both the Meshichistim and the anti-Meshichistim confronted this day.

³⁶Mrs. C., Montreal, 3 April Toronto. Mrs. C. is on *shlichus* in Montreal with her husband.

This past year on *gimmel Tammuz* I spent the day minding my brother's-in-law and sister's grocery store located in the Chabad neighbourhood of Montreal. I knew it would be a quiet day because so many of the usual customers (and the owners) went to New York to visit the Rebbe at the *ohel*. I had much work to do for this project and so brought reading material to the store. I first read that week's edition of the Canadian Jewish News where I noticed that the Perspectives section was dedicated to the memory of Menachem Mendel Schneerson in commemoration of his *histalkus*. It included a tribute to his past deeds and concluded with a plea for his return. In the middle of the article was a large black and white photograph of the Rebbe.

As I was finished reading the article, a woman whom I knew to be very *Meshichist* walked into the store and made a comment about my slacking off on the job. She wore a pin on her blouse that was shaped like a tambourine. On this pin the words *Yechi HaMelech* were engraved. As she passed by the counter she noticed the article and pointed to the picture and shouted *Yechi Adoneimu Moreimu VeRabbenu Melech HaMoshiach Le'Olam Vo'ed!* I nodded and smiled.

As she picked up her groceries, she asked me if my brother-in-law had gone to New York. I answered her that he had taken the trip that morning. I then asked her why she was not in New York. She looked at me, sighed, and said "the *Ribono shel Olam* [God] puts us in certain places at certain times". Then she began to question me about the article. "Who wrote it? Are they writing of the Rebbe in the past tense?" she wanted to know. I told her the author's name. Again she sighed. She told me that he was not very *Meshichist*. I also told her

that in the article the author included a passage to the Rebbe telling him how much his presence is missed.

We began to discuss the various *sichas* "clear and explicit directions", as she called them that pertain to the Jewish people's redemption. She was impressed by my thorough knowledge of the texts. I informed her that I was in the process of completing this project "the Chabad movement after *gimmel Tammuz*". She asked me what my point of view was. I told her that I was examining the need and the ability of the *Chassidim* to keep the Rebbe alive. She sternly corrected me. "Not keeping him alive. He is alive." She told me not to be afraid to use strong language. She is of the belief that everyone knows that the Rebbe is alive, but that some are afraid to publicly acknowledge this notion.

I thanked her for her input and as she walked out of the store she turned to me and said "you see? I told you that it was *bashert* [God's will] that you should be here today and not Yossi [my brother-in-law] - and of all days, *gimmel Tammuz*." She handed me some *Meshichist* literature and assured me that we had brought the *Geulah* (redemption) one step closer.

In some ways this day turned out to be very anti-climactic. All year I had been observing the variations of the messianic fervour among the Lubavitcher *Chassidim*. I expected for some rally or other important event to take place on this day. With the exception of numerous Lubavitchers flocking to New York, nothing notable happened. Of course, this is telling in itself. Because no matter how much or how little the Lubavitcher *Chassidim* believe that the Rebbe is alive and/or present, *gimmel Tammuz* has become a day of retrospect when every

Chassid examines his and her deeds and wonders why the Messiah has not come yet. But more importantly every single Lubavitcher questions why the Rebbe no longer sits in 770 where they can all visit with him. Despite all of their compensations for the Rebbe and their ability to keep him alive in their homes and community centres, every Lubavitcher continues to feel the void in his or her life since the death of the Rebbe.

CONCLUSION

The centrality of the Rebbe in Chabad has always been a vital part of the Lubavitch's existence. Immediately after the Rebbe inherited his father's-in-law position he set out to establish and develop a close relationship to his *Chassidim*. After forty years of leading the movement, it is clear that he succeeded in this endeavour. Indeed, the Rebbe was able to accomplish even more than that. He was able to capture the hearts of many of the world's Jews and non-Jews. His success can be attributed to a variety of reasons.

The Rebbe was a charismatic leader who spent most of his time tending to the needs of the *Chassidim*. For the first three decades of his reign, he spent endless hours answering questions and finding solutions to various problems for anyone who wanted to meet with him on an individual basis. Later, when these private audiences were limited to special cases, Menachem Mendel would set aside every Sunday in order to maintain close contact with those individuals who needed to meet with him.

But apart from his close ties to Jews in Crown Heights, he was able to keep the lines of communication with those Jews that he sent to far off places in order to conduct outreach work. He became the most visible Rebbe in history even though most of his followers had very limited physical contact with him. After 1994 when the Rebbe passed away, this worked to the emissaries' advantage. For many years they were used to seeing the Rebbe on video tape or by glancing at his pictures. All of the children who attended Lubavitcher institutions were told many stories describing the Rebbe's greatness. When the Rebbe passed away, the

entire Lubavitch world community suffered immensely. And even though their loss was great, no community suffered as much as the Crown Heights community did. It was the Crown Heights community that had to make the largest adjustment. The Lubavitchers in Crown Heights had to learn from the *shlichus* communities of how to maintain close ties with the Rebbe without the Rebbe's direct presence.

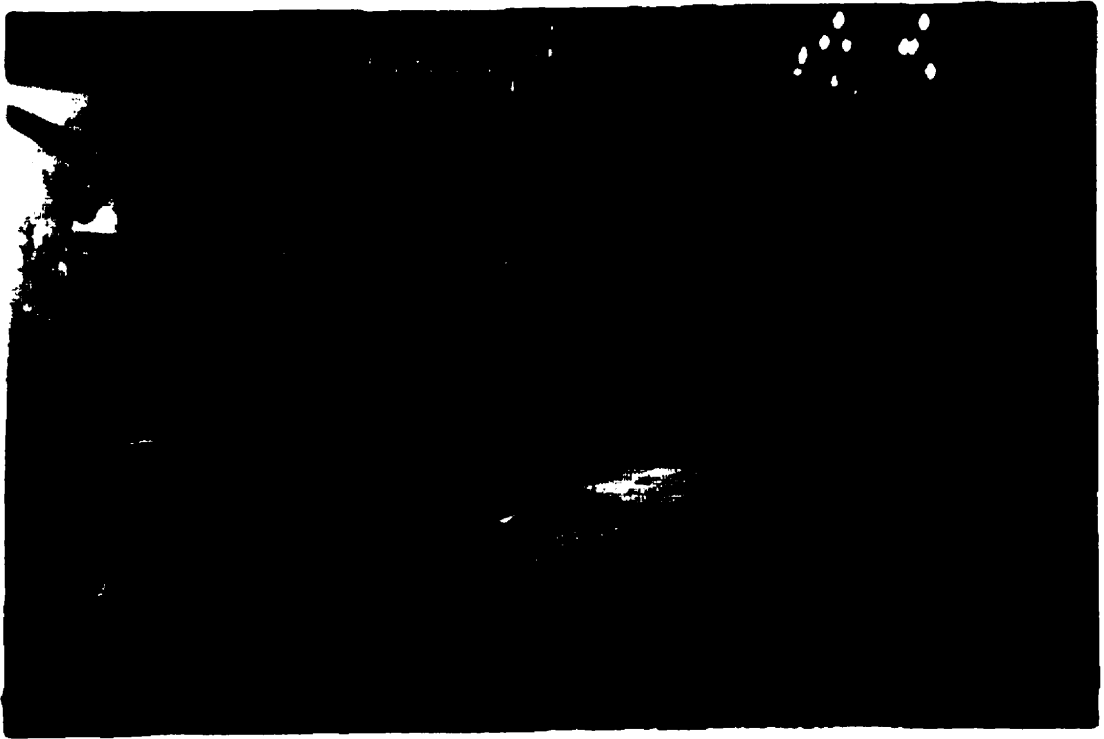
Over the years, many *ba'alei teshuvah* moved into Crown Heights to be near the Rebbe. Other families who had been there for several generations stayed for those same reasons despite the physical deterioration of the city. At every available opportunity these residents of Crown Heights would go to 770 to listen the Rebbe speak or just to watch him from afar. They prided themselves on living so close to their beloved *Zaddik*. When they lost him, they had to find some way to compensate for the gap in their lives. For mainstream Lubavitchers, compensating this loss meant increasing the number of lessons taught in the name of the Rebbe, reinforcing the Rebbe's lessons in young children and increasing the number of visual aides in order to keep the Rebbe's presence viable. For the more extreme cases, compensating for the Rebbe's death meant appointing him to a lifelong position, namely that of *Moshiach*. In all of these cases, and in all of the cities where there was a Chabad House, maintaining the presence of the Rebbe was of utmost importance.

Appointing a successor was not a viable alternative to any of the *Chassidim*. Rather, Crown Heights had to take lessons from the outside Lubavitcher communities who for years had satisfied their need to see the Rebbe

with previously recorded artefacts. But what the Crown Heights community did - rather did not do - was even more significant. They all stayed in Crown Heights to revel in the memories of the not-so-distant past.

And while the rest of the world pondered the fate of this community that was so attached to their leader, the Lubavitchers had already decided the outcome of their futures. There would be no next Rebbe. The Lubavitchers would do everything that they could to keep the Rebbe alive for themselves and for their children. The *Chassidim* were able to transform the Rebbe from a physical leader with limited powers to a leader of a spiritual nature with unlimited and eternal powers. Lubavitchers have made it a priority to insure that future generations, including Lubavitchers and non-Lubavitchers, Jews and non-Jews can and will know the Rebbe.

APPENDIX A:



The author and the Rebbe.

Photograph taken 1 March, 1992.

APPENDIX B: THE SURVEY

This questionnaire is to help me to establish if there are diverging patterns within the Lubavitch community vis-à-vis age, and community involvement in understanding *inyanei Mashiach*. Please answer all of the questions as honestly as possible. All questionnaires will remain anonymous unless otherwise specified. The data accumulated from this survey is for academic research purposes only. (You may answer in Hebrew or English.)

Please fill in the spaces appropriately:

Male _____ Female _____

Age _____ Marital status _____

City _____

Are you a Lubavitcher? Yes _____ No _____ Affiliated _____

Are you "frum from birth"? Yes _____ No _____

If you not, for how long have you been a "Baal/as Teshuvah"? _____

I have
(Please include dates)

attended:

been employed at:

Chabad summer camps

Chabad day schools

Chabad Yeshivah/Seminary

Chabad Houses

Chabad synagogues

Chabad Supplementary Schools

I read the following Lubavitch publications:

Bais Moshiach

Chabad Magazine

Kfar Chabad

N'shei Chabad Newsletter

Other _____

My contact with the Rebbe has included (please specify number of times):

-receiving dollars/blessings _____

-*yeichidus* _____

-going to *farbrengen* _____

-watching videos of the Rebbe _____

-writing letters to the Rebbe (before Gimmel Tammuz) _____

-writing in the *igros ha-kodesh* (after Gimmel Tammuz) _____

-praying at the *Ohel* _____

Please answer the following questions:

In your own words, please describe the event of Gimmel Tammuz, 5752 _____

In the Chabad community, the terms *Meshichist* and *anti-Meshichist* are often used. What do these terms mean?

Meshichist:

Anti-Meshichist

Do you believe there could be a next Rebbe? Explain.

Do you believe that the Rebbe is Mashiach? Explain.

What title to you add to the Rebbe's name? Why?

Z"l (Of Blessed Memory)

M"hm (Melech Ha-Mashiach)

neither

Do you say <i>Yechi</i> at:	Yes	No
Home	_____	_____
In private	_____	_____
School	_____	_____
Synagogue	_____	_____
Social gatherings	_____	_____
Other _____	_____	_____
Not at all	_____	

Why do you, or don't you say *Yechi*?

I have been educated in *inyanei Mashiach* (topics related to Mashiach) at:

home _____

school _____

synagogue _____

shiurim _____

Social gatherings _____

Other _____

When discussing *inyanei Mashiach* at the following places I have experienced:

	support	tension
home	_____	_____

school _____

synagogue _____

shiurim _____

Other _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: _____

Date: _____

If you are interested in providing a personal interview, please fill in your name and number

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

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