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ORTHODOXY, THEN AND NOW

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Posted Mar 18 2009

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Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn was the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (widely known as the Friediker - Yiddish for "previous" - Rebbe). He served in that position for 30 years, from 1920 until his passing on *Shabbos* morning, January 28, 1950. He was buried at Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, New York.



Recently, someone sent me a link to a video clip of his *Ievaya* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9RSdGG6Y3E). From the clip one can see a number of external differences between Orthodoxy circa 1950 and Orthodoxy today.

First, most of the men in the crowd are wearing hats and coats that are not black. Indeed, gray seems to have been the favored color for men's hats at the time.

Second, the majority of the men shown are clean shaven.

Third, men and women are standing together in the crowd. Apparently, no separation of the sexes was imposed upon those gathered to give the Rebbe a final tribute.

In short, this assemblage does not look anything like what one would see today at the funeral of a well-known rebbe or *rosh yeshiva*.

Orthodox Judaism was indeed different in 1950.

Yeshiva education was just beginning to expand, and a large number of elementary yeshiva graduates went on to public high school. Fewer went on to study in a *bais medrash* after high school, and fewer still entered *kollel*. The average level of Torah knowledge among *baalei batim* was nowhere near as high as it is today.

A relatively small percentage of women covered their hair. Mixed dancing was still part of the social life of many Orthodox shuls. There was little separation of the sexes, so boys and girls more often than not interacted with each other at social gatherings. The dating system so prevalent in our day was not followed by most young Orthodox men and women. (Some might argue that this was a plus.)

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It was indeed a very different Orthodox world.

Today we can point to many improvements. These include, but are certainly not limited to, a probably unprecedented commitment to and level of Torah study on the part of Orthodox young people; a considerably higher level of *tzinius* - modesty - in many circles; a sharp increase in daily synagogue attendance; stricter

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kashrus standards, including the use of *chalav Yisrael* products, by many; a proliferation of *chesed* organizations; a more stringent approach to *shmiras Shabbos* by those who consider themselves Orthodox; and a surprising number of *Mincha minyanim* - a phenomenon that hardly existed years ago - in some cities.

Each of us can undoubtedly add more items to this list. But there's no denying the fact that today, more careful attention is given to the performance of *mitzvos* - some of which were often neglected in the fifties.

* * *

The above is indeed good news for Orthodoxy. Still, there are those who feel there is much missing from today's Orthodoxy. They decry what they believe is an unhealthy focus on appearances and *chumros* at the expense of good *middos* and *ehrllichkeit*.

Many who project the image of being very *frum* seem at the same time to be overly concerned with materialism.

True, more women cover their hair today, but some seem to think nothing of spending a small fortune on a *shaitel*. Only the finest name-brand apparel will do for many families. It is not uncommon to see an observant man driving a car that costs as much as some people make in a year.

Emphasis on form at the expense of substance seems to be in vogue; image is all important to far too many. Some of our children have come to think that this emphasis on externalities is the acid test of religious observance.

A friend of mine once told me that after his children had viewed the wedding album of his parents, they asked, "Abba, were *Bobby* and *Zaidy* Jewish when they got married?"

There are other real differences between the nature of Orthodoxy in the 1950s and Orthodoxy today.

Chillul Hashem - desecration of God's name - has become all too prevalent. I cringe whenever I see the media report on so-called *frum* Jews in an unflattering light. I am not implying that there was no wrongdoing years ago. There certainly was.

Nonetheless, it seems that what has transpired with far too much regularity in recent years has resulted in a most unflattering light being trained on Orthodox Jews.

In his essay "*Chillul Hashem*," first published in 1975 in the periodical *Mitteilungen* and reprinted on pages 213 to 216 of *Selected Writings* (C.I.S. Publications, 1988), Rav Shimon Schwab, *zt"l*, wrote:

The second sentence of *Sh'ma Yisroel* begins with the command: "You shall love Hashem," which is interpreted by our Sages: "Let the name of Hashem become beloved through you." In other words, we are supposed to lead the kind of exemplary life which would contribute to the universal adoration of [Hashem] and which would, in turn, enhance the glory and lustre of the Torah, adding respect for the dignity of the Jewish people as a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation.

The very opposite of the sanctification of the Name as condemned by the Prophet with the scathing words (*Yechezkel* 36): "They came to the nations and desecrated my Holy Name, so that one said to them, 'is this the people of [Hashem] who came from His land?'"

Every form of *Chillul Hashem* lowers the awareness of the Divine Presence in the world. But if the desecrator happens to be a professed Torah observer or, even worse, a so-called scholar of the Torah, then the *Chillul Hashem* not only weakens the respect for Torah on one hand, but strengthens on the other hand the defiance of the non-observer and adds fuel to the scoffers, fanning the fires of religious insurrection all around. *Chillul Hashem* is

responsible, directly or indirectly, for the increase of frivolity, heresy and licentiousness in the world.

* * *

Respect for one's elders seems to have become a thing of the past for many young people. One even encounters so-called *frum* adults who appear to have never learned that *derech erez* toward one's fellow man and woman should be part and parcel of one's dealings with others.

The Torah commands us to honor our parents, our older siblings and older people in general. Indeed, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch pointed out that honoring parents is one of the foundation stones of *Yahadus*, because our basis for accepting the truth of the Torah is something that is passed on from one generation to the next.

When I was growing up (I was born in 1941), it was made very clear to me that you never called an adult by his or her first name. It was always "Mr." or "Mrs." or "Miss" or "Aunt" or "Uncle." Calling an older person by his or her first name would instantly result in a rebuke from my parents.

Today I often hear children call their adult aunts or uncles by their first names. Some years ago one of my sons had a classmate over for *Shabbos*. (The boys were 10 years old at the time.) After *Shabbos* I asked our guest what he was going to do now, since his parents had gone away. He replied, "I am going to call Shloime. He will pick me up." I asked, "Who is Shloime?" The boy replied, "My uncle." I was taken aback at how this young man thought nothing of calling his uncle, who was, of course, an adult, by his first name.

I have asked people in their twenties and thirties and even older why they let themselves be called by their first names. They reply, "Being called 'Uncle' (or 'Aunt') makes me feel old." They do not seem to realize that they are doing a disservice to their nieces and nephews. Allowing them to address older people by their first names fosters the idea that everyone is on an equal level. This is not true. The Torah tells us that age deserves respect, and children have to be made aware of this as often as possible.

And then there are the youngsters who push ahead of me when I am about to leave shul. Often I put my hand on the shoulder of such a fellow and say to him, somewhat facetiously, "Sir! I believe that I am a bit older than you are!" More often than not the young man has no idea what I am talking about.

I was taught that you always let an older person go through a door before you. It was just one more part of practicing *derech erez*, but it seems to have been lost in many circles today.

Unfortunately, lack of *derech erez* is widespread, and it evidences itself in the way all too many children and youngsters behave in yeshiva and Bais Yaakov. Fifty years ago the overwhelming majority of Orthodox parents made it very clear to their children that a key ingredient in going to yeshiva was behaving properly and treating the teachers with respect. Why is this not also the case today?

* * *

Could it be that we have become lost in the forest for the trees? While we may be outwardly more observant than people were a generation or two ago, some would maintain that our grandparents embraced far more *menschlichkeit* and *ehrllichkeit* than we see today. Their *Yiddishkeit* seems to have been simpler and more to the point than ours often is.

Our grandparents were able to transmit their *Yiddishkeit* in a fairly simple fashion. One might summarize their teachings as follows: Be a mensch, learn Torah, and make the most of every minute of every day. Keep in mind that people are watching you and they will judge *Yiddishkeit* by how you behave, so make sure that whatever you do is viewed as a *kiddush Hashem* - a sanctification of God's name. Be sure to become self-sufficient through honest labor and contribute to the community at large. And, above all, be *ehrllich* in all of your dealings with others.

This message was clear and straightforward, and it led to the rebuilding of *Yiddishkeit* after the terrible losses that we experienced during the Holocaust. The guidance our grandparents gave their children kept them from the confusing blend of *halacha*, *minhag*, *chumrah* and common practice that has left too many today groping for an understanding of what is important and what is not. There were no mixed messages about what they taught the next generation, because they lived these values each and every day of their lives.

Another area in which we are sadly lacking today is that of *mesiras*

nefesh. For some, the notion of sacrifice hardly seems to exist anymore. One can only wonder how they would react if confronted with the challenges our parents and grandparents faced in the 1950s.

No one should desire or look for tests. Still, in light of the current financial situation that is creating such difficulties for so many, now is perhaps the time for each of us to evaluate the substance upon which our religious observance is based. What should be the basis of our relationship to Hashem? How should our actions and values reflect our relationship to the Creator?

Rav Hirsch gives us insight into this. In his commentary on *Shemos* 20:9 - "Six days shall you serve and do all your [creating] work" - he wrote:

Not for your own glory should you do your work, by which you rule over the world. You should regard your work as "service," service in God's kingdom, done in the service of God. Do your work at His bidding and for the sake of His world, in which He has placed you, "to serve it and to keep it." By appropriating, transforming and altering the world's resources, you are to elevate this world from blind physical compulsion to the purpose of moral freedom and the service of God in freedom. [*The Hirsch Chumash, Sefer Shemos*, (New) English Translation by Daniel Haberman, Feldheim Publishers and Judaica Press, 2005.]

Rav Hirsch goes on to comment on *Shemos* 20:14 - "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his servant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor":

All "religion" and all "worship of God in heart and spirit" are worthless if they lack the power to control our words and deeds, our family life and social life. Only through our actions and way of life can we prove that we are truly and genuinely God's servants. Conversely, all social virtue is worthless and crumbles at the first test, as long as it aims merely at outward correctness and at doing what is right in the eyes of man, but neglects inner loyalty and does not base itself on conscientiousness and on the purity of inner conviction, which only God can see and judge. [Ibid.]

Striving to accomplish this means maintaining the higher level of *mitzvah* observance we see today combined with the values of our grandparents. The result will be a more meaningful synthesis of externalities and our connection to Hashem, giving us the best of both worlds - in other words, a *Yiddishkeit* our grandparents would be proud of, and nothing less than a *kiddush Hashem*.

Dr. Yitzchok Levine recently retired after serving for forty years as a professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey. His regular Jewish Press column, "Glimpses Into American Jewish History," appears the first week of each month. Dr. Levine can be contacted at llevine@stevens.edu.

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re: "Orthodoxy.....This message is meant for Dr Levine..

Date 08:03, 03-18, 09

I have lived thru the decades to which you referred, and my older sisters grew up in the early 1930's. And so, I have some comments -some serious and some not- I am not much of a writer-and certainly not a typist. Therefore if you wish to call me, I will be home Thursday from 9-3 @ 7189517847. I spoke to you once or twice - the last time at the barber on C.I. Ave. We might have an interesting conversation.

Abe Dicker

Addressing elders

Date 09:03, 03-23, 09

Regarding the humanization of Orthodoxy and the depreciation of yashrut, I'm particularly a fan of Rabbi Marc D. Angel's works, and I'll refer to him on these matters, for words more eloquent than mine. Suffice it to say, Dr. Levine's quotations of Rav Hirsch, resound within me. As Rav

Hirsch was fond of noting, "Glatt kosher? Glatt yosher". If the sine qua non of being Jewish is (as Rav Hirsch has it, in turn as interpreted by Rabbi Shelomo Danziger and Dr. Judith Bleich), tikkun olam, i.e. of the building of mankind's socio-political reality under the aegis of G-d's kingdom, I fail to understand how anyone can undervalue derech eretz. If one discards that which the mitzvot are intended to engender, of what use are the gufot of the mitzvot? Whether one follows Rambam that the mitzvot are utilitarian, engendering the Mean and correcting certain historical behaviors of man, or whether one follows Rav Hirsch that the mitzvot have pedagogical and symbolic lessons, the fact remains that it is an inescapable conclusion that the mitzvot bein adam laMakom, divorced from the mitzvot bein adam l'havero, the former have very little value indeed. As Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (quoting his friend Dennis Prager) and Rabbi Benjamin Blech (following the Midrash) put it, G-d would much rather that His children have peace with each other and war with Him, than vice versa - any human parent would agree, the respective punishments of the Mabul and Babel corroborate this, and the midrash on Yeremiyahu explicitly states this (saying that G-d would be thrilled if we kept His Torah, even if we denied belief in Him).

But aside from this...

I did not grow up Orthodox, but I was always taught, NEVER refer to elders by their first names.

I have "Mom", "Dad", "Grandma", "Grandpa", "Bubbe", "Zeide", "Aunt Marti [her first name]", and "Uncle Paul [his first name]".

NEVER would I even contemplate referring to any of them by their first names. I am now 21 years old, and I've wondered at what age I'll be allowed to refer to non-relatives by their first names. But in the meantime, I still refer to everyone above 35 or so, by their first names.

Michael Makovi
Jerusalem, Israel; formerly of Silver Spring, MD

RE: DR. LEVINE'S ARTICLE

Date 01:03, 03-23, 09

It is generally difficult to comment accurately on the sociological and cultural phenomena of different generations. (There is much subjectivity when such discussion are held.) Nonetheless, I would like to offer some comments.

It seems to me that excessive emphasis is currently placed on external demeanor and superficial ritual which do not automatically lead to bona fide mitzvah performance and wholesome faith in God.

In particular, there is a misconception--in some circles--that Hasidic religiosity is the most ideal form of traditional Judaism.

Such a misleading notion is often promoted by Chabad who pursue a proactive policy of attracting non-affiliated Jews. Emphasis is placed on ritual and messianic ideology. With respect to the latter, Lubavitch erroneously teaches that the previous and deceased Lubavitcher Rebbe was/is Moshiach. (Such ideology is clearly outside the mainstream of conventional and traditional Jewish theology.)

Such eccentric religiosity distorts Judaism.
Rabbi Yoel Cohen

RE: Dr. Levine's Article

Date 11:03, 03-24, 09

Dr. Levine writes an interesting article about the changing Zeitgeist within the orthodox community.

Although attempts to reach out to unaffiliated Jews is commendable, such efforts have also engendered negative outcomes: Radical focus on ritual at the expense of wholesome humane interaction. Such an approach has led to unsalutary extreme policies which discourage good theology.

In particular, recent negative trends have led to ridiculous book banning. According to reliable sources, for instance, Rabbi Slifkin's recent book on creation and Torah was blacklisted--for absurd reasons. In Boro Park, the rabbis of Beth-El Young Israel and Avraham Zvi Hersch, Rabbi N. Goldberg and Rabbi Moshe Snow, ordered the removal of the aforementioned book even though they had not read it. They blindly relied on the silly opinions and rumors they had heard from other biased individuals. (I cite those two cases as examples---there were other similar edicts. The Novomimsker Rav also signed a ban against that book without having read it.)

Intolerant ideological zeal undermines the Jewish religion. There is also a fixation on so-called acceptable attire according to which people must wear either black hats or special types of yarmulkas in order to be accepted. (In fact, according to one pietest viewpoint, it is necessary to wear two hats--one yarmulka and one fedora together.)

There is also a tendency to "daven" at breakneck speed instead of praying with sincere devotion.
(There is nothing wrong with speed reading---but it should not be confused with serious

prayer.)

Dr. Arnold Berger

Dr. Levine's Article

Date 12:03, 03-24, 09

I wish to write about an unfortunate experience during a synagogue service in the hope that people will take note of a problem which harms true religious continuity and fellowship.

For the past year I have been reciting the Mourner's Prayer--Kaddish--for my father. My experience with formal prayer services, in this regard, has been frequently negative. Specifically, the Cantor and the Rabbi of Beth-El Young Israel in Brooklyn, Rabbi Moshe Snow and Rev. Eli Miller, imperiously told me that I should recite that liturgy as quickly as possible. (The irony of the situation was that my recitation was five seconds slower than a fellow mourner who was saying Kaddish with me. Actually, the other gentleman did not object to the five second discrepancy in regard to the recitation in question.)

The president of the synagogue, Mr. Sam Czeibel, is also a zealot about rapid-fire "davenin".

I mention this incident as another illustration of the inane and superficial behavior that one encounters during formal worship in too many places. (I am not against formal prayer. But formal prayer should not be mistaken for perfunctory speed reading which has a deleterious effect on the religious community. (I have nothing personal against the individuals mentioned above. I am sure that they do good things for their community; however, such callous behavior has no place in a synagogue.)

Because of such ridiculous policies which thwart serious contemplative prayer, I will cancel my membership of that synagogue. (It is a shame that people fail to appreciate the majesty and beauty of the traditional Jewish prayer book--the Siddur.)

Dr. Arnold Berger

Article by Dr. Levine & Comment by Rabbi Yoel Cohen

Date 10:03, 03-24, 09

BS'D

Shalom uBrochoh! My comment is really for Rabbi Cohen amvsh. In my opinion, one must be exceptionally careful when communicating about any Tzaddik, from any generation. Especially when such comments might be misconstrued as loshon hora or similar. Not that The Lubavitcher Rebbe ZY"A or his Father in Law, The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe ZY"A need me, of all people, to defend them in any way. However, perhaps for my own sanity I must put up some form of defense. The Lubavitcher Rebbe is no doubt the Nasi Doreinu - the leader of our generation. Oh, do you care to question this? Okay, then please tell all of us, who else has done, is doing, or can do anything minutely close to what The Rebbe did (and continues to do)? The Nosi Doreinu MUST be a Tzaddik that is open in his generation, not hidden. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu was, Dovid HaMelech, Eliyahu HaNovi, etc etc I purposely write "and continues to do" for certainly a Rabbi such as yourself clearly knows and understands that when a Tzaddik passes to the next world, so to say, and is no longer bound by physical boundaries, that HaShem, Himself, releases the Tzaddik to move about without any bounds whatsoever, so that he may continue the good work he accomplished while on earth, and even exceed it! I am also positive that the good Rabbi knows that in each and every generation there is a Moshe Rabbeinu - a leader with a spark or a part of the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu planted within him - so that he can actualize his leadership just as Moshe did in his time here on earth. Actually, all of us know, as I am sure you do, too, that every Jew has a piece of Moshe Rabbeinu within him / her - it's just that most of us don't take the time or effort to ignite it as do our Tzaddikim. My dear Rabbi, when you begin to make seemingly questionable comments about our Tzaddikim - past, present, or those still to come, hbal'h, you are walking a very thin tight rope - questioning their sincerity, their knowledge, understanding ... G'd looked into His Torah and at His Creation and knew that there would only be a certain number of Tzaddikim in all of Olam HaZeh ... so He divided equally for all generations - and alas there are 36 in each and every generation. A few are open for we must know and have our leaders, and many are hidden. Disparaging a Tzaddik, whether YOU agree with them or not, whether YOU like what they did or how they did it, this is a formula for G'd Forbid, Heaven Forefend, I shutter to think about it !!! Why do we Jews worry so much about all of the people in the world that hate us? Just look around - unfortunately there are plenty of Jews that hate their fellow Jews, too. And I don't mean the non religious Jews, I mean the religious Jews that can't seem to look beyond their own nose, so to say. Rabbi Cohen, I am positive that you are a very gentle and peaceful man. I am sure that you, in no way could have meant anything disparaging about The Lubavitcher Rebbe or The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe - it can't be ... at least, I daven that it cannot be ... and I daven that none of us disparage any Tzaddik, from any generation.

Don't forget, when HaShem decided, so to say, which Tzaddikim would go into which generations, He taught us - nu, don't compare the Tzaddikim of one generation with another! Each generation needs its own leaders, its own Tzaddikim, Talmidei ChaChamim, its own Poskim, etc. - each generation needs the leadership that I, HaShem will provide it. Don't look around and say disparaging things regarding the Tzaddikim I am giving you, to show you the way, to teach you, to nurture you ... to lead you ...

they are given to you exactly because you are also being Blessed with life in a particular generation, in a particular time, and as the world needs YOU here, now, right now, to do your avodah, so does the world need this particular Tzaddik, here, now, right now, to His Avodah. But to write or speak anti them, I mamesh shudder at the mere thought of it, I get cold chills,

and I worry about not only you, dear Rabbi, I worry about ALL of us.

You wrote in your message "It seems to me that excessive emphasis is currently placed on external demeanor and superficial ritual which do not automatically lead to bona fide mitzvah performance and wholesome faith in God.

... Such a misleading notion is often promoted by Chabad who pursue a proactive policy of attracting non-affiliated Jews. Emphasis is placed on ritual and messianic ideology."

What in the world is the matter with pursuing a "proactive policy" of attracting non-affiliated Jews? Lubavitch has been and continues to be the largest organization in the world that possesses an enormous amount of disyata d'shmaya when it comes to kiruv. No other organization can claim to come close to the sheer numbers of Yidden that have become full functioning frum members of Klal Yisroel due to ChaBaD - NO ONE! Many organizations and Yeshivos do a bang up job of recruiting, kiruv, etc etc - and much kudos are due to all of them - but NONE, ZERO, ZILCH, can HONESTLY claim the overall long term success of ChaBaD - not now, not ever !!! And if you choose to close your eyes or put on blinders to deny this, then you are denying each Jew their right to become more observant - all of us -the uninitiated and the FFB - and all in-between.

Now I will continue with quoting your comments:

"With respect to the latter, Lubavitch erroneously teaches that the previous and deceased Lubavitcher Rebbe was/is Moshiach. (Such ideology is clearly outside the mainstream of conventional and traditional Jewish theology.) Such eccentric religiosity distorts Judaism."

You know, when I was first coming of age / i.e. going through the motions of becoming a baal tshuvah - I often heard a short story told - something like this:

When our Holy Redeemer is revealed (Please G'd, NOW) - when he is revealed - if it is a Lubavitcher, unfortunately many of the frum Yidden will look and scoff, and will miss the boat, so to say. However, if our Holy Redeemer is a Jew from any other Mesorah or background, Lubavitch will still be the first in line and leading the way to Yerushalayim. Do you understand this significant difference? Lubavitch wants the Moshiach to come NOW, mamesh RIGHT NOW! Regardless of who it turns out to be. Yes, does ChaBaD have their own theories of who it is - of course they do - but in fact, may HaShem simply reveal our Redeemer and Lubavitch will run along side of him regardless of where he comes from - but will you, my friend? Or will you first look at his garb, the length or shape of his beard, his yarmulke or kippa, what will make you decide that this person, whomever it is, is indeed our Moshiach - what is your personal yardstick and upon what have you based your personal yardstick?

One more thing, what in the world do you mean by "eccentric religiosity" ???

Oh, let's see ... the 21st century, thank G'd, hosts many Yeshivos, Seminaries, etc. - more than any other time in the history of the universe (were you aware of this fact?)

Nearly each of these mosdos teaches its own individual way to "learn", to daven, to teach, to do mitzvohs, its own unique hashkofoh, etc. - We all share commonality - Torah & its 613 mitzvohs, Chagim, and the like - but each of us gets to their potential through a different path, we create our own prism - either through our time in a certain Yeshiva or Seminary, or Community, or through our own learning and questioning, however - Rabbi Cohen, Judaism is by definition an ECCENTRIC RELIGION !!! NO ONE teaches that I must do as you do, or that you must do as I do - for as long as we follow the foundations set forth by G'd at Har Sinai, and we don't add or detract, etc., then this is all that is required of us - but how you exactly get to this point and how your neighbor gets to it, well, this is by definition eccentricity. It is OUR mesorah to be this way. Go back to the tribes - each had its own degel, its had its own nusach, its had its own minhagim, its had its own hashkofoh, each had its own inherent way of looking at the world, of serving HaShem, of learning, growing, living. Go back further, even Yaakov Avinu ZY"A knew of this - he knew that each son had to have their own unique Brochah in order to survive eternally - and each Brochah speaks not only of who the Brother is and what he has been, it also speaks of who he will be, and those that follow him. Yaakov Avinu sets the tone for each tribe to have its own eccentricities, so to say. This is Judaism ! It's NOT one piece fits all - a living and growing entity, each striving to do their very best. So I differ in your argument - eccentric religiosity does not take away from Judaism, it in fact, keeps Judaism alive.

Why? It's quite evident that you are not prepared to be a Lubavitcher - nu, so what - just be the best frum Jew you can be. As for myself, I am not prepared to be cloistered in a bais medrash going through my day as a robotic Jew. Yet, we must still respect each other - and our Leaders, and our Tzaddikim. I wish you and all of Klal Yisroel and Chag Kosher v'Sameach! A safe, kosher, and meaningful Pesach ... and G'd willing, mamesh, G'd willing, we will yet have the opportunity to meet each other, with the revelation and arrival of our Holy and Righteous Redeemer, IMMEDIATELY NOW !!! Without further delay - and now that Rosh Chodesh Nissan is here - the month of our Geulah - the month that is created for the very purpose of Redemption - may HaShem have mercy on all of Klal Yisroel, reveal our Moshiach, and immediately bring all of us back to Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh, to our third and final Bais HaMikdosh, and there, all of us will be zocheh to be purified with the ashes of our the Parah Adumah, and then to bring our Korban Pesach and our other sacrifices, and to serve HaShem without hate, jealousy, miss-judgement, and the like, in purity of heart, mind, and soul. MOSHIACH NOW !!!

Aharon E Rubin

Re: Aharon E. Rubin's Letter

Date 01:03, 03-26, 09

Thank you for taking the time to respond to my comments.

Your statement that "Judaism is an eccentric religion" is totally absurd.

Before attempting to make pronouncements on Judaism, you must study Torah systematically.

Your assertion that the late Lubavitcher Rebbe was/is the "Nosi Doraynoo" (the supreme rabbinical authority) lacks substance.

It is unfortunate that you believe that the "rebbe" was "Moshiakh". He is deceased. And according to all authorities, the real Messiah must be alive. The doctrine of a messiah being resurrected from the dead is a Christian myth--which has nothing to do with traditional Jewish theology. (Like Korakh, Bilaam, Tzadok, Baisus, Jesus, Shabbatai Tzi--and countless other colorful individuals, the Lubavitcher Rebbe was NOT the Messiah.)

By the way, there is no dogma dictating the belief in a messiah---there is a tradition according to Rambam---Perek Chelek commentary. However, it is legitimate to believe that Almighty God Himself will bring about the ultimate redemption of mankind. (See Sanhedrin 99a--Rabbi Hillel's teaching.) Rabbi Cohen

Aharon E. Ruben's Letter

Date 09:03, 03-26, 09

I also appreciated Dr. Levine's article. Many of his ideas accurately reflect some of the differences between current and past trends in the orthodox community. In my opinion, Dr. Levine is right about a tendency to stress khumras over mitzvahs bayn adam lah-khah-vay-roh.

I agree with Rabbi Cohen's explanation concerning Chabad's ideology which is definitely outside the mainstream. As Rabbi Cohen correctly admonishes, one should not consider Lubavitch a model for traditional Judaism.

I am also of the opinion that some unaffiliated Jews have erroneously deemed it appropriate to accept everything Chabad has to say---especially in the area of messianic theology. By extension, such individuals, like Aharon E. Ruben, have inexplicably concluded that the deceased Lubavitcher "Rebbe" was/is the Messiah---even though he is no longer alive.

From his letter, Mr. Ruben (I'm sure is a nice fellow and he is entitled to his viewpoint) actually believes that the aforementioned clergyman is still "alive." As the gentleman writes: He (the Lubavitcher Rebbe) "moves about without any bounds" and continues to do good work on earth---to paraphrase.

The writer then goes on to say: "In each generation...there is a leader with the spark of Moshe Rabbeinu planted in him." (This is the typical Lubavitch party line. And on that basis, it is concluded that the deceased Lubavitcher Rebbe is the Messiah---May HaShem have mercy on us all!)

The problem with the Lubavitcher movement is its dogmatic doctrine that the Lubavitcher Rebbe is the Messiah even though he is no longer alive. And as pointed out by Rabbi Cohen, Lubavitch also spreads the false belief--at least, according to traditional Yah-hah-dooos, that the Messiah has come from the dead---a view that runs contrary to the Torah.

As noted from the writer's letter, mention is made of "Tzadikkim" and how wrong it is to disagree with them. It turns out, however, that the writer's reference to disagreeing with Tzadikkim really means: disagreeing with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. That attitude, in my opinion, stems from intolerance. For Mr. Ruben's edification, all traditional and orthodox rabbis and scholars agree that Moshiakh will have to perform specific deeds which we lead to the final redemption of mankind---including the reconstruction of the Bais HaMikdash, complete liberty, security and peace for the Jewish People in the land of Israel, the acceptance of HaShem as the true and only God of the universe and peace on earth.

It is clear that the above conditions have still not been fulfilled. (Mr. Ruben should also concede that the deceased clergyman in question did not even come close to the fulfillment of any of the prescribed duties which will be performed by the real Moshiakh, as taught by Rambam Hilkhos Melakhim.)

It is indeed appropriate to engage in an open discussion on this issue. It is encouraging to read the honest and erudite statements made by Rabbi Cohen on this subject. (Rabbi Chaim Silver has also contributed to a proper understanding of the false messianic claims made by Chabad.)

It is relevant to quote Rabbi Belsky, a respected senior rabbi---a posek and a supervisor in the OU Kashrus department. (His views are highly respected in the ultra-orthodox community.)

In Mishpacha Jewish Family Weekly (April 30, 2008 edition) Rav Belsky is quoted as follows:

"Present-day Chabad has become a personal cult centered on the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe. Everything they do, from beginning to end, revolves around this. They constantly project his image, talk about him and how great he was, how smart he was, how he was a better strategist than all the generals, that he was Mashiakh, etc. This is the way people talk about a cult figure. There is no room in Yiddishkeit for a personality cult in which an individual

is deified and glorified. Whether he was great or wasn't great is immaterial. There have been many great people in Judaism. The personality cult of glorifying an individual person, giving him unique titles, elevating the shape of the building he was active in, etc., has no place in Yiddishkeit."

Rav Belsky very eloquently exposes the ideological flaw in the aforementioned messianic mania.

Finally, with the advent of Passover, I would like to add that we learn a very important lesson about the concept of redemption. As it is taught in the Haggada (the traditional text read during the Seder) the Israelites were redeemed by Almighty God Himself directly.

That event set a precedent, in my opinion, and it is a valid model for the future redemption of the Jewish People and the world, which will be ushered in by HaShem--the Creator of the entire Cosmos. May we be all worthy of that sublime event speedily in our lifetime!
Rabbi Zalmen Shapiro

Agreement With Dr. Levine & Rabbi Yoel Cohen

Date 03:03, 03-27, 09

I agree with one of Dr. Levine's main ideas about the excessive emphasis on "Khumras". This often results in the loss of "Derekh Eretz" which diminishes the gains of the "kiruv" activists who reach out to their alienated brethren with good intentions.

Rabbi Yoel Cohen's remarks are relevant and insightful. He correctly calls attention to the eccentricities inherent in Chabad theology which should not be mistaken for sound traditional Judaism.

Specific mention of the fallacy concerning the late Lubavitcher Rebbe's messiahship is important for people to know. For all intents and purposes, according to official Lubavitch theology, the aforementioned deceased clergyman is erroneously and foolishly regarded "Moshiakh."

Such a heterodox and false messianic view has transformed Lubavitch into a cult which focuses its ideological efforts on the deification of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe. (All sane and loyal members of the Jewish religion should repudiate that false idea.)

Even though many of our Lubavitch brethren mean well, the messianic ideology which is driving them is the cause of their collective theological delusion.

Regarding their outreach efforts, it is relevant to point out to letter writer Aharon Ruben that the so-called Lubavitch success is enormously exaggerated. Despite their claims, approximately 90% of American Jewry are still "off the derekh"---unaffiliated and not mitzvah observant.

It is also important to remember that many thoughtful Jews have actually been turned off by the outrageous messianic claims of Lubavitch regarding the alleged messiahship of the Lubavitcher Rebbe who is now dead, (Lubavitch clergy and activists still say that their dead rebbe is the messiah and some even assert that he has not died; letter writer Aharon Ruben implied that the deceased cleric is still active.)

I wish my Lubavitch brethren well; however, I do pray that they reconsider their dubious messianic ideology. May HaShem bless Israel and usher in world peace speedily in our lifetime.
Dr. Robert Feldman

Respect is Respect...it needs to be taught

Date 01:04, 04-27, 09

I was raised in the 60's, and despite living a somewhat wilder youth than many of today's kids could even imagine, I was taught to always respect others. I was not raised frum, but my great grandparents were Chasidim in Russia. Now I'm a baal teshuva, and my Rabbi and his wife are MAYBE 30-ish or slightly younger. I'm 55, yet I still call them Rabbi and Rebbetzin always. I cringe when I hear people call them Shmuel and Tzippy...it's just not OK.

Reuven Ashkenazy

Comment by your mechutan about this article

Date 07:05, 05-6, 09

Dear Mechutin: amush

This article was not what I expected from our short phone conversation. It is much much different and really hits the nail on the head. I cannot praise your words enough. Sometimes we know something is true. We see it daily. It bothers us. But, it does not reach our conscious mind until someone says it. This time you said it! And, sadly, I feel it. I am really glad I asked Dovid to hook me up with this. This is a subject which we need to chazere over and over so that it keeps us sensitive to how we act and how we live. Thank you for writing it and telling me about it.

Sincerely,

Shmuel State

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