

Chapter 2:

Who is the Lubavitcher Rebbe?

The first Lubavitcher Rebbe was R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1746-1812). He was a student of R' Dov Baer (The Maggid of) Mezeritch, who was in turn a student of the Baal Shem Tov. R' Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe, led a group of Chasidim who called their movement Chabad. It was also called Lubavitch, after a town in Lithuania that was at one time the center of the movement. He had an illustrious lineage going back to Rashi and through him to King David.

After the Alter Rebbe's death, his son R' Dovber (1773-1827), the Mittler Rebbe, led the movement. Third in the line of Lubavitcher Rebbes was R' Dovber's nephew, R' Menachem Mendel (1789-1866). He is commonly known as the Tzemach Tzedek after the title of his highly regarded tshuvos (responsa). He led the movement through a very difficult time. The Czar in Russia was making life very difficult for Jews and R' Menachem Mendel tried to intervene with the government on behalf of his followers. After R' Menachem Mendel's death, his son R' Shmuel (1834-1882), the Rebbe Maharash, led Lubavitch. In turn,

his son R' Sholom Dovber (1860-1920), the Rebbe Rashab, took over after him.

In 1920, R' Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson (1880-1950), the Rebbe Rayatz, took over the mantle of leadership of Lubavitch from his father. The Rebbe Rayatz built a strong organizational structure for Lubavitch and began many educational and outreach projects. However, finding himself in communist Russia, he realized that he needed to move his operations to a more hospitable environment. He moved to Warsaw and then, with World War II starting to break out, he settled in America.

After the Rebbe Rayatz, his son-in-law R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) became the spiritual leader of Lubavitch. Prior to that, the Rebbe Rayatz was instrumental in bringing the Rebbe out of Russia and, in Warsaw in 1929, married his daughter off to the man who later become the Rebbe. After the marriage, the Rebbe Rayatz began preparing the Rebbe for his important future role.

In 1944, after settling in New York, the Rebbe was appointed the head of Kehos publishing. Through this position he was able to publish and disseminate great works of Torah throughout the world. Two years later he was appointed the head of the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch through which he zealously established yeshivos throughout the world. Even before he became the official leader of

Chabad, the Rebbe was already disseminating Torah throughout the world.

On January 28, 1950 (Yud Shvat, 5710) the Rebbe Rayatz passed away and the Rebbe was later appointed his successor. From then on, the Rebbe devoted all his efforts to teaching Torah to all Jews, everywhere in the world. His frequent lectures developed complex insights on Torah that were published by his chasidim and he directed his followers to publish many books and pamphlets as well. All this helped develop a Torah literature on many levels of understanding so that both the beginner and the expert could learn from the Rebbe.

The Rebbe also instituted a very personal but wide web of *shluchim*, emissaries, each of whom was personally sent by the Rebbe to a destination in which to start or strengthen a Chabad community. The shluchim were directed to the largest metropolises and the smallest towns, to the most central places and the most obscure areas. Because of the Rebbe's love for every Jew and his sincere desire for Torah to be available to all, he sent emissaries to every corner of the Earth. This wide network of followers has quickly made Lubavitch into the largest segment of Orthodox Jewry in the world.

Building on all of these organizational structures, the Rebbe built a huge empire of outreach and educational centers. His success brought world-wide fame and recognition, even in Gentile circles. Throughout his time of leadership, the

Rebbe was visited and honored by scholars, laymen, politicians, and dignitaries because of his wisdom and fame. His headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn was a frequent stop for both regular Jews and ones of great fame. Because of this, many of his chasidim declared him to be the Moshiach. The song “Yechi adoneinu moreinu verabbeinu Melech HaMoshiach leolam vaed” (Long live our master, our teacher, our rebbe, the King Moshiach forever) was sung frequently to declare the Rebbe as Moshiach. After the Rebbe’s stroke, this was even sung before him to his apparent approval.

However, in 1992 the Rebbe suffered a debilitating stroke and two years later, on June 12, 1994 (Gimmel Tammuz, 5754), he died. He was buried in Montefiore Cemetery in Queens, NY, where a visitor center called "The Ohel" has been established to assist those coming to pay their respects and pray. But, is he really dead?