

**REDEEMED?** Six months after the death of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, pictured above in a Brooklyn store, Lubavitch followers are now proclaiming his imminent resurrection. Jewish theologians such as Aaron Mick, however, say that such assertions distort and maybe even transgress Jewish law. Stories this page.

## Rabbis Blast Lubavitcher Messianism

### Warn Resurrection Talk Echoes Christian Themes

By LUCETTE LAGNADO  
FORWARD STAFF

**NEW YORK** — The Lubavitcher Chasidim of Crown Heights are alarming Jewish theologians with the growing fervor of their belief in the imminent "resurrection" of Menachem Mendel Schneerson as the "Messiah," and some critics are warning that eerie parallels to Christianity are flickering inside the Lubavitch movement.

The concerns are being voiced in the wake of last week's community-council elections in Crown Heights, where potential leaders were anointed in the name of the Rebbe, who died in June. Invoking the Rebbe, members of the Crown Heights' *bet din*, or rabbinical court, became players in the election, issuing formal recommendations as to which slate of candidates to support.

#### Distorting Judaism

The community's turmoil has to do not only with who shall preside over Lubavitch in the messianic era, but also with who shall preside over them in the Republican era — specifically, who shall reign over the multimillion dollar real estate properties, schools and institutions that make up the wealth of Lubavitch. In any event, the situation has reached the point where some rabbinical authorities, including a Chicago-based sage, Aaron Soloveichik, as well as other rabbis and scholars, fear that the Lubavitchers have crossed a line and are distorting fundamental tenets of Judaism.

Unraveling the threads of the latest news from Lubavitch starts with the victory of the incumbent community-council president, Rabbi Joseph Spielman, who has been prominent among the group advancing the notion of the Rebbe as Messiah. The man who wields much of the power, Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky, the Rebbe's former driver and chief of staff, has been considerably more low-key about the supposed "second coming" of Schneerson. In the elections, Rabbi Krinsky was known to

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## Netzarim's Settlers Dig In Gaza Strife Hits Home

### Iran in Gaza Visits Oslo's Failed Experiment

By HILLEL HALKIN  
FORWARD STAFF  
**NETZARIM** — "A thorn that will be removed," Israel's foreign minister, Shimon Peres, called the settlement of Netzarim in the Gaza Strip last week after four Israeli soldiers were killed at nearby road in two separate, perpetrated incidents. He said that while now was the time to relocate Netzarim, it

#### Israel Diary

## PLO Scrap State Zion?

proceed with this issue were contradictory statements made by Prime Minister Rabin on his recent visit to America. Whereas Mr. Rabin was quoted by

would eventually have to be moved. "Where are you from?" asked the reservist guarding the gate to the settlement, which also happened to be his home, when, appearing at it this week, I asked him about Mr. Peres' remarks. "Zichron Yaakov." "And that wasn't a thorn, too?" He was good at history, if not necessarily at logic. Today populated by some 10,000 people, the town I live in was founded by 50 families in 1882, in an area full of Arab villages.

#### Armed Convoys

The reservist's name was Ya'ir. He had ritual fringes sticking out of his army shirt, and he had been sitting with his rifle, studying a rabbinical commentary, when I arrived. Atop the perimeter fence was a Chanukah menorah made out of empty army-ration cans of pickles, jam, hummus and corn niblets and lit with wicks dipped in kerosene.

I had driven to Netzarim from the nearest Israeli army checkpoint on the Gaza Strip's border with a jeep in front of me and an armored vehicle behind me, loaded machine guns pointed outward. Such convoys are the only way that cars now reach and leave the settlement, which — surrounded by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in Gaza City

## Rabbi Nachman, Dead 183 Years, Still Leads Flock

By BINYAMIN JOBKOVSKY  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**NEW YORK** — Every Saturday morning, Chasidim who worship at the Breslover shul in Jerusalem enact a ritual: Members queue up to the throne of their Rebbe, Rabbi Nachman, and proceed to utter a heartfelt, at times emotional "Good Shabbos."

Rabbi Nachman has been dead for 183 years, but his followers continue the tradition as a sign of their allegiance to him. They maintain their former leader's throne-like chair, which was smuggled out of Russia in pieces and then reconstructed.

#### Band of Eccentrics

Since the death of Rabbi Nachman, the dynasty has continued, but it has appointed no other leader. In this way, the Breslover Chasidim resemble the Lubavitchers of Crown Heights, who now say that no one can replace their late Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

However, unlike the Lubavitchers, the followers of Rabbi Nachman do not believe their Rebbe was the Mes-

Please turn to Page 4

#### The Politics of Moshiach

## Roman's Rise and Fall

# Rabbis Blast Crown Hts. Messianism

LITAN

ENCY  
ved when Rabbi Shlomo Hal-  
ruven, was recently sentenced  
in the case. Tai Ellin-Byrd,  
ing him in the Chasidic world.

Following the five-week trial in  
a unanimous" about Halbrans-  
tion room. Ms. Ellin-Byrd said.  
Women's American ORT — a  
jurors were Jewish, "one of

was kidnapping," she said in an  
was wrong. There's a different  
very self-assured. He was smile  
as a complete shock to him

now in prison. His wife, Malkia  
argues but convicted of conspir-  
ber.

Continued from Page 1  
be close to some of the individuals  
who lost.

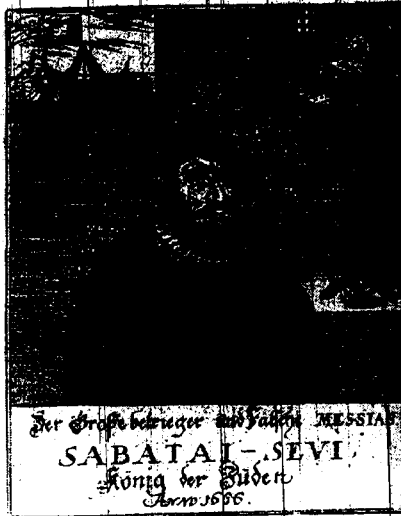
Rabbi Shmuel Menachem But-  
man, his arch-nemesis, chortled that  
the community's vote for individuals  
such as Rabbi Spielman reflects the  
popular will that only people sup-  
porting the notion of the Rebbe as  
the next Messiah would remain in  
control. Rabbi Butman, who has  
chaired the International Campaign  
to Bring Moshiach, insists that "it is  
not some of the people in the com-  
munity, but all of the people in the  
community as well as Lubavitch  
throughout the world, who believe  
that the Rebbe will take us out of  
exile, and that the Rebbe will lead us  
to the great final redemption." Rabbi  
Krinisky could not be reached for  
comment.

Yet, as the Jews of  
Crown Heights continue  
to mourn the loss of  
Schneerson, memories  
of the Rebbe's long and  
poignant illness, his evi-  
dent suffering and the  
months he spent in a hos-  
pital intensive-care unit  
make him ripe for mar-  
tyrdom and are giving  
him, critics warn, a  
strangely Christ-like  
cast. Some scholars are  
urging that the Jewish  
world issue a clear con-  
demnation of the latest  
development as being  
absolutely contrary to  
halacha. There is also  
the fear that the move-  
ment will make it easier  
for evangelists to func-  
tion.

### "Repugnant"

"I don't believe it. I  
don't believe it. It is  
incredible." Rabbi  
Soloveichik exclaimed  
when informed of the  
words of Rabbi Butman  
and others in Crown  
Heights about the im-  
minent return of the Rebbe  
as Moshiach. The world-  
renowned rabbi said  
flatly that "there is no  
possibility whatsoever"  
that Menachem Mendel Schneerson  
would emerge from the dead to be  
the Messiah. "That could be possible  
in the Christian faith, but not  
Judaism."

Jewish texts, prominent rabbis  
and scholars say, suggest the Mes-  
siah will come from the ranks of the  
living. Rabbi Soloveichik added that  
the mere suggestion that a dead in-  
dividual would return as Moshiach is  
"repugnant to everything Judaism  
represents."  
Rabbi Butman, one of the leading  
messianists during the Rebbe's life-  
time, was adamant, however. In an  
interview with the Forward shortly



FALSE MESSIAH: Followers of Shabtai Zvi, above, the 17th century messianic pretender who converted to Islam, continue to pray for his return and believe that he is the real Moshiach.

## Jewish Establishment

is were killed. "bus No. 5," he  
is "at your doorstep ... and at  
children's schools."  
Singer was vehement on the  
set of the July bombing in  
as Aires of the Jewish commu-  
nity, known as the AMIA,  
chase not to go down there and  
how this happened," he said.  
re issue of restitution for prop-  
rietary Jews during World  
II, Mr. Singer lambasted Ameri-  
can Jewish leaders for accepting  
to Germany paid for by the Ger-  
man government. Instead of pushing  
compensation, American Jewish  
groups have become a "lobby for  
Germany," he said, referring to their  
agreement to see Germany become  
a permanent member of the United  
Nations Security Council.

### Misspent Monies

Money, he said, needs to go to  
in Eastern Europe, who, he  
said, have been failed by Ameri-  
can Jewish groups, which has not provided  
adequate funding to sustain these  
communities. He said the money also  
is to go to poor Eastern Euro-  
pean Jews who have made aliya to  
Israel, and not to relieve Jewish orga-

nizations in America.  
He added that "we have no way of  
protecting ourselves outside of Eretz  
Yisrael" and criticized the Diaspora's  
complacency and its "We're-really-  
made-it-in-Mitzraim" attitude.  
Describing the Diaspora as a tempo-  
rary dwelling, he said, "when living in  
a five-star hotel," you need to remem-  
ber it's only a hotel. Sure it's five stars,  
he went on, "but it's a hotel."  
Meanwhile, leaders of the OU  
used the convention as a forum to  
express concern about secularization  
and assimilation. One item that domi-  
nated the discussion was what to do  
about NJCRAC. After much debate,  
OU delegates in turn passed a reso-  
lution stating it would be difficult for  
the organization to remain within  
NJCRAC if members persisted with  
their calls for religious pluralism in  
Israel. Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, the  
incoming president, summed up his  
organization's stance by saying, "We  
expect to continue our active mem-  
bership in NJCRAC, but our friends  
there must understand that an insis-  
tence on public discussion of reli-  
gious issues will make our continued  
membership virtually untenable."

Dr. Ganchrow, however, added  
that during his presidency he  
expects the OU to become more  
involved in mainstream Jewish polit-  
ical life, strengthening its presence  
in the American Israel Public Affairs  
Committee, the key pro-Israel lobby.  
He added that as part of his plans for  
the OU to play a more prominent  
role in Washington, he intends to set  
up a formal lobbying office. One  
informed source told the Forward  
that a Senate staffer has already  
agreed to work on behalf of the OU.  
On Israel, however, the OU chose  
to remain neutral in an effort to  
alienate none of its members, with  
a resolution that came out neither for  
nor against the peace process.  
Indeed, even the main event of the  
weekend, the debate between Mr.  
Beilin and Gen. Sharon, proved more  
peaceful than many had predicted.  
Despite fears that Mr. Beilin might  
be accorded an unfriendly reception  
by some in the audience, the crowd  
proved, if not as warm in its applause  
as for Gen. Sharon, at least polite,  
which was an obvious relief for many  
of the top officers of the OU.

before he went to Manhattan to light  
the Chanukah menorah, he said defi-  
nitely. "We believe that the Rebbe is  
Moshiach and we say it."  
**Dangerous Ground**  
Rabbi Soloveichik, however, was  
contemptuous, denouncing Rabbi  
Butman as "a little fanatical," some-  
one who "means well but, out of des-  
peration, conjures non-rational  
ideas." The late Rebbe, said Rabbi  
Soloveichik, "can't be the Messiah —  
he is not living — a Messiah has to be  
living — a living Messiah, not a dead  
Messiah."  
Still, the idea of Schneerson's

the strongest word that can be used  
in the context of Judaism," Mr. Ber-  
ger said of the belief in Schneerson's  
resurrection as Messiah, "but I am  
perfectly willing to say this is a thor-  
oughly illegitimate position within  
Judaism."  
Mr. Berger said that while he was  
disturbed by the sect's messianism  
when the Rebbe was alive, he was  
willing to accept it because of the  
good works Lubavitch was doing the  
world over rescuing lost Jewish com-  
munities. "Once he died, to continue  
to maintain this position seems to be  
so unacceptable ... that it is the obli-  
gation of every Jewish leader to say  
in no uncertain terms that this is not  
a position that will be tolerated with-  
in Judaism."  
"The persistence of such a claim is  
beyond the pale — the movement  
will destroy its legitimacy," Mr.  
Berger predicted.

### 'Closer to Christianity'

Mr. Berger, a student of Jewish-  
Christian relations, raised another  
disturbing prospect, namely, that the  
new teaching of Lubavitch would  
make it easier for Christian mission-  
aries to get Jewish converts. "Does  
this make the job of missionaries eas-  
ier? The answer is, absolutely,  
because one of the fundamental Jew-  
ish arguments in response to Chris-  
tian missionary efforts was that  
Jesus could not be the Messiah  
because he died before redeeming  
the world." By saying the late Rebbe  
is Messiah "aborts" the standard  
Jewish response, Mr. Berger said.  
"One longtime critic of Lubavitch,  
Rabbi Allen Nadler of YIVO, sees  
the recent developments as yet fur-  
ther evidence that the sect is deviant  
from traditional Judaism and ought  
to be shunned as dangerous. "I am  
a lot more detached ever since the  
Rebbe died. Before, I felt that Lubav-  
itch had a place in the table of Jew-  
ish discourse. But now, they are  
closer to Christianity in their way of  
thinking," Rabbi Nadler told the  
Forward.  
"All of my animus aside," Rabbi  
Nadler, an ordained Orthodox rabbi,  
added, "it is very clear from all the  
Jewish sources since Christianity  
that talk about messianism that the  
idea of death and the rebirth of a  
Messiah is contrary to Judaism."  
Indeed, he argues, "There is ... a  
strong history of opposition to the  
belief in a resurrected Messiah."  
Rabbi Soloveichik offered Lubav-  
itch a consoling piece of advice, urg-  
ing them to appoint for themselves a  
new Rebbe who could lead the com-  
munity — "They should appoint  
someone, if they don't it will be very  
damaging," he said with emotion.

## Breslover Chasids Follow Dead Rebbe

Continued from Page 1  
siah. Because of their small numbers  
and peculiar ways, the group has  
been isolated from the Chasidic  
mainstream, and many authorities  
dismiss them as a band of harmless  
yet colorful eccentrics. Indeed,  
although there are instances of Cha-  
sidic sects being unable or unwilling  
to select a new Rebbe to lead them,  
none other has chosen to see their  
leader as a messianic candidate after  
he passed on.

### Leaderless Sects

While there have been several  
important Chasidic sects that were  
left leaderless — followers of Rabbi  
Levi Yitzchak of Barditchiv and  
Rabbi Elimelech of Lezhensk, to  
name but two — the groups dissipat-  
ed or merged within a relatively  
short period, surviving children or  
grandchildren marrying into more  
vibrant dynasties. The Lubavitcher  
Rebbe left no offspring. In addition,

because the Rebbe was portrayed as  
a unique and almost supernatural  
figure, it seems unlikely that his  
devotees will settle for less.  
For a number of experts, the mes-  
sianism of the Lubavitch, whose fol-  
lowers persist in calling their dead  
Rebbe Moshiach, conjures up the  
disturbing images of the followers  
of the false Messiah Shabtai Zvi,  
who drew a tremendous following in  
the Levant in the 17th century only  
to disappoint many by converting to  
Islam. To this day, there are those  
who await his return. Called *Donme*,  
or apostates, by the Turks, they  
choose to refer to themselves as  
*Malaminim*, or true believers. Sev-  
eral thousand followers of Shabtai  
Zvi are said to reside in the environs  
of Istanbul. Three hundred years  
after Shabtai Zvi's death, they pur-  
port to have a Jewish identity of  
sorts, follow many Jewish customs  
and pray regularly for his imminent  
return.

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**GREENWORLD**  
Mr. Jerry Kocsig  
The Forward  
45 East 33rd St.  
New York, NY 10016  
5 August 1994  
with the response we  
As we had

# The Sage and Miss Lagnado

I am addressing you in connection with an article written by your distinguished correspondent Lucette Lagnado ("Rabbis Blast Lubavitcher Messianism," Forward, Dec. 2). Everything that this distinguished correspondent wrote in my name is fairly accurate. However, the context in which she wrote it tends to give the impression to people who are not knowledgeable in Torah and Jewish matters that I too consider the Lubavitch movement as a cultist movement whose followers are convinced that the late Lubavitcher Rebbe will be resurrected shortly and that he will redeem the Jewish people from exile. Such a notion is so unrealistic that it is the antithesis of the truth.

Your distinguished correspondent quotes me correctly: "Rabbi Soloveichik, however, was contemptuous, denouncing Rabbi [Butman] as 'a little fanatical,' someone who 'means well but, out of desperation, conjures non-rational ideas.' The late Rebbe, said Rabbi Soloveichik, 'can't be the Messiah — he is not living — a Messiah has to living — a living Messiah, not a dead Messiah.'" All the words of this quotation are perfectly accurate. I have no complaints against your distinguished correspondent; my complaint consists in the fact that the tone of the article implies that in her opinion the Lubavitch movement is a cultist movement. This is despicable; especially despicable is the fact that your distinguished correspondent put into the Forward the picture of Shabbetai Zvi. My intention was to relate my understanding that the overwhelming majority of the Lubavitcher Chasidim do not ascribe to the notion that the Rebbe will be resurrected as the Messiah.

Please allow me to clarify my position on the Lubavitch movement. As I said in my eulogy over the Rebbe zt"l, that unlike any other Chasidic Rebbe or any *Rosh Yeshiva*, who is the rebbe of a single group in Jewry, large or small, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe was the Rebbe of *Klal Yisrael*. The reason for this is the fact that in his generation, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe was an unparalleled spiritual leader, and due to his vision, his foresight and especially because of his *ahavas Yisrael* and *ahavas habrios* (love of Israel and love of humanity), he was able to reach out unto

the most assimilated sections of Jewry. Because of his unusual inspiration he was able to make thousands of *baalei teshuvah* in the Diaspora and in *Eretz Yisrael*, even in remote places like Australia, New Zealand and India. The thousands of *baalei teshuvah* in Soviet Russia are exclusively due to the self-negating sacrifices of the Lubavitch *sheluchim*.

There is a traditional friendship and attachment between the Beis Horav and Beis Lubavitch. Reb Chaim of Volozin, the most outstanding disciple of the Gaon of Vilna, was the one who lifted the

ban that the Gaon of Vilna imposed upon the Chasidic movement. Reb Itzele of Volozin had a close relationship with the Tzemach Tzedek. Reb Chaim Brisker had a close relationship with the Rashab; and my brother Reb Yosef Ber with the late Rebbe.

I hope that this will dispel all the spiritual pollution that exists in the secular Jewish community, and even in some groups of the Orthodox Jewish community, in respect to the evaluation of the Lubavitch movement.

Ahron Soloveichik  
Chicago, Ill.

## Myopic Report on Moshiach

Your recent article on Lubavitch ("Rabbis Blast Lubavitcher Messianism," Forward, Dec. 2) forcefully argues against the dangerous elements inherent in contemporary Lubavitch messianism. As a scholar of Chasidism and Kabbalah, I must take issue with the nature of your argument. First of all, those interviewed in the article were never very sympathetic to Lubavitch even before the death of the Rebbe. Alan Nadler's sometimes vehement anti-Chasidic attitude is well known in the scholarly community. His irreverent and, in my

view, inaccurate review of recent scholarly works on Chabad Chasidism some years ago in The New Republic attests to that. David Berger, whom I admire and respect, was never very sympathetic to Jewish messianic movements in general and Lubavitch in particular. In short, I felt the article was one-sided and Jewishly myopic.

More substantively, Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik's comment that the rise of *Moshiach* from the dead is "repugnant to everything Judaism represents" is highly problematic in light of the fact that a similar assertion is made in the Zohar, a medieval kabbalistic text attributed to the rabbinic sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai and one of the most influential texts in Jewish history. The

connection to the Shabbatean heresy in the 17th century is well-founded. However, many prominent rabbis in 17th-century Central and Eastern Europe believed Shabbetai Zvi to be the Messiah, only deeming his teachings heretical after his problematic halachic innovations and his subsequent conversion to Islam. I have not seen any deviance in halachic behavior even among the most ardent Lubavitch "messianists."

In short, the individuals interviewed in the article were never willing to entertain the possibility of the late Rebbe as Messiah when he was alive, nor are they willing to acknowledge the centrality of the deep-seeded messianism latent in the kabbalistic teachings of the Zohar and the 16th-century Safed kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria. For many American Jews of all persuasions, it is not Lubavitch messianism that is "repugnant" but messianism in general. However, to paraphrase the 20th-century Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, it is the continued emergence of false messianism in Judaism that keeps the messianic idea alive.

Shaul Magid  
Anna Smith Fine Professor of  
Jewish Thought  
Rice University  
Houston, Texas

For American Jews,  
it is not Lubavitch  
messianism that is  
'repugnant' but mes-  
sianism in general.

• Jews in Jewish se Death. Th private l describing who was escaped f to Lodz captured, tried for court sen by firing next to a body. Th cemetery started enabling • Christ accordin ward's ed worship focus of Because and life, image o noticed shines lo est day c late Dec worship later tra

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