

Scherman: Societies and individuals cope with economic realities — over time making needed adjustments. The explosive growth of yeshivas and kolels has transformed Jewish life exponentially for the better. The Orthodox world was almost moribund before it happened. I think it was Divine Providence that gave the Jewish community and this country the prosperity that made this possible. What will happen next, no one knows.

Goldin: But you can project learning as *one* option; not the sole option. Doing so would prevent giving those who don't sit and learn the sense that they're failing because they're not in the elite.

Scherman: I agree with you. Some of the men who are not suited to full-time learning feel that they're failures. Every yeshiva recognizes that problem. But if the Rosh Yeshiva gives options, then their institutions — and the Jewish people — might lose the most talented.

Goldin: But we are saying two things to our community: first, that there is one particular goal that everybody should aspire to, and anyone who doesn't quite make that grade really isn't cutting it. Then, quietly, we say to those who aren't cutting it, "you're not really a problem." Aren't we creating an unhealthy situation particularly for the men who can't sit in a yeshiva and learn? If we create an unreasonable expectation in the community at

large, aren't we doing our young people a disservice?

Scherman: On the other end of the spectrum, in the U. S. — especially in the Jewish community — the ideal is a college education, preferably graduate school. But there are plenty of good Jewish boys and girls who can't hack it.

Goldin: You're right. No community benefits from having just a cookie-cutter mentality. I wonder whether we wouldn't all be better served if we reset our expectations. What about the dropouts — people leaving the Haredi world?

Scherman: I think that by and large it's like the Neturei Karta demonstrating with the Arabs or going to Teheran to embrace Ahamanidinejad. They get the headlines. Of course a tiny percentage leave, but nothing like what the publicity tries to portray.

Goldin: How does the Haredi community perceive the concept of *or l'goyim*, playing a role in world events on a positive level? Will this be accomplished by active interface with the non-Jewish world, or by just having non-Jews emulate our lives?

Scherman: It's not by close interaction. The Talmud's definition of *kiddush haShem* is to live the way the Torah wants us to live and have people look at us and say, "Wow, how fortunate and praiseworthy are the parents who have such children." 

Divine Sparks

Simon Jacobson

I'll never forget the question posed to me by a woman in South Miami Beach. I had just finished a lecture about my book, *Toward a Meaningful Life*, presenting the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, to the secular public.

"Did the Rebbe recognize Conservative Judaism?" asked the woman. "If not, I don't want to buy the book of a bigot," she bluntly stated. The auditorium fell silent.

I paused before I replied. "No, he did not recognize its legitimacy." The audience became uncomfortably restless, until I continued: "But he also didn't recognize Orthodox Judaism, ultra-Orthodox, reformodox, reconstructodox, and all the other 'doses' that have been and will be created. The reason being: Nowhere is mention made of all these labels in the constitution of Judaism — the Torah."

And then I asked them: Was Moses Ortho-

dox, Conservative, or Reform? Anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of spirituality knows that one cannot stereotype and fit the soul into man-made labels and structures; the soul is a Divine force in each of us, infusing us with an indispensable mission to fulfill in our lifetime.

I learned this fundamental truth in Chabad, as a student and Hasid of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Rabbi Schneerson, or as he is lovingly called, "The Rebbe," was the seventh in a dynasty of rebbes, spiritual leaders, that began with the founding of the Chabad Hasidic movement in Belarus by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812). Rabbi Schneur Zalman, whose lineage traces back to King David, was the youngest student of Rabbi Dovber of Mezeritch (d. 1772), who in turn was the student and successor of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer

(1698-1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism in 1734.

The contribution of Chabad Hasidus can be appreciated by placing its advent in historical context. The primary challenge facing the Jewish people following the Emancipation in the 18th century was: how to benefit from newfound freedoms while not compromising the integrity of millennia-old Jewish tradition. Indeed, modern assimilation was birthed as a result of a people unprepared for the challenges of accelerated emancipation. The challenge would take on different forms in the subsequent years — the battle between religion and science, between church and state, and between faith and reason. Some chose insulation to protect themselves from these progressive forces; others compartmentalization, and yet others assimilation.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, and the six successive generations of Chabad rebbes, developed an eloquent and comprehensive system to bridge the schism between the material and the spiritual, offering a dynamic blueprint for Jewish life, one that makes the spiritual journey personally relevant to contemporary times.

Drawing from the vast corpus of mystical and talmudic teachings, Chabad (an acronym for *chochma, binah, dat*, the three defining intellectual faculties — conception, understanding, knowledge) teaches that within all of matter lies potent spiritual energy. Each of us is charged with the mission of discovering the Divine “sparks” allocated to us in our respective corner of the world and sphere of influence.

We relieve the tension between matter and spirit by spiritualizing the material, releasing the Divine energy embedded in every person, object, and experience. Redemption is the natural culmination of this process. Recognizing the Divine soul in each person naturally leads to a loving attitude toward every individual, regardless of background or persuasion.

If Kabbalah manifests the Divine in the human, then Chabad Hasidism transforms the human into the Divine. This interface between God and man allows us to enter the emancipated world without compromising timeless values. On the contrary: it begets the opportunity to integrate both freedoms, material and spiritual, by refining and spiritualizing material secularism, turning the world into an intimate home for the Divine. Chabad offers man the tools to perceive and reveal the

Divine in every aspect of life, to integrate personal independence with the highest moral standards of Torah, to blend fiery passion with profound intellect.

The ultimate litmus test for the success of any movement or philosophy is its future: Does it inspire passion and commitment in its youth? Does it have the power to perpetuate into future generations?

Since its inception, some 250 years ago, Chabad has spawned generations of adherents, men and women from all walks of life. Today, Chabad is a vibrant force in Judaism. Infused with a profound sense of mission, tens of thousands of young revolutionaries can be found all across the globe, directing Chabad houses, schools, synagogues, and community centers — perpetuating Jewish life and igniting souls.

What lies behind this power is a profound philosophy that plumbs the depths of Talmud and Kabbalah and integrates it into a systematic lifestyle, joining ritual and spiritual in a seamless union. The intimate appreciation of each soul’s dignity — regardless of background, education, or Jewish experience — drives the Chabad individual, welcoming all with an unmatched warmth and non-judgmentalism. Eternal and humble respect for the mysterious journey of every unique soul, and the responsibility to do everything possible to actualize that soul’s potential, lies at the heart of a Chabadnik’s commitment: to not just warm yourself in this cold universe, but to warm all those around you. A Jew is a Divine soul, period. And “who can know their [every soul’s] greatness and excellence of in their root and source in the living God...all Jews are called real brothers” (*Tanya* chapter 32).

The Hasid is driven by the absolute belief that we now stand at the threshold of redemption, when all the Divine “sparks” will be actualized. We therefore are compelled to do everything possible to finish our work of refining and transforming the material universe into a Divine home; to be “a light unto nations” and reveal the Godly “spark” in every human being and in every part of existence. Then our accumulative effort, coupled with the hard work of generations past, will finally erupt into a global surge of goodness and spirituality, bringing on the age of redemption, the messianic age, when the world will be filled with Divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea.

Simon Jacobson is the author of Toward a Meaningful Life (William Morrow, 2002), founder of The Meaningful Life Center (meaningfullife.com), and publisher of the Yiddish-English weekly, The Algemeiner Journal (algemeiner.com). Rabbi Jacobson served as the documenter and publisher of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe’s public talks from 1979 till 1992.

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