The withdrawal from Sinai, handing over Palestinian cities after the Oslo Accords, the retreat from south Lebanon and then, most devastating, the razing of the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip — these have become an almost insurmountable challenge to the settlers' messianic worldview. Its adherents today are experiencing a major crisis of faith, and their response to this crisis divides them into a number of distinct groups. Some, like Rabbi Shmuel Tal, have given up all hope for the State of Israel. They no longer see it as divinely ordained, and they have, for all intents and purposes, joined the Haredi world, thus allowing them to shift the center of their religious life from Zionism to halakhah. Some, led by the prominent Rav Tzvi Tao, have delayed redemption indefinitely, and, while still sure it's on its way, have transferred progress toward it to the dimension hidden from the unlearned eye. At present, they concentrate their efforts on strengthening halakhic observance and education, while waiting for the masses to embrace their tradition.

Other messianist settler groups, like the Jewish underground (early 1980s) or the Bat Ayin Underground (2002), have turned to acts of violence in an attempt to force an apocalyptic event (or simply an all-out war) that will force the state to conquer its forsaken lands. And some, led by the post-Zionist and deeply kabbalistic teachings of Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh, aim to overthrow the secular government in a revolution of consciousness that will reconnect every Jew to his or her innermost soul. Most Religious Zionists, however, are simply living their bourgeois life, hoping for the best, somewhat less convinced of the state's divine status, and ever more wary of sweet-talking prophets bringing tidings of the End.

The Many Movements of Chabad

MAYA BALAKIRSKY KATZ

Chabad, a tiny minority among world Jewry, is Judaism's most recognized public face. To a large degree, the religious outreach of Chabad has replaced the mid-century focus on Diaspora Zionism with a proudly religious diasporism. Under the leadership of its last rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), Chabad in America evolved its leadership to include a geographically scattered group of followers, turning a necessary response to dislocation into a modus operandi of modern Chabad. Institutional Chabad consciously used modern media (lithography, museums, celebrity photography, the Internet, satellite television) to construct a broad social network, binding its devotees to God, to their rebbe, to each other, and to their public. At the same time, other ultra-Orthodox groups have avowedly rejected these same media.

Chabad's relationship with media has enabled the movement's efforts to globalize; its controversial messianism has also garnered media attention to the movement. Consider Chabad's attitude to docu-videography and the display of ceremonial objects. Schneerson, known simply as the "Rebbe," is the single most video-documented leader in history. The world knows the Rebbe through his public image — his portraits, sound recordings, and filmed appearances. But the construction of this celebrity figure has little bearing on the way most of his followers interacted with him during his lifetime. Chabad's embrace of modern media saw many innovations, such as the traveling emissaries (*shluchim*) who spread the Rebbe's religious revival campaigns (*mivzoyim*) around the globe. The Chabad movement saw a means to advance its presence through a proud — and often controversial — visual culture. For example, its spirited defense of some civic displays of religious life — such as the lighting of Hanukkah menorahs in the public square — became a way for Chabad communities to participate in, criticize, and attempt to reform American Jewish life.

Chabad's leadership has historically shown itself to be flexible in the face of change. When the sixth dynastic rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), was separated from his Hasidim in 1927, the exchange of portrait photographs (a potentially dangerous practice in Soviet Russia) helped bridge the distance. Subsequent to his immigration to America in 1940, the theological regionalism of the Belarusian Court, once considered sacred and immutable, needed to be rethought. Chabad Hasidim purchased a building for Schneersohn in the typical model of the privately owned *shtibl*, hundreds of which already existed in New York. A tri-peaked, red brick home on Eastern Parkway, the building signaled Chabad's revitalization in a country that Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak promised would be a final resting place before the coming of the Messiah. In an unprecedented move in the mid-1980s,

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though, the Rebbe initiated a mission to replicate the Brooklyn *shtibl*; he directed his followers to build an exact replica in Israel as a satellite chapter. Intended to defend the Brooklyn *shtibl* from a property claim by Barry Gourary, the last living heir of the deceased Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the replica would bolster the legal (and revisionist) claim that the Brooklyn building and its holdings belonged to an institutional Chabad rather than to any private owner.

With his decision to replicate his dynastic court (known simply by its Crown Heights, Brooklyn house number: "770"), the Rebbe transformed Chabad from a dynastic leadership model to an international, corporate-style, Jewish religious organization. Just as the Rebbe succeeded in dispatching photo-mechanical reproductions (portrait photographs and videography) to maintain a dynastic movement in the face of immigration, he used the same media practices (in the form of architectural replication) to put an end to the very same dynasty, proliferating the movement's teachings through a more effective, institutional organization. During the height of the property dispute in New York's federal court, the Rebbe urged his followers in the Israeli settlement Kfar Chabad to raise a building within the year, a request that inspired speculation on the imminent arrival of the Messiah. The court ruled in favor of the institutional model of ownership in 1987 (a complete revision of historic Chabad) and the Brooklyn building was replicated in sites as anomalous as the desert landscape in Israel, the university campus of Rutgers in New Brunswick, N.J., and urban Brazil. Concretely, the 1940 purchase of a Chabad court in Brooklyn shifted Chabad's historic attention from the Belarusian court in Lyubavichi to an American-centered identity. With a second phase of dislocation through the Rebbe's replication of the Brooklyn building in Israel in the mid-1980s, the building(s) signaled the corporate nature of the movement. Chabad shifted the focus from what it saw as a failed Russian history to an optimistic and proudly American religious identity and, in this shift, and with an adeptness that could be seen as very modern, Chabad transformed its institutional identity from a Hasidic dynasty to a religious corporation. When people ask me why the Rebbe never appointed a successor, I say that he did: 770.

For Chabad, the line between congregation and audience is thin; the movement's keen awareness of itself, with its very media-oriented sensibility, is one of its greatest survival skills. The late-stage messianism that transformed the Brooklyn building brings up interesting questions of religious content but should not preclude attention to the perhaps more interesting question of religious form. Chabad's transformation in attitude and its comprehension of new forms of communication enabled the extension of the movement past the Holocaust and the passing of its last dynastic leader in 1994. Less relevant is how Chabad has set itself apart from other Jewish religious movements, based as it is on a media-centric model of community. Chabad's most controversial image — that of a dead Messiah — facilitates the creation of independent Chabad communities around the world and keeps their distinct brand of *Yiddishkeit* in the public eye.



"Emissaries/ *Shluchim* in front of '770'" by Julian Voloj

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