

**TENS OF THOUSANDS MOURN THE DEATH OF RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON**

By Susan Birnbaum and Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, June 12 (JTA) -- Tens of thousands of Chasidic Jews flocked to Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood to pay tribute to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who died here early Sunday morning at the age of 92.

A monumental figure in the modern-day Jewish world who headed the Chabad movement of Lubavitcher Chasidim, Schneerson was mourned by followers around the globe, many of whom believed him to be the Messiah.

At Lubavitch headquarters in Brooklyn, thousands of mourners gathered Sunday afternoon under overcast skies to join the funeral procession to the cemetery in Queens where the rebbe was laid to rest.

Known to hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide as simply "the rebbe," Schneerson was seventh in a line of Lubavitch rabbis dating back to 18th century Russia.

He left no heirs to assume leadership over the fervently Orthodox movement he headed for 44 years.

As a result, the rebbe's death leaves a gaping leadership vacuum in the Lubavitch movement, which claims hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide, as well as Chabad outreach centers across the globe.

Schneerson had been hospitalized last February after suffering repeated seizures stemming from a stroke he had in 1992, which paralyzed the right side of his body and left him bedridden and unable to communicate.

On March 10, Schneerson suffered a second stroke, which doctors said "seriously weakened" the left side of his body.

Though officials of the Lubavitch movement were characteristically optimistic about the rebbe's condition in his final weeks, when he lay unconscious supported by a respirator, they were forced to concede that his condition had deteriorated.

During the week preceding his death, the rebbe had suffered kidney failure. At 7 p.m. Saturday, he went into cardiac arrest, but his condition was later stabilized. At 12:55 a.m. Sunday, the rebbe suffered a second cardiac arrest. He was pronounced dead at 1:50 a.m.

Crowds Estimated At 35,000

Schneerson was buried Sunday afternoon next to his wife, Chaya Moussia, and his father-in-law -- Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson, the previous Lubavitcher rebbe -- at Old Montefiore Cemetery.

While attendance at the burial was restricted, there was an emotional scene earlier in Crown Heights, as followers waited for their first glimpse of the rebbe's coffin.

According to police estimates, some 35,000 people were gathered outside Lubavitch headquarters waiting for the coffin to be brought outside.

When the plain pine coffin appeared, the

scene became one of emotional mayhem, with women wailing and men pressing forward to touch it.

The 350 police who were on the scene could barely contain the surging crowds, and the pallbearers had difficulty getting the coffin into a waiting hearse.

Despite the sudden rush to the coffin from the sea of black-hatted mourners, no injuries were reported.

The crowds walked behind the slowly moving vehicle, which led them on a processional through the Crown Heights neighborhood.

Some 50 buses were waiting to take some of the rebbe's followers to the cemetery after the procession was over.

Among the dignitaries present at Lubavitch headquarters were New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani; Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of Israel's opposition Likud bloc; Gad Yaacobi, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations; Colette Avital, Israeli consul general in New York; and Lester Pollack and Malcolm Hoenlein, the chairman and executive vice chairman respectively of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

'This Is Not The End'

In Israel, the focus of mourning was Kfar Chabad, the village that is the center of the Israeli Lubavitch movement.

On Sunday morning, a stunned follower told Israel Radio: "This is not the end. The rebbe will return. He will be with us from on high. He is but dead in nature; in reality he lives forever."

Crowds of Lubavitcher Chasidim mobbed Ben-Gurion International Airport, offering to pay cash for any ticket that might get them to the funeral.

El Al Israel Airlines scheduled an extra flight on a jumbo jet for some 450 of the rebbe's followers. But neither El Al nor any of the foreign airlines that serve Israel had other craft they could divert for the thousands who thronged into the departure area.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin saluted the rebbe as a great scholar who had made a vast contribution to the entire Jewish people.

"The rebbe's loss is a loss for all of the Jewish people," he said. "A great sage is gone, a distinguished leader."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres described the rebbe as "a leader of the highest stature, a great man and a scholar, who labored selflessly on behalf of Jews of the Soviet Union and other countries behind the Iron Curtain."

Representing Israel at the funeral, at the express wish of Rabin and the Chabad movement, was Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yisrael Lau.

With his long white beard and piercing blue eyes, Schneerson was a charismatic, magnetic presence whose talks and writings on Jewish mysticism and philosophy were central to Lubavitch thought.

When he became immobilized and unable to communicate after the 1992 stroke, his circle of aides rushed to fill the power vacuum.

But in the rebbe's absence, conflict arose

over the course of the movement, and particularly over the campaign to declare Schneerson as the Messiah.

According to Jewish tradition, there is a potential Messiah in every generation who will reveal himself if and when the world is ready.

In their effort to get the rebbe to emerge and declare himself the Messiah, Lubavitchers stressed the importance of performing mitzvot, or religious commandments.

Even those in the Chabad-Lubavitch movement who had not acknowledged that the rebbe was the Messiah nonetheless attributed to him the qualities necessary for being the world's savior. Many others, both within and outside the movement, described him as the foremost Jewish personality of modern times.

His death leaves nobody at the helm of the Lubavitch movement, which was founded in the 18th century by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Since its founding, the movement has always had a rebbe, or spiritual leader.

No Apparent Successor

But because the rebbe left no descendants or a designated successor, Chabad -- an acronym which stands for the Hebrew words for wisdom, understanding and faith -- has been left with no apparent leader for the first time in its history.

Caught up in the belief that the rebbe had messianic powers and potential, the Lubavitchers would never even discuss the possibility of his passing and therefore prepared no one to take his place.

Within the last year, thousands of his followers at the 770 Eastern Parkway headquarters in Brooklyn would burst into singing "We want Moshiach now."

Sometimes, in the rebbe's presence, they would chant rhythmically, "Long live our master, our teacher, our rabbi, the King Messiah forever and ever."

Much controversy arose when the rebbe's followers burst into this song after Schneerson suffered a stroke two years ago. At the time, the rebbe seemed to pump his one good arm up and down, as though conducting this specific chant.

Many in the Lubavitch community claimed he was thereby acknowledging that he was the Messiah.

His followers cited many worldly occurrences that, to them, proved that the rebbe was the harbinger of the end of days.

The leadership of the Chabad movement was riven by disputes over whether to proclaim him the Messiah.

At the end of January, a group of followers was going to try to anoint the rebbe as "King Messiah."

Only a last-minute move to prevent the rebbe from appearing prevented the ceremony from taking place.

During the rebbe's final illness, the Lubavitchers, through their telephone hot line, would call for more fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, the reciting of psalms, learning Torah and giving tzedakah, or charity, in multiples of 92, so that the rebbe would reach that age.

The hot-line message was often spoken by a rabbi who was crying.

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Dvora Getzler in Jerusalem.)

IN CROWN HEIGHTS, CONFUSION, GRIEF AND FERVENT PRAYERS FOR REDEMPTION

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, June 12 (JTA) -- People were not talking much Sunday outside Lubavitch world headquarters in Crown Heights.

But the sound of tambourines and chants of "Melech ha-Moshiach" -- the Chasidic movement's call for the biblically prophesied Messiah -- could be heard all along Eastern Parkway, the main thoroughfare of the Brooklyn neighborhood.

Though the movement's 92-year-old spiritual leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, had died of a heart attack just a few hours earlier, the determination that the rebbe would still reveal himself as the Messiah was heard amid the prayers of mourning.

"I think the rebbe's going to redeem us," 19-year-old Yehoshua Smukler said as he stepped away from a circle of dancing men. "He's going to get up and take us into redemption."

Others in the tightknit community struggled silently to manage their grief among the throngs of reporters, police officers and public figures who had descended upon Crown Heights to witness the funeral.

Behind a maze of police barricades, hundreds of men in black fedoras lined up for a chance to view Schneerson's body, or took refuge under white prayer shawls in the synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway.

Upstairs in Lubavitch headquarters, where Schneerson had managed the movement's vast network of religious outreach services, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky tried to paint a picture of business as usual.

"We know pretty much what the rebbe wants of us," said Krinsky, the movement's official spokesman and a close aide to the rebbe. He pointed out that in the 27 months since the rebbe's first stroke, the movement had grown by 20 percent. "That continues," Krinsky said quietly. "That will always continue."

'We Lost A Father'

But Krinsky, his blue suit torn in a gesture of mourning, also insisted that the movement be given time to sort itself out. "We all feel that we lost a father, we feel orphaned," he said. "You should give us a chance to wrestle with that."

Word of the rebbe's passing spread almost instantaneously to the movement's offices across the globe by facsimile, electronic mail and telephone. Television cameras crowded the Crown Heights headquarters while Lubavitch representatives in South America and Australia called to arrange live satellite hookups to the funeral.

Leib Simcha Meadvin, a 30-ish man dressed in the traditional Chasidic black hat and coat, said the community had been in denial about the possibility of the rebbe's death and now does not know how to handle it.

"There's all these people running around without answers. No one wanted to think about it before, and now that they have to think about it -- I don't know."

Like some others standing out in the rain on Eastern Parkway, Meadvin said that this generation simply may not have done enough to merit redemption by the Messiah.

"Maybe," he said, "we have to do more."

A LEADING JEWISH FIGURE OF HIS TIME, THE REBBE WAS COMMITTED TO EDUCATION

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, June 12 (JTA) -- Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who died early Sunday morning at a New York hospital, has been described by many as the foremost Jewish personality of modern times.

Schneerson was the seventh in the dynastic line of leaders of the Lubavitch movement, which was founded in the 18th century by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.

The rebbe, as he was known to his followers, was born in 1902 on the 11th day of Nisan, in the Ukrainian city of Nikolaev.

He was the son of a renowned kabbalist and Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson. His mother, Chana, was herself from a prestigious rabbinic family. His great-grandfather and namesake, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, was the third Lubavitcher rebbe.

When he was 5, Schneerson and his family moved to the Ukrainian city of Yekaterinaslav.

As a child, he showed prodigious mental acuity and had to leave the cheder, or religious school, because he had overtaken the other students. His father engaged private tutors for him and then taught his son himself.

By the time Schneerson reached his bar mitzvah, he was already considered an "illui," or Torah prodigy.

In 1929, he married Chaya Moussia Schneerson, the second daughter of the Lubavitcher rebbe at the time, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, Menachem Schneerson's distant cousin.

Breaking the mold of Chasidic scholars, Schneerson pursued secular studies at the University of Berlin, and graduate studies in engineering at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Fleeing the Nazis, Schneerson settled in the United States in 1941, where he worked for the Brooklyn Navy Yard as an engineer.

Always Loyal To Cause Of Education

He soon became an intrinsic part of the Lubavitch movement, serving as head of Merkos l'Inyonei Chinuch, the movement's educational branch; Machne Israel, the movement's social service organization; and Kehot Publication Society, the Lubavitch publishing department.

In 1950, upon the death of Rabbi Schneerson, Menachem Schneerson became the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe. With his piercing blue eyes and magnetic personality, he easily caught the undivided attention, and devotion, of thousands, perhaps millions, of followers.

Throughout his leadership of Lubavitch, Schneerson always remained loyal to the cause of education, often heard saying, "We dare not rest until every Jewish child receives an education."

Lubavitch schools prospered during his long tenure. An estimated half-million Jewish children, many of them not Lubavitch, learn in Lubavitch-sponsored schools worldwide.

The rebbe continually emphasized the need to reach out to alienated Jews, to bring them back to their roots. He saw to the establishment of special educational facilities for them.

From full-time yeshivas for Jewish men and women with little or no background in Torah study to literally tens of thousands of classes at

Chabad-Lubavitch centers around the world, the rebbe was the life force behind an outreach that has affected the entire spectrum of Jewish life.

He came up with the idea for the Lubavitch "mitzvah mobiles," or "Jewish tanks to combat assimilation," as the rebbe referred to them.

They offered the opportunity to do "mitzvahs on the spot," such as donning tefillin.

He oversaw and constantly expanded a far-flung network of Lubavitch communities -- from the Pacific Rim to the American Midwest, from Australia to the former Soviet Union -- where shlichim, or emissaries, created Chabad houses to welcome all Jews, regardless of their background or level of religious observance.

Non-Religious Asked Blessings, Too

Those living in Brooklyn or visiting would attend his teaching gatherings, known as "fahrbrengen," with a special devotion.

Every Sunday, at the World Lubavitch Headquarters located at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, huge crowds of men, women and children would line up and wait their turn to meet the rebbe face to face and receive his blessing.

Each person would receive a crisp new dollar bill, to be given to a charity of choice.

It was not only Lubavitchers who waited for a chance to meet with the rebbe. Jewish organizational leaders, many not religious, would ask his advice and blessing for given projects.

Even non-Jewish leaders from around the world sought out his counsel.

Every day the rebbe was inundated with mail, consisting largely of letters asking advice from his followers, many of whom would not wed, move or take a new job without asking him first.

The rebbe's picture was placed on the walls of his followers' homes, and even in their offices.

While Schneerson's authority throughout the world was immeasurable, in his 44 years of leadership, he rarely left Brooklyn and never visited Israel.

His only sorties were his regular trips to the Old Montefiore Cemetery in the borough of Queens to visit the grave, known as the "ohel," of his predecessor, as well as that of his wife, who died in 1988.

He would pray there for hours on behalf of all Jews, and especially for the sick.

The rebbe's reach extended well beyond the domain of religion. It stretched from Brooklyn to Israel, where he exerted immense influence over local politics.

The rebbe was believed to have the power to see into the future. Lubavitchers liked to repeat that the rebbe had, in fact, predicted when the Persian Gulf War would end and that Jews in Israel would be spared, and had foretold the large emigration of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews.

The rebbe was responsible for making Chabad, unlike other Chasidic movements, an outreach organization serving all Jews.

And unlike other Chasidic movements, Chabad remained pro-Israel -- precisely because of the large numbers of Jews living there.

In keeping with the belief that the rebbe could be the Messiah and would make his final place in Israel, his followers in the town of Kfar Chabad built an exact duplicate of the Brooklyn headquarters, an action they say was in accordance with the rebbe's wishes.

ARAFAT DELAYS TRIP TO JERICHO; DATE OF ARRIVAL NOW UNCERTAIN

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 12 (JTA) -- Yasser Arafat had planned to make a ceremonial arrival Sunday in the West Bank town of Jericho, the seat of the new Palestinian provisional government.

But the day came and went with no sign of the Palestine Liberation Organization leader, and PLO officials now say the long-awaited arrival may not take place until the end of June or the beginning of July.

Arafat reportedly had ordered the closing of all PLO offices in Tunis by June 15. But there were no signs this week that the Tunis offices were actually closing.

Israeli officials meanwhile are completing their preparations for Arafat's arrival, which has met with calls for protests from Israeli political, religious and settlers groups.

These members of a highly vocal opposition are threatening to block all Israeli roads along which Arafat may pass when he travels from Jericho to the Gaza Strip, the two areas which last month came under Palestinian autonomy.

The Israeli defense establishment reportedly is arranging for the call-up of a maximum number of defense, security and police forces to patrol around Jericho, Gaza, the roads leading between them as well as border entry points.

According to some reports, Arafat will travel from Jericho to Gaza aboard an Israeli helicopter.

Announcements that Arafat intends to visit Jerusalem to attend prayers at the Mosque of Omar on the Temple Mount have led to threats of massive demonstrations by religious and settlers groups.

Heightening the tensions was a call last week issued by former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren for the assassination of Arafat, a move Goren justified on the basis of both international and Jewish law.

U.N. MOVE AGAINST ISRAEL FAILS

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, June 12 (JTA) -- A Lebanese drive for a Security Council statement condemning Israel has failed, because of American insistence that any such measure be balanced.

Lebanon hoped the Security Council would react to Israel's kidnapping last month of Shi'ite Muslim guerrilla leader Mustafa Dirani and the separate air strike June 2 on a training base of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah.

But the United States, which has veto power in the Security Council, insisted that any statement condemn as well the Katyusha rockets fired on Israel in the aftermath of the air strike.

Israeli Ambassador Gad Yaacobi expressed satisfaction with this, attributing it to close cooperation with the United States and other delegations.

Yaacobi further indicated in a statement that members of the Security Council are showing increasing understanding of the terrorist nature of Hezbollah and its pro-Iranian nature.

Lebanon, for its part, condemned the Security Council's failure to act as "a great blow to its role as the ultimate guarantor of international peace and security."

GROUPS HAIL VOTE BY HOUSE TO LIFT BOSNIA ARMS EMBARGO

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 12 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are hailing a resolution adopted by the House of Representatives urging President Clinton to lift the arms embargo against war-ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Despite strong White House pressure to defeat the resolution, which was introduced by Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), the measure passed by a vote of 244-178.

A Democratic leadership deeply divided on the issue only mustered 117 members, who joined 127 Republicans in calling for the United States to act independently in lifting the embargo.

The measure authorizes Clinton to send up to \$200 million in military materiel to the region.

Later in the day, the House voted 242-181 to reject a measure urging Clinton to seek United Nations approval before lifting the embargo.

American Jewish Congress President David Kahn praised the initial House vote, calling it "a clear signal" that "we'll no longer tolerate the blatant aggression against the Bosnian Muslims."

B'nai B'rith President Kent Schiner also praised the House decision.

The House vote by no means translates into a lifting of the embargo. The Senate will now take up the measure, only one month after approving both an amendment to lift the arms embargo unilaterally and a measure to wait for U.S. allies to act.

Each of the conflicting stances passed by one vote.

If the Senate approves a bill to lift the embargo, Clinton could still veto the measure.

RUSSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER HELPS ANTI-SEMITIC PAPER FETE ANNIVERSARY

MOSCOW (JTA) -- A newspaper known for its anti-Semitic content recently celebrated its second anniversary with an appearance by one of the leaders of last year's violent power struggle against President Boris Yeltsin.

Ruslan Khasbulatov, the former speaker of the Russian Parliament, offered his congratulations to the Al-Kods newspaper at a Moscow event attended by about 1,000 people.

It was Khasbulatov's first public appearance since he was released from jail in February as the result of an amnesty granted by Parliament.

Al-Kods, which is Arabic for Jerusalem, is published by Shaaban Khafez Shaaban, a Palestinian, and is renowned as one of the most anti-Semitic publications in Russia.

It has aligned itself with Russia's opposition movement, an eclectic assortment of extreme nationalist, Communist and anti-Semitic groups that aim to bring down the Yeltsin government.

In a recent interview with a local newspaper, Shaaban accused "Zionists" of convincing then-U.S. President Harry Truman to order the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan in World War II, and of helping Adolf Hitler attack Jews in order to spur them to immigrate to Israel.

Jewish organizations here have appealed to the Russian Public Prosecutor's Office to have the newspaper prosecuted for inciting ethnic hatred, which is banned under Russia's press laws.