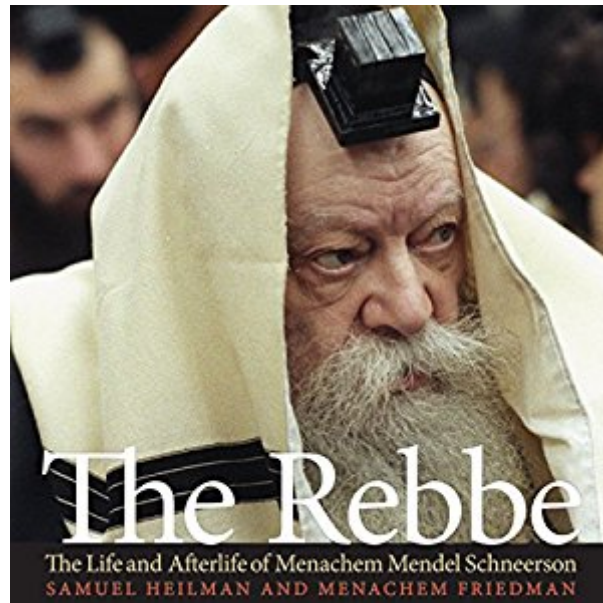


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# The Rebbe: The Life And Afterlife Of Menachem Mendel Schneerson



## Synopsis

From the 1950s until his death in 1994, Menachem Mendel Schneerson - revered by his followers worldwide simply as the Rebbe - built the Lubavitcher movement from a relatively small sect within Hasidic Judaism into the powerful force in Jewish life that it is today. Swept away by his expectation that the Messiah was coming, he came to believe that he could deny death and change history. Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman paint an unforgettable portrait of Schneerson, showing how he reinvented himself from an aspiring French-trained electrical engineer into a charismatic leader who believed that he and his Lubavitcher Hasidic emissaries could transform the world. They reveal how his messianic convictions ripened and how he attempted to bring the ancient idea of a day of redemption onto the modern world's agenda. Heilman and Friedman also trace what happened after the Rebbe's death, by which time many of his followers had come to think of him as the Messiah himself. The Rebbe tracks Schneerson's remarkable life from his birth in Russia, to his student days in Berlin and Paris, to his rise to global renown in New York, where he developed and preached his powerful spiritual message from the group's gothic mansion in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. This compelling book demonstrates how Schneerson's embrace of traditionalism and American-style modernity made him uniquely suited to his messianic mission.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Not having dug through the charges and counter-charges, I can't really comment on the disputes over how accurately the book recounts the details of the Rebbe's early life. I can say that the story is amazing to the extent it is true (and would be an amazing novel if it wasn't!) The basic outline is as

follows: in the 1930s, Menachem Schneerson, despite his Hasidic ancestry and father-in-law, basically lived as a modern Orthodox Jew (although an extremely pious one, at least in some respects). He tried to become an engineer, but his ambitions were frustrated when France refused to allow him to practice (because he was not a French citizen) and Hitler's invasion of France forced him to flee to America (where his lack of English skills limited his opportunities). He then worked full-time for his father-in-law (the then-leader of the Chabad/Lubavitcher sect) because of some mix of personal piety, personal devotion to his father-in-law, and the lack of any career alternative. Schneerson was so brilliant and charismatic that Chabad Hasidim drafted him as rebbe of the sect himself a decade or so later, and over the ensuing decades he turned a tiny sect into a worldwide Jewish outreach organization. This is a story as astonishing as Moses' evolution from Egyptian prince to leader of Judaism- except it happened in our lifetimes! The book tries to explain why the Rebbe was so successful in leading Chabad. Some of the factors in his success were: \*Because he had lived outside the bubble of a Hasidic neighborhood, he was somewhat able to relate to Jews outside that bubble.

This book has an interesting approach to research. Using the sources that will validate the authors theories and ignoring the information that challenges it. It seems they decided the outcome before they started the research and molded the book based on their prior assumptions. Their primary argument is that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson was a student struggling with his identity in prewar Europe, pursuing his education as engineer. They paint a picture that he was disengaged from the Chassidic lifestyle dabbling in modern Western culture. In 1941 he escapes Nazi Europe and emerges as Jewish scholar and then becomes the Lubavitcher Rebbe, finding his true vocation. Historical research tells a far different story. The authors ignored the recent publications of multi volume work of Rabbinic Scholarship discovered posthumously by Rebbe from that period. They confuse it with the single volume Reshimos Hayoman, a diary of Chassidic lore from the same time. They have all kinds of claims about the Rebbe not attending synagogue and they ignore a wealth of testimony- much of it available on an oral history project by Jewish Educational Media, that tells a far different story. They also fail to examine the deep relationship between the Rabbi Schneerson and his father in law the previous Rebbe during the thirties. Either the authors research was so superficial that they could not find the material that is sold in many Jewish bookstores and online, or they choose to ignore historical sources that refute their primary assumption. As so called scholars, at the minimum they should have presented this material and then their arguments refuting it. They choose to act like it does not exist.

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