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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.

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Customer Reviews

Eminent Jewish scholars Heilman, of City University of New York, and Friedman, of Bar Ilan University in Israel, have teamed up to produce an outstanding biography of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe. Their well-grounded contribution carefully avoids

hagiography, but their restraint leads them to avoid characterizing some of the more outlandish claims made by the rebbe and his adherents. The issue of whether the rebbe is the Messiah, as contended by some of his disciples, is also treated with respect. More significant is the thorough analysis offered by Heilman and Friedman of the rebbe's great organizational success in sending emissaries throughout the world to persuade Jews to become pious. In addition, the history and influence of the Lubavitcher movement is carefully and candidly traced, including a complete account of Schneerson's experiences before and after he became the rebbe. The disputes that followed his death are methodically depicted. This well-written presentation, based on exhaustive scholarship, will stand as the definitive statement about the life and times of a highly influential religious leader. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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"How do you write a biography of the Messiah? That is the question that Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, two leading Jewish social scientists, have had to tackle in their groundbreaking study of Menachem Mendel Schneerson."--Times Literary Supplement

"An outstanding biography of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe. . . . This well-written presentation, based on exhaustive scholarship, will stand as the definitive statement about the life and times of a highly influential religious leader."--Publishers Weekly

"An important biography. . . . This is as full and reliable an account of the life of this towering spiritual leader as we are likely to get."--Saul Rosenberg, New York Sun

"Lively and provocative. . . . [An] eye-opening account of the Rebbe's 'life and afterlife.' . . . [T]he best analytical study of the two major themes that it addresses: A critical and often boldly psychological biography of Schneerson is prefaced and supplemented by two chapters devoted to a sociological analysis of the beliefs and behaviors of his Hasidim, especially after the death of the man they were--and most still are--convinced was the Messiah."--Allan Nadler, Forward

"This fascinating book by two outstanding scholars of contemporary Jewry is a must-read for those interested in the Lubavitch movement, whether insiders or outsiders. . . . Overall, it examines a mystery that compels the reader's interest."--Jewish Book World

"The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson by Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman fills a considerable void in the biography of one of the towering religious figures of the 20th century. . . . I am grateful to the authors for a profoundly human biography that will hopefully spur a whole new literature on the rebbe as man rather than angel and as person rather than saint."--Rabbi Shmuley

Boteach, New York Jewish Week"[T]his book will serve as the most outstanding work in print on the Rebbe's life, his influence and his afterlife."--Aaron Howard, Jewish Herald-Voice"Sixteen years after the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, a flurry of new publications indicates not only how enduring the interest is in his life and legacy, but how potent the minefield is surrounding his mythology. . . . The Heilman-Friedman book is generating the most controversy. Written for a lay audience, it frames Schneerson's mission, and that of the Chabad movement he led, as motivated by Messianism, here defined as the attempt to hasten the Messianic era through human actions."--Sue Fishkoff, Jewish Telegraphic Agency"In this exemplary work, we are treated to a well-written, well-documented history of the rise, life, death, and 'afterlife' of Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-94), the seventh-and last larger-than-life-leader (or 'rebbe') of ChaBaD Lubavitcher Hasidism. . . . An outstanding book, strongly recommended for all interested in studying Schneerson and his beliefs."--Anthony J. Elia, Library Journal"When Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, the two most distinguished sociologists of contemporary Orthodox Judaism set out to write this book, I was green with envy. They would combine their considerable talents and learning to bear on arguably the most fascinating, perhaps even the most successful, late 20th century Jewish religious leader. . . . They have done an admirable job."--Michael Berenbaum, Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles"[T]he extraordinary biography of the Lubavitcher Rebbe executed by Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, two sociologists who have cooperated in an exacting study of one of the most important religious figures of the 20th century. . . . They deploy this approach in a narrative that is extraordinarily smooth in its literary style and transforms what could have been a dry and jargon-ridden sociological foray into a highly readable and occasionally even gripping exploration of the inner workings and theological complications that have animated the Lubavitcher 'empire' in the recent past."--Arnold Ages, Indianapolis Post & Opinion"[A] superb new biography. . . . Mr. Heilman and Mr. Friedman are the perfect guides to tell this story. Their book is a model of meticulous research and balanced, wise assessments. . . . The authors tell a riveting tale. No better account of this amazing saga of faith, hope, triumph and delusional madness can be imagined. To enjoy this book and learn its profound lessons, you don't have to be Jewish."--Martin Sieff, Washington Times"Where Heilman and Friedman excel is in separating fact from fiction in the rebbe's life. . . . I am grateful to the authors for a profoundly human biography that will hopefully spur a whole new literature on the rebbe as man rather than angel and as person rather than saint."--Shmuley Boteach, Jerusalem Post"Illuminating. . . . [A] clearly written and engaging biography. . . . For anyone interested in a sophisticated sociological analysis of how Schneerson was able to become 'The Rebbe' this is a must read."--Nathaniel Deutsch,

Haaretz "Prominent sociologists Heilman and Friedman have written an important book on the Lubavitcher movement, perhaps the most notable sect within Orthodox Judaism. The Rebbe, however, is also a provocative biography of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, one of the 20th century's most influential religious leaders. . . . For those unfamiliar with Schneerson's powerful religious message and messianic mission, this is essential reading."--Choice "This is a very good, accessible, non-hagiographic biography of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe. . . . Highly recommended for collections of twentieth century Jewish history."--Shmuel Ben-Gad, AJL Newsletter "There is a great deal that is new in this very readable study and much that should interest students not only of Hasidism but also of charismatic religious groups in general."--Shaul Stampfer, Religious Studies Review "This book is helpful as an account of the transformation of Chabad from inner-directed to outer-facing, from a lineage that prized lengthy contemplative prayer to one that celebrates bold feats of outreach."--Nehemia Polen, Modern Judaism

ALERT: This book is not a biography by any academic standard. Is closer in fact to a tabloid. You know, there are academic works that support theories with evidence and then there are educated tabloids that are well written but make supposition's based on loose evidence and hypotheses. This is the latter. The author's of this largely fictional novel have an agenda that is suspect. Full Disclosure - I am not Lubavitch. Make no mistake, this is an entertaining read but it's by no means an apparantly well research tome. IF it was by chance researched at all, the authors took so many literary liberties that it can't be considered as credible source for understanding the mindset of Chabad or nor it's Rebbe. When I read "he MUST have been..." or variations on that theme, it tells me the author doesn't really know, nor have evidence to support the supposition's they are making. No, rather, they are make assertion's based on THEIR perspective, THEIR experiences, THEIR coloring of the evidence. How does one, or can one, stand in the shoes of a great spiritual leader and assume to understand what motivates them or inspires them? One can't. How can one stand in the shoes of a world-wide leader and assume to understand or know what they are thinking? One can't. Yet this book, unfortunately, presses theories, speculation and 'maybe's" as fact. Like I said, it was entertaining to read...but it gave me very little insight into the thinking of spirit of the great Rebbe.

As a Hasid i am sick and tired of dogma of cultist biography books. Finely a true critical yet objective book evenly sourced form pro Chabbad Hasidim and its critics. A monumental historical study, that

gives meaning to a controversial sect and its mystical leader. As an insider of the Jewish world I encourage you to buy this book and read it thorough, to see what and why Chabad Lubavitch is so unique? What drives them to change the world into their worldview? Yes they hate this book, and you will understand why once you see how deeply & intimately this book will take you inside their motives and machinery. Enjoy it!

Very good

Seemed to cover many untouched aspects of Lubavitch, and posted a different, "outside", perspective to the Rebbe z"l. A comprehensive work.

Disgraceful hatchet-job. The authors have a clear agenda--the facts be damned. Unfortunately, an accurate biography of the Rebbe remains to be written, as everything out there is simply propaganda supporting a particular "take" on the Rebbe.

I found this book somewhat interesting, but difficult to determine what was factual and what was theory. Though lots of sources were provided, it seemed that the most important arguments in displaying the rabbi's drive and goals are told over as fact, yet are not sourced. Very much a psychological analysis with lots of conjecture that did not allow me as a reader to draw my own conclusions. I feel like I got to know the authors' view of the rabbi, but not necessarily got to know the rabbi himself.

Not a puff piece, not totally hard hitting, just a fair and balanced presentation of the man and the movement. Fascinating.

The book is the most unprofessional book I have ever read. It is blatantly bent in a negative way against the Rebbe (and positive for no reason when it comes to one of the authors sources, for his rumors). It is full of innuendo and interpretations of events in a negative way and conjecture offering no source or support for those OPINIONS. And mind you these interpretations contradict each other. Only one small example, on the one hand Mendel as you write in the book while in Paris was so out of Judaism on the other hand he was able to write this scholarly book Hayom Yom - start off his career as a Rebbe with an incredible amount of deep knowledge and personal piety, and much more, which leads to something else. The book is dishonest with the truth by leaving out known

facts of how the Rebbe behaved while in Paris. For the most part there is no revelations of anything important in this book. If anyone is looking for a tabloid type written book this is it.

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