

Jeremy Rosen: Rabbi Abraham Kook and the Lubavitcher Rabbe

- Good afternoon, everybody. I was asked, who do I really admire within the Jewish world? Who were the great figures that I think in our lifetime, or close to our lifetime, have been the most influential on Judaism in a spiritual and religious sense? And I have very special requirements when I think of who I admire, and usually it is not the sort of person that everybody else admires. I am conscious of the fact that the Talmud keeps on stressing the idea that the real tzaddik, the real good person, is the person who doesn't necessarily make a big fuss or a big noise. There is this lovely idea that there are 36 human beings in this world who, because they are so special, they are the ones that keep the world going no matter what terrible things we other human beings do. These 36, the Lamed Vovniks as they're called, nobody knows who they are. And I have picked two people who are known to have been excessively self-effacing, still were able to take public stands, but were characters of impeccable, spiritual, and we'll even say political dynamism, and have had the most significant influence on what Judaism is today. And both of them come from what is called a chassidic background.

And so to give you a little bit of background to who they are and what background they come from, I need for a moment to give you a little bit of history. In the 17th century, the majority of Jews in the Western world were living in an area that includes Poland, Ukraine, and parts of Russia today, later on called the Pale of Settlement. And most of them, not only were they poor, but they were rural, they lived, many of them, out in the countryside. The urban aristocracy of Jewish life inhabited the main cities, Vilna, Warsaw, places of that kind. And there was a significant class gap within Judaism between the elite, both financially and intellectually, and between the masses. And it was as a result of famous Khmelnytsky massacres, in which whole communities were wiped out, and the world almost thought it was coming to an end, and ideas of false messiahs coming to save us would happen. And people, the poor, turned to wonder miracle makers, they didn't have the means to go to proper medicine, whatever that was at that stage.

And out of this developed a movement that started off simply as a one man crusade, to use the wrong term, and that was the man called the Baal Shem Tov, the person with a good name, which didn't just mean he had a good name himself, but it meant he knew how to contact God, he was a faith healer, and he went out to provide for the need of the masses, the downtrodden masses. He was a scholar, but people imagine he was just a simple man, because he liked to portray himself as a simple man. And he gathered around him a significant number of followers, and they were known as the Chassidim, the pious. And he was very much influenced by the mysticism of the community of Safed in Israel in the 16th century, headed by Isaac Luria, which portrayed a Judaism based on feeling and experience, rather than on strict scholarship and rigid following of the letter of the law, in which he preached that every soul mattered, every person mattered, however little or however much they might know, they were all beloved of the Almighty, and the role of the religious leader as he saw it was to inspire people to raise themselves out of the depression they found themselves in, and they needed help, and his role was to provide them with help. He died and following on his death, some of his followers then

set up courts or centres of chassidic piety that welcomed the masses to them, made them feel wanted, and the mainstream orthodoxy felt so threatened by this that in fact they banned the movement in two different herem's bans on them because they thought they were undermining authority. But despite the establishment's desire to hang on to power and object to any new idea, they thrived, and they developed tremendously as a result of the popular demand.

And this demand of a mystical, personal way of looking at life was one that underpinned by a certain optimism that things can get better, and they framed that in terms of the Messiah, things will get better, we'll be able to solve the problem. This mood of Hasidism, it developed, but unfortunately like all rebellious creative movements it became somewhat fossilised, and it became fossilised in terms of dynasties, and these dynasties had at their head rabbis, who were usually the children of the previous rabbi, and they maintained this court to which people would come, but people would come to be inspired, but at the same time they came to solve problems, and they came to see their rebbes not as channels to the Almighty, but as substitutes, as intermediaries. Amongst the different chassidic dynasties that existed in Poland, Ukraine and Russia, there was one that in a sense set itself apart, and it was the chassidic movement known as Lubavitch, based on a town in Russia, but in which it spread down through the whole of the Russian empire, and it became known as Chabad, Chokhmah, wisdom, Binah, intuition and Da'at, knowledge. And its main book, the Tanya, gave an encapsulation of mystical and, if you like, non-rational Judaism, which appealed to those on both sides, both the scholars and the simple people.

Out of this movement of Lubavitch, the end of the 19th, the beginning of the 20th century, emerged two remarkable human beings, both of them coming from this background. One of them was Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who became the first chief rabbi, not of Israel, but of the British mandate, Palestine. He was the first chief rabbi. The other one was Rabbi Schneerson, the Rebbe of Lubavitch, and they couldn't have been more similar, and yet in certain ways more dissimilar. Rabbi Cook is identified nowadays with religious Zionism, and on the other hand, Rabbi Schneerson is identified more with outreach to the masses, wherever they might be, anywhere in the world.

To start with Rabbi Cook. Rabbi Cook was remarkable. You look at a picture of him and he looks like any one of these black hat, long bearded, long frock coat rabbis, but he was an academic scholar. In addition to that, he was a poet, animistic and an advocate of vegetarianism, but not only that. His belief was that every Jew, no matter how far away from tradition he or she was, they were part of the Jewish people. And he had this incredible belief in the importance of individual spirituality on the one hand, and the national religious identity and spirituality on the other. He had a job as a rabbi in Eastern Europe, but in 1904 he decided to come on Aliyah, so to speak, to Israel. And he came to a country that was rigidly divided, as much as it is today, between the secular anti-religious and the religious anti-secular. They were barely on speaking terms. And he made it his mission to try and mediate between the two. In all his writings, he was focusing on the importance of the individual, finding that person's role in life, function in life, and spirituality, inner spirituality. When he first arrived, he allied initially with Rabbi Sonnenfeld, who

was the main character of the old Yishuv. That is to say, the Jews who had been emigrating from Eastern Europe during the 17th, 18th, 19th century, many of them Hasidim, but many of them opponents of Hasidism, and they believed that their job was to come and live in the Land of Israel and there await the arrival of the Messiah and create a community, but it wasn't a political movement.

On the other hand, you had the new Yishuv, the new immigrants who had come from Eastern Europe, most of them were secular, communist, Marxist in one form or another, and they wanted to create a new religion, essentially one that rejected the religion of the ghetto and created the new religion of the liberated male and female in an intellectually open world that rejected religion. And the two of them tried very hard, touring the settlements and touring people and trying to get them together to get on with each other and accept the beauty of each other. Unfortunately, Rabbi Sonnenfeld and the old Yishuv broke away. They thought there was nothing they could do. The Marxists and the socialists were so dogmatically embedded in their ideology that they just gave up. And as a result, Rav Kook was the only man of the orthodox world at that moment, of the ultra-orthodox world, that was fighting in Israel to value everybody. He valued the most irreligious, anti-religious person working on a kibbutz to help build up the country, because he thought that the community, the Jewish people, needed a land of their own.

This was even before the Holocaust, needed somewhere to escape from the pain of Eastern Europe, but it wasn't just to escape, it was to create something new, to create a new spiritual religious world. And in World War II... World War I, rather, he was caught in Europe. He couldn't get back to Israel. He spent some time as a rabbi of a very orthodox community in London. But in 1920, when the war was over, he returned to Israel, initially to hold a position of chief rabbi in Tel Aviv, then Jerusalem, and then the chief rabbi of the whole of the Jewish community in the Palestinian Mandate.

To understand what he was like, I want to read from you one of the poems that he wrote. He wrote scholarly books, interpretations, on all kinds of things, but this is a poem he wrote called The Four Layers Song, a song on four different layers. And it goes like this, and this is obviously a translation from the Hebrew, he wrote in beautiful Hebrew. There is a person who sings the song of his soul. He or she finds everything, complete spiritual satisfaction within himself, and that characterises certain human beings on earth. Then there's a person who doesn't just think of himself, but thinks of the nation. He goes beyond his own private soul, which he finds too narrow, too limited, and he yearns for greater heights. And he sees these heights in the entirety of the Jewish nation, and so he sings a song, not just of his own soul, but of the nation. He clings with a sensitive love to the entirety and shares its pain, its joys, its hopes, and speaks with thoughts regarding the past and the future, and investigates the inner spiritual nature of love and a wise heart. Then there's a person whose soul is so broad that it expands beyond the border of Israel, not just his people. It sings the song of all of humanity. This soul, which constantly grows broader with exalted totality of humanity, yearns for humanity's general enlightenment, and looks forward to its perfection. And from this source, he draws all his thoughts, insights, ideals, and visions, the universal. And then there's the soul who rises even

further, and he wants to unite with all of existence, with all creatures, with all worlds, with the divine world, and with all of them, he sings this combined song of all these different elements. And this is the person who can find ultimate peace in the universe. Only a few people are able to rise and sing all these songs together in one ensemble, so they give all their voices to this song so sweetly that supports and nourishes other human beings, a voice of happiness and joy, of rejoicing, of tunefulness, of merriment, of happiness. The song of the soul, the song of the nation, the song of humanity, the song of the world, and the song of God, and they all come together.

Now, that ability to appreciate everybody, no matter what their religious level, no matter how significant, is what characterised this remarkable man. He died too early, in 1935. He had exhausted himself trying to mediate between the secular and the religious, and was rejected by both, and felt he was a failure, and left behind him a yeshiva of his own, which after he died, did not thrive as much as he hoped it might. He had a son, Zvi Yehuda Kook and his son followed his ideology, almost to a T, acted as his secretary, as amanuensis, and took over the yeshiva when the father died. He was a quiet man. He had none of the charisma of his father. He had none of the greatness, actually, of his father, if I am honest about it. When I first met him, when I was in Israel in 1962, I was impressed by a sweet man, but not a very powerful one. But he had turned the ideology of his father into his mission in life. But by and large, he was ignored. He had a handful of young men who studied with him, who carried forward his idealistic Zionist dream, but hardly anybody took him seriously. After the Six Day War, his sudden idealism became the inspiration of a movement called Gush Emunim, this pioneering movement that said Israel up to now had lost its pioneering dream. It was no longer trying to expand, it was trying to cling on. We want to go beyond this. We want to return to the land of our fathers. We want to, now that we have the West Bank, we want to settle it. And it became this massive settlement and largely political movement in which this rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook became the symbol.

The truth of the matter, in my opinion, is he was made this symbol by his acolytes, by this small team of politically active young men that surrounded him, took advantage of his position and his name and the reputation of Rav Kook to turn this into the very problematic but dynamic movement that came from this. I don't believe that was what the father wanted, certainly not the politicisation of it. And so his memory, unfortunately, of Rabbi Kook has been to some extent tarnished, both by the ultra-orthodox rejection of his Zionism and by the Zionist rejection of his religion. So from that I want to turn to the next person who comes from this particular background, and that is the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, born in Eastern Europe again in the Ukraine, 1902, never wanted to be a Rebbe. He wasn't the son of the Rebbe, and there were a series of great Lubavitcher Rebbe before him who had built up this as a significant Hasidic movement, but one of many. There were others very, very more numerous, and to this day, because people see Chabad more than any other, they think it must be the biggest Hasidic movement, but far from it. There are others far bigger.

But nevertheless, he made sure that he could go in his own way, which was to combine the great knowledge of Talmudic sources together with a secular education. He went to Berlin, he

studied some philosophy there, he moved on to Paris, and he studied some engineering there, and when the Nazis came to power, he fled and arrived in New York in 1941, with the idea of simply being a private person. He had married the daughter of the previous Rebbe, and there was some talk that as such, and as the previous Rebbe had no sons, that he should be the successor, but he resisted it. He didn't want that power, and he struggled against it for several years, and it wasn't until 1951 that he was officially appointed the Rebbe of the Chabad movement. And he had the breadth of vision to realise that out of New York, which at that time was the most powerful, strongest Jewish community in the world, while Israel was still struggling, wasn't even certain altogether it was going to have a state of its own, that he had a mission in the diaspora. Not to exclude Israel, but his mission was to be in the diaspora, and therefore, unlike Rabbi Cook, he stayed in America, and that was his location. But what was interesting about it was that in America, he came to realise the power of Madison Avenue publicity, and the idea of using modern technological tools to reach out beyond the confines of his little palace, so to speak, in Brooklyn. He had started, first of all, with education.

He set up what was called Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch which was an organisation within Chabad to broaden the scope of education and to spread it around the world wherever he could. And when he started, there were just a handful. When the first Chabad came to London, one or two families, not more. But there were families from Chabad scattered around the world who he was able to draw on to help him build up what became an amazing structure of Jewish life, which in many respects was the first franchise system in which his job was to reach out, send his representatives out into the world, and to spread them out with a message of love, tolerance, and warmth, to welcome everybody, no matter where they came from, to focus on obviously building up the Jewish world, but still maintaining good relations with the non-Jewish world. But he drew on the mysticism of the Kabbalistic system that Lubavitch was based on, that Hasidim was based on, this idea of we have to make the world a better place. And the way to do it is by working hard, and by working hard and welcoming people and making the world a better place, we can get the Messiah to come. And what he meant by the Messiah was not necessarily a person as such, but an era of peace and love where, to quote Rambam, people would not be imposing themselves on other people. There'd be no Shibud Malchuyot, no oppressive government.

And so with those tools in mind, from very small beginnings, he managed to build things up. His representatives who went round the world, all of them, maintained the Hasidic idea of special dress to mark them out from others. That would, in one sense, be a problem, but in another sense, it would help them preserve their sense of identity and this fierce loyalty to their ever. So that even if these men and women going around the world were not the greatest giants of Torah, or the greatest rabbinic scholars, or a lot of them within Chabad were, but they were people who could go out as representatives. The term was a shaliah or Shulchan, representatives. And they were supported by a system which took care of their education, no matter where they were, gave them a home base wherever they were, that provided them with initial funding wherever they went to go, wherever the Rebbe would send them to go, and then have to build up their own communities. And enable them to draw on the amazing scholarship, not only of the Chabad

movement before him, but of his own writings. And Chabad has their own library. Everybody in Chabad has this special Chabad library that they turn to if they have an idea, if they need an idea, if they're short of a sermon or something to say, or if they want an answer, they can get it.

When the Rebbe was alive, anything they needed would go through to the Rebbe. A blessing for a marriage, a blessing for a new house, a blessing for any state of their family's life, from a birth circumcision to a wedding. Everything had to have the blessing, the approval of the Rebbe. And they would go to the Rebbe with cures when they were ill, they wanted these things, all of them phenomena of all Hasidic movements. And of course, you know, to some extent one can make fun of this one. Here's about all the cases where the Rebbes give a cure and never the cases where the Rebbes didn't. And after all, it's a 50-50 chance when somebody says you will get better and you don't. Oh well, at least we'll remember the cases where they did. But nevertheless, this has been a phenomenon of all Hasidic movements.

The remarkable feature of Chabad is like almost all of the others, with one or two small exceptions, noticeably Bratslav, they were more concerned with closing in on themselves and protecting themselves. And cut themselves off from anybody who was not as religious as they were, who was not prepared to conform in the way that they demanded. Chabad, on the other hand, didn't have that approach. They welcomed anybody. They were much more open and lenient and didn't impose their views. Now it doesn't mean to say they don't have very strong views. And if you want to really become a member of Chabad, of Lubavitch, you have to adopt those views. And anybody who doesn't tell the party line will find himself or herself out.

But nevertheless, leaving aside the ideological issue, their main achievement was to service Jewish communities anywhere. And the result, ironically, is that these are the Chabad, the group of people who are drawing more people from the secular and the left part of Judaism to come more into the centre than any other institution. And not only that, but because they were initially the first people who went into outreach, reaching out to the non-religious, they have inspired in the non-Chassidic world as well as in the Chassidic world, other outreach movements that try to bridge the gap, both within Judaism, of the religious side, and at the same time, maintain very good relationships with the non-Jewish world, which is why, for example, Chabad has an office in Washington, and why they go out of their way, wherever they are, to cultivate the local political forces. For support, obviously, but also because the Lubavitcher Rebbe was very keen on the idea in Judaism that a non-Jew who keeps the basic seven Noahide commandments, they are the pious of the world. And the more pious people we have in the world, we have to encourage them and support them.

And so part of his platform was to reach out to the non-Jewish world with this idea of the seven basic commands, which most Christians have, most Buddhists have, most Muslims have, and try to forge links, contacts, and sympathy with them in order to make the world a better place. All of these ideas are ideas that can be abused. There are many people who think that this is what happened to Lubavitch. When, unfortunately, the Rebbe died after a long illness in 1994, people had been for years saying, he is the Messiah. That is to say, how do we understand a Messiah?

A Messiah is somebody who changes the world, who brings more goodness to the world than we've had before. And this man has done more than anybody else in Judaism for the wider world beyond the small little community of the small ghetto, and therefore he must be the Messiah. But unfortunately he died, and there had been within Judaism no knowledge or idea of a second coming, and yet, ironically, a good proportion of the Chabad movement after the Rebbe died said, the Rebbe will come back again. And the Rebbe is still alive in that sense.

And this has, of course, created something of a split, not only within Lubavitch, but within the world at large of the religious community, who regard Chabad a little bit on the loony side, and yet have to admit they've done remarkably well. The other side of Chabad was the fact that the Rebbe didn't go and live in Israel. He went on living and seeing himself as the Rebbe of the diaspora. And not only that, but he did very much get involved in certain aspects of politics in Israel, not in party politics. He refused to get involved in party politics. He thought it was corrupt, he was right it was corrupt, but he did want to get certain concessions made from the Israeli government, particularly on the definition of who was a Jew, and in support of religious issues, not necessarily political ones. But he also made it a point of encouraging his followers to get involved with the army, and going to the army if some of them to serve, and others to teach, and to be involved, and to support, particularly families who had lost members in the struggle for survival in Israel. And in that sense, like Rav Kook, he had this passionate interest in supporting Jewish survival in Israel, but in the context of a government that might have been secular. It didn't matter. Whereas the other Hasidic movement and the other wings of the ultra-orthodox Haredi movement say, no, on principle, we don't like the secular movement.

Although there are certain Hasidic dynasties, Ger and Belz, who are involved with government affairs, except in their case they do it through their political agents, and they are involved in politics in Israel. So you have these different ways of manifesting your influence in Israel today. And both of these, both the Rav Kook version and the Chabad version, come from this original Hasidic idea that we as a nation, we are Am Yisrael, we are the people, no matter who we are within it, no matter how much we do within it, no matter how little we do within it. And we are, and we are responsible for each other, we should love each other. But remember, my dear friends, love your neighbour as yourself, V'ahavta L'reacha Kamocha, was first said by Moses, it was copied by Jesus, it has been spread by make love, not war, and we are no nearer, I suggest, of being nice to each other than we necessarily were then.

So the dream of messianism, the dream of making the world a better place, is still there. And I can't think of two more significant people in trying to move towards this and get us to move towards this, in getting us to come together, and in getting us to come together to try to make a better world, despite all the horrible things that are thrown at us and keep on being thrown at us, and all the mistakes that we ourselves make and all the misjudgments that we make, we still need this vision of perfection, this vision of love, and this personal desire to make ourselves better people within the Jewish people and within the world at large. And that's why I really find these two characters so persuasive.

Many times in my life I have been asked to join in, whether it's in a book fair or some other conference, debates on who were the most influential Jews. And usually people come up with people like Freud and people like Marx, and I always bridle at that. They might be the greatest people who happen to have had some Jewish genes, but that doesn't make them the people who have most influenced the Jewish world. And if you look at the Jewish world today, this is a world where I was brought up in, where the British Empire was the most important community. Then it was overtaken by the United States, which was the most important Jewish community, and 50 years ago it still was, but now it's not. Without any question, Israel is the greatest Jewish community and the strongest and the most creative and productive and religious in the world today. And so the foresight of producing that end result was people who did support coming to Israel, no matter who you were, and trying to build the community up.

And the other side of it is, within the religious world today, who is the fastest growing and the most dynamic sector? And the straight answer is, it is the Hasidic world. It's true the Lithuanian world has also come back from the edge of extinction in World War II, but in practise, in terms of numbers, in terms of institutions, in terms of impact on the world, the Hasidim have won hands down. Even to the point where, in the Lithuanian world, which originally was the world that banned Hasidism, now every one of the Rosh Yeshivas, the head of their academies, behaves as if he was a Hasidic Rebbe, and have the same indications and focuses on blessings and charisma, and to some extent one might call it the supernatural. But the Hasidic world is exponentially growing. In the ultra-black community, so to speak, of Williamsburg, of Brooklyn and their outreaches in New Jersey and in New York State, they are growing all the time. Some drop out of any community, always have. In fact, most Jews have always disappeared in one way or another in a generation. But they are going strong. And Sunni Chabad. When I first encountered Chabad in the early 50s, there were a handful of Shluchim. Now there are thousands of them. It's absolutely unbelievable. And each generation, they get more and more. Once there was only one Chabad Centre in New York, now I'm told there are 15 of different kinds. And so this exponential growth, they started with little synagogues, then they went into education schools, then they went into publications, and now they're going into secondary schools and expanding beyond, and they are using technology and the internet and everything to make a wider, wider reach out.

This is not for everybody. But as I like to say, take an example of analogy of golf. Golf or tennis or any game, you have the professionals. Around the professionals, you have those who are the coaches. Around the coaches, you have those who are the broadcasters who televise and expand the game. You have those who make money on equipment and on fashion. You have those who make money on public relations. They are all involved in making golf or tennis or soccer or baseball or basketball the hugely important, wealthy elements of the secular world. And everybody plays a part. And if the professionals were to exclude the TV people or exclude the publicists or exclude the spectators that turn up in their large numbers, they wouldn't be as powerful as they are. And the same thing goes for Judaism. As you should know of me by now, I'm inclusive. I want everybody to feel a part no matter what their views are and no matter what their standards of religion are either. But when I look at the history of the Jewish people, it

seems to me that in the last 100 years, these two men, Rav Kook and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and those who are satellites in one way or another, have succeeded in bringing us back from the brink of extinction.

Q&A and Comments:

So on that optimistic note, I now turn to some of the questions. I see not so many as normally I get. Maybe more will turn up.

Stewart Seidl says, Chabad rabbis can be very cool.

When I lived in Coral Springs in Florida, he opened up the conservative, joined the conservative reform on Orthodox colleagues for a Purim celebration. Yes, this is typical of Chabad outreach to everybody. Whereas on some of the Haredi world, they will not talk to the reform or the conservative or any other rabbi. They go out of their way too. And they're very human and they do a great job.

Michael Bloch, I find fault with your dismissive, even negative point of view that you have towards the national religious camp, denies our right to our motherland.

Well, I'm sorry I gave you that impression because it's not what I feel. I'm not against the idea of settling in Judea and Samaria. I'm not against Jews expanding. Quite the contrary. I think it's very necessary to. And if on the one hand we move to a position where we are going to have two states, just as there will be Arabs living in a Jewish state, there should be Jews living in an Arab state. That would be genuine peace. And if we don't get that, then there is no genuine peace. What I object to is brutality, physicality, abuse, dehumanisation. And I see that coming from many settlements on the West Bank. I didn't mention the national religious group because although a lot of my family would identify with them, I don't identify with the way and the method of dealing with the situation in the West Bank today. So I praise the national religious camp when it is religious. But when it is not behaving in a religious way, I condemn it as much as I condemn any other aspect of Judaism where they do not behave in a religious, spiritual, human way. So I hope that clears things up. But if not, come back at me.

Shelley says, go to college, get a secular education as well as a Jewish one.

Shelly, I know, but that's the right of the very religious world to say we don't like the influences that are permeating the secular world. We want to protect our children from it. Maybe from the media and the social media and everything like that. And that is their right. They have every right to do it. And they can still go out and earn money. There are plenty of Chabad and Satmar are multimillionaires. We hear about the poor ones, but there are plenty of rich ones. And I think we have the right, just as people have the right to homeschool, to protect their children to whatever degree they feel is appropriate. Maybe play a little of their liturgies that would be so enjoyable and enlightening.

Well, Launa you can. What I suggest you do is you go on to YouTube and you tune into YouTube. I'll give you one example. Look up a man called Motty Steinmetz Motty Steinmetz is a Vizhnitz Hasid. Vizhnitz was one of the more pro-Israeli Hasidic groups at one stage, but a little less now. And he will lead you to a group of other very famous, millions of downloads on YouTube of Hasidic music, both liturgy and non-liturgy that's available today. It's amazing how they have reached out, how these guys, the Long payot and the Black Hats are getting millions and actually a lot of non-Jews, particularly from South America, from the evangelicals who love the spiritual message, because the Yiddish and the Hebrew gets translated, can be translated on screen. And they see the message of warmth, togetherness, godliness and humanity. So there's plenty there. Go and look it up.

Q: Does Chabad observe his independence?

A: I believe the vast majority of them do. They are very much involved in Israeli life, both in Independence Day, the Memorial Day and other celebrations, as well, of course, as the religious ones.

Sharon's saying, hi. Sharon, good to hear from you.

Chabad in Cambridge is wonderful. They've showed me the amazing kindness, inclusiveness. My grandchildren love their Khedah.

Well, there you are. And that message is repeated all around the world. It doesn't matter where in the world you go, from Kathmandu to Bali to Fiji, wherever you go, almost, there's a Chabad house. And just one small experience, a former pupil of mine who went off the tracks, who ended up drugged out in the Philippines. And he died. And his body laid for months in a morgue because nobody could recognise him or know about him. And it was only because a Chabad guy came there and somebody mentioned there was an unclaimed body. Would you like to look at it? And discovered that he was Jewish and then found out more about it, and then discovered that he came from a Persian community. And he got in touch with Chabad in London. And Chabad in London got in touch with somebody from the Persian community there, who then got in touch with somebody in New York and arranged for this guy to be buried in New York, because that's where other members of his family ended up. Now, that's the outreach of Chabad wherever you look.

Carla, thank you very much. I've been in Beit Harav Kuk in Jerusalem, Rav Kuk, you can see there's a movie of his life. That's the house I used to study in, because at one stage that was the shiva. It is not now a much bigger and much more popular shiva has grown up. It's with thousands and it's done extremely well because of the growth of religious Zionism.

Nancy said, I recently learned that in the 1930s and 40s, Hasidic rebbes in Poland told Jews they could visit Palestine and invest in Palestine, but not go to live there because the Messiah hadn't yet come. Many Jews would have been saved.

This is absolutely true, Nancy. Many Hasidic groups in Eastern Europe, not just Hasidic groups, were against going to Israel, as they were against emigrating to America, because they thought they would lose their Jewish identity as thousands, maybe even millions did. And it's always a toss up. And there are some shameful examples of rebbes who told their pupils, their followers to stay, but they themselves escaped. But there are other rebbes who survived in the camps and came out and rebuilt their dynasties afterwards, despite the mistakes they make. We could all make political mistakes and back the wrong political party.

You know, I've just been watching, I'm sure some of you have, this new series that you find on Hulu and elsewhere, on Anne Frank. It's a wonderful series on television on Anne Frank. It's a dramatisation, but it shows how, whether it was in Germany or whether it was in Holland, Jews did not want to leave. Secular Jews didn't want to leave, let alone religious Jews didn't want to leave. And because very many of them were poor, they couldn't get out. The rich got out, no question. The rich on all sides, rich Hasidim got out. It was the poor ones that got slobbered. But, you know, that's a sad chapter. And slowly one can say that we will have maybe learnt from our lesson. But I don't know, I'm suspicious. I think we still live, particularly in America, in Cloud Cuckoo Land.

Q: Chasid Halkol, has Chassidim elected a rabbi to follow Schneerson?

A: The answer is no. There's rather like, in the 19th century, the Breslov Hasidim never appointed a successor to the brilliant, great Rav Nachman of Breslov. And they were afterwards always known as the Teuta Hasidim, the dead Hasidim, because they didn't have a Rebbe. The question is why? And we don't know. There are all different possibilities. One possibility is the Rebbe simply didn't find anybody he had the confidence in. He had confidence in the team. He had confidence in the system. In the system that he had set up, which gives responsibility to different people in different areas, which gives responsibility to the individuals to take responsibility for their religious life and for their communities. That he thought that this franchise system might have been the best solution. And the other answer is that sadly, towards the end of his life, after a stroke, he was not in a position to make the sort of decision one would have thought. Now, many people say this is for the best. And I, for one, tend to think it is. Because all my experience of Hasidic Rebbes, of different kinds in Israel and elsewhere, shows that those who inherit the job are rarely as good as those before and are not the best people to lead. And the only other explanation I can give is that he himself maybe thought that God was going to come and intervene.

Ruth. The exponential growth of Hasidim is due to their having as many children as possible, 10 or 12. Though Chabad has gotten involved in the secular life, other Hasidic movements have closed the secular life.

That's correct. Secular lives are supporting them. They don't contribute in any way to the secular state of Israel. That's true. But here in America, with social welfare, we support people who very often we think don't deserve it. And that's part of any state, a democratic state, funds the

different areas. And to some extent, you might argue, it's just the secular side are more interested in supporting, as I think they should, the Arab citizens in Israel. Why shouldn't other people be supportive of the religious? I think this is a divisive argument. I think both sides are divisive, frankly. Both sides ought to have their wrists slapped. But nevertheless, in democracy, people rarely make the right decisions and look at this country, America, look at England, look at France, wherever you look, politics is a mess. But that's not an argument to say just because they have a different way of life, therefore we shouldn't support them.

Q: Amalie, do they welcome anyone who claims to be Jewish, even conservative communities?

A: They absolutely welcome as Jewish anybody whose mother is Jewish, but they do not exclude from their community anybody, however they define themselves as Jewish. The definition within Chabad remains as orthodox as any other. But welcoming anybody despite their status, that is legitimate.

Ellie says, I read the Rav Kook was one of the jeeps that entered East Jerusalem as it was free during the Shtetl War.

Yeah, that's the son of Rav Kook. The son of Rav Kook was pushing this dynamism of Zionism, of inhabiting the whole of the land of Israel. And that's why he was brought by his pupils who were serving in the army, all of them were. They went out of their way to get him and to bring him into Jerusalem to fulfil the dream he had, because for most of his life, he couldn't get there. I wish there were more open-minded rabbis like you in Israel, we might fight amongst ourselves.

But there are, Judith, there are so many wonderful enlightened rabbis in Israel, men and on the Reform side, women, even members of my family who are so open. There's a whole centre called Yakar in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv, my brother founded, which is open to everybody and very, very tolerant. But one only hears the bad news everywhere. You never hear the good news. You never hear of all those people, again, like my family who go into Gaza and try to make relationships and try to build bridges and try to do things. You don't hear that, everybody is busy criticising everybody else.

Keith, Chabad is the second largest Chassid movement over Satmar. Ger is the largest in Israel.

Yes, I'm sure Chabad is certainly pretty big. But as I say, Satmar is still, in my view, the biggest and it's true, having children, and the more the merrier. But also what happens is that a lot of Chassidic movements split. So Satmar has already split. It has two Satmar rebbes. And similarly, Vizhnitz have split. There's a Vizhnitz in Israel and a Vizhnitz in in in Monsey. So, you know, many Chassidic groups, if they hadn't split, would also had been much bigger.

Marion Gill says, in South Africa Chabad has been most successful. There's also the fear Chabad has a cult of the Rebbe, is, was the last word, too much like the Almighty. I fear independent thinking of Chabad is compromised.

Look, a lot of people, most people, I would say, like to be told what to do. That's why fascism is so popular. That's why Marxism was so popular. Very few people think for themselves. And that's why, for example, in the United States of America, the most popular source of inspiration comes from movements like astrology and easy self-help gurus who get millions and millions coming because they give answers. They become equivalent of Rebbes, just as, if you like, the Dalai Lama is a Rebbe. So people need this. In, from every rational point of view, the job of the Rebbe was to stimulate people to study and to think for themselves and to make up their own minds. But it's more convenient sometimes to fall back on what's already there and accept it and it makes life easier. I happen to be one of those guys, and you might call me a masochist, who likes being independent and likes to draw sometimes on Hasidism, sometimes on the Shiva world and wherever I find inspiration. And obviously, like Rav Kook, I believe that the core of it is my Jewish soul, even though I have other souls too.

Welcoming leadership has revived dying congregations, yes, yes, Chabad now has even in England entered into the mainstream rabbinate and they take over synagogues. You've described how do you see future growth of conservative movement. I don't see the conservative movement or, as I mentioned in my last lecture, or the Reform movement, I don't see them as being growth areas. They are areas in which they are protective, they can retain some people within the Jewish ambit, but they are not creating this passionate involvement to the same extent that the Hasidic and the other Haredi movements who reach out go. So, whereas I welcome their presence, I don't see them having the solution to the long-term survival, but they do have a very important contribution to make and I don't deny it as I don't deny total secular Judaism that has no religion at all.

Few anecdotes from religious Zionists, says Gideon, it was heard there were two biggest Rav Kook and Rav Lubavitch.

There's a story that Rav Kook's book, Orot Hakodesh was handed to the Rebbe of Lubavitch. He went through it, said that both his writings and Chabad had the same mystical grounding, just Rav Kook put more emphasis on prophecy, divine inspiration, and the Rebbe said, Chabad put more emphasis on doing mitzvot. I'm not certain about the conclusion, but in general I'm sure that's right. In general I'm sure that's right. Both of them believe that action, doing mitzvot, behaving in a moral way makes you a better person. But unfortunately, as there's everywhere too, there are people who do mitzvot who don't do everything they should do.

Chabad respected Louis Rabbi Jacobs, he was sent representative to attend his funeral. Yes, here's a good example. Rabbi Louis Jacobs was an Orthodox rabbi in England who was rejected because the English rabbinate, including chief rabbis, including beloved chief rabbis, is so scared of saying anything that might be deemed as non-religious that they basically excommunicated him and treated him disgustingly. Absolutely disgustingly. And we're there because at the same time he was a scholar of mysticism and he contacted and was in touch with the Chabad. The Chabad Rebbe respected Louis Jacobs, sent a representative to his funeral, and one of the few people who recognised that he was a remarkable man who was

humiliated and dismissed by what I call the establishment, which is another reason why I am anti-establishment.

Henry Hyatt, interesting book, Who Will Lead Us?

Thank you, I'll look at it.

Q: Nurit Ety, you think Rabbi Shlomo Goren was the chief rabbi of the IDF?

A: Yes, Rabbi Goren was. Rabbi Goren wasn't Chabad. He was a Lithuanian type of rabbi, modern Orthodox, a great rabbi, and he was the one who was photographed blowing the shofar at the Western Wall, very much involved. I certainly admired him, but he, I don't think either himself would compare himself to Rabbi Cook.

Sharon, my grandchildren are paternity Jewish, they still have went for me into their Khedah. I'm so pleased. I mean, that's where Chabad is great and why I admire them so much. So good for them.

Gideon, insulin aeronautical, Yitzchak Ginsburgh a few years ago, he claimed that Rav Kook and the sick rabbi Lubavitch were two sides of the same neshama.

So there we are, you see, as they say in Hebrew, I'm glad that other people greater than I have a similar view to that. So yes, I think that's a very nice point to make.

Q: Nourit, is Rabbi Yehoshua Engelman still associated with the Yakar in Tel Aviv?

A: I don't think so. I mean, he's a lovely man. Yakar in Tel Aviv is run by my brother Mickey's second son, Chananel, and it's doing extremely well there. I'm sure Rabbi Engelman is welcome there, and I'm sure he may give lectures generally, but Mickey's eldest son, Dov, is the head of Yakar in Jerusalem and Chananel is head of Yakar in Tel Aviv.

Q: Marcia, my father is Rav Kook's first cousin. What's the best book to read about the remarkable man? Are there still living descendants?

A: There are living descendants, both who have become more orthodox than he was, and aren't so happy to be compared to him, and some who married out. I'm trying to remember, do I have it here, the best book on Rav Kook? There's one in the, I think it's in the Yale series of Jewish Lives, but I need to look it up and check, and if you give me your email, I'll send you the details of the book.

Q: Rever, is Israel-Pravgassism growing rapidly with more than 50 congregations?

A: Yes it is, but it's still comparatively very, very small. I would like it to grow bigger, I'm sure it will, but compared to the vast numbers who are Haredi Ashkenazi, and the vast numbers of Sephardim in Israel, who are very traditional, it's a very small movement.

But, so long, good luck to it, and I have a niece who's a rabbi in a progressive movement in Israel, and does very well.

Your comments about Rabbi... Jacob Swell says stay independent. Thank you Marion.

Thank you everybody for listening, and until the next time, bye bye.