

A Brief History of Lubavitch Messianism

The Beginning

In the winter of 1950 the previous Rebbe issued the first of a four part Chasidic discourse, compiled from previous discourses, to be read over the weekend of 10 Shevat, 5710. The discourse focused on the metaphysical purpose of this world, for man to reunite the Divine Presence with this world in the state it was before the initial sin of Adam. The discourse relates how this was done only once before, by our biblical predecessors, starting from Abraham and culminating with Moses at Sinai. After the sin of the golden calf, the Divine Presence ascended once again and it is now our purpose to draw it back down. The discourse stresses the function of Moses as the seventh in the line of righteous men who worked to draw the Presence down, each from another of the seven heavens. Moses, the seventh, "as all sevenths are beloved," brought the Presence from the first heaven back down to earth. The previous Rebbe passed away on that Saturday, 10 Shevat, the date of the publication of this discourse. The latter three portions of the discourse were published on successive predetermined days on the Lubavitch calendar.

The discourse strongly suggests that just as Moses, the seventh, succeeded in fulfilling this divine purpose, so too our generation, the seventh to the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, would finally be the generation to once again draw down the divine presence, this time fulfilling the entire purpose of creation and bringing about the end of exile forever.

It was also clear that the Rebbe, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, would perform his role in this divine completion as Moshiach.

The Rebbe assumed leadership on the first anniversary of the previous Rebbe's death and marked it by reciting a discourse based on the first of the twenty chapters in the discourse. The Rebbe made this discourse a cornerstone of his leadership, each year reciting a discourse based on another of the twenty chapters, from 1971-1990 repeating the cycle, and in 1991 starting the cycle again.

Stages

The Rebbe started his leadership on a theme of "the seventh," poised to finally accomplish what had been prepared for us by the preceding six generations of Lubavitch.

The Rebbe made constant reference to his deceased father-in-law, the previous Rebbe, assigning to him the role of Moshiach, which was understood by all Chasidim to be a model for himself. In fact, the Rebbe referred to the previous Rebbe almost exclusively as "the Rebbe, my father-in-law" and never used the term "the Rebbe" to identify himself directly.

In 5730, on the day preceding the twentieth anniversary of the previous Rebbe's passing, the Rebbe called for the completion and initiation-ceremony for "Moshiach's Sefer Torah," a Torah scroll designated for Moshiach. Although the Rebbe's lectures had been full of expectation for the imminent arrival of Moshiach, many people consider this ceremony to be a significant turning point in the Rebbe's attitude towards Moshiach, now making Moshiach a tangible reality.

The next major turning point was the death of the Rebbetzin, the Rebbe's wife, in 1988. The Rebbe's lectures seemed to take on a sense of urgency towards the topic of Moshiach and towards behavior consciously devoted to bringing Moshiach. However, it seems that this era actually preceded the Rebbetzin's death somewhat, and that the two events were not entirely related.

The most significant turning point was shortly after Passover 1991, when the Rebbe gave a brief speech urging the Chasidim to do what they can to bring Moshiach, saying, "What else can I do?...The only thing I can do is to give this over to you: Do all that you can." This speech, incredibly uncharacteristic of the Rebbe, came as a shock to Chasidim and carried a tone that was a sort of mixture between despair and panic. Following this speech, every lecture of the Rebbe's was devoted to the topic of Moshiach, leading up until his stroke in the February 1992.

Despite these changes over the years the theme of Moshiach was one that permeated the Rebbe's character from the very beginning. Throughout his entire leadership, the Rebbe frequently mentioned that this was the seventh generation and that of the redemption and, using his father-in-law as model, made constant reference to "the Rebbe" and "the leader of the generation" as Moshiach.

Context

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe said in 1908: "We are now in the last generation...now is the generation of Moshiach...the present generation is the generation of Moshiach without any doubt." (Toras Shmuel 5667, pp. 73-74.)

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe said in 1927: "We are entering a new era in our time...and I do not mean spiritual revelations, I mean actually greeting Moshiach. I am not giving an extended period of time for this, it will be in my lifetime." (Sefer ha-Sichos 5687, pp. 121-122.)

In 1939 he added: "We can tangibly see that this is the generation preceding Moshiach...Moshiach is already here, he is beyond the wall, he who has good hearing can already hear him, he who has good sight can already see him."

In 1952 the Rebbe, the seventh generation of Lubavitcher Rebbes, said: "Moshiach is about to arrive...And not only the younger of the group but the eldest of the group — in his lifetime Moshiach will come." (Edited and published in Likutei Sichos vol. 1, p. 263.)

Today we are not in the generation of the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe nor the generation of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe. Not only the oldest of those present at the Rebbe's lecture has passed on but also a number of the younger ones as well. There is no confusion about this. There is no suggestion that we must still be in the fifth generation, or that Moshiach must have already come. No one has ever suggested that those present by the Rebbe's speech did not really die. There is no reason for confusion here, and indeed there is none.

Incubation of Messianism

I did not live in any generation other than my own, so I cannot say what was in the minds of those who lived in previous generations. But in this generation it is said that Chasidim have always considered their Rebbe to be Moshiach.

Growing up I was told that the greatest person in any given generation is necessarily poised to be Moshiach. We know that the Rebbe is the greatest man alive today, I was told, and therefore the potential Moshiach, but, that the Rebbe has said that he does not want people saying that he is Moshiach.

That is what I was told in the eighties.

Chasidim have always recited a verse wishing long life to the Rebbe. An extended version of this verse was made into a song, including an appenditure to the Rebbe's title now calling him "King Moshiach." The Rebbe did not allow this song to be sung in his presence, although there were a few times that he tolerated it and even indicated encouragement.

During the late eighties the Rebbe spoke of the importance of declaring "*yechi ha-melech*," "may the king live." This was generally associated by Chasidim with the well known verse that had always been in use for the Rebbe. In the early nineties some Chasidim began to use this brief version itself to extol the Rebbe.

At that time some Chasidim started to become more vocal about the Rebbe being Moshiach, even serving him with a petition to reveal himself. One brilliant Chasid, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Wolpo, of Kiryat Gat, Israel, prepared a book demonstrating evidence that the Rebbe was both the potential Moshiach and was destined to be manifest as the actual Moshiach. This was in line with the expectation that Moshiach would arrive in the Rebbe's generation. The Rebbe told him not to publish this work and he published a book pertaining only to Moshiach in general but not to his identity.

Shortly after the Rebbe's stroke in 1992, which left him partially paralyzed and unable to communicate efficiently, a new book was published by the same author, this time with the full addendum regarding the Rebbe's messiahship. Another book by Rabbi Wolpo, this time a Q & A book, followed shortly after. I must say that these two books are very intelligent works and are meticulously honest and accurate in what they say. Only fact is presented as fact, and speculation is presented as speculation. Despite this cautiousness,

at one point he writes that those claiming that the Rebbe is Moshiach do not consider it to be a game, "they are placing their honor and their futures on the line by publicizing their clear faith in our righteous Moshiach of flesh and blood, while we are speaking about a Moshiach who is exceedingly aged and in a severe state of health, yet they are not deterred by the fact that this is a matter whose truth is destined to be exposed."

Birth of Messianism

In addition to the extra Psalms recited for the Rebbe's recovery, it became customary to, as a group, recite "*yechi*" three times after each prayer and after any public gathering to say Psalms. Slowly, the full version of "*yechi*" began to be introduced — with little objection.

In the summer of 1992, the first after the Rebbe's stroke, the staff of the Lubavitch overnight camp in Kalakaska, Michigan (known simply as "Detroit"), decided to introduce the appended verse for wishing life to the Rebbe, now "the Rebbe king Moshiach forever and ever." Considering that this was a private camp of Lubavitchers, and considering the Rebbe's condition and the expectation that it would be alleviated in conjunction with the redemption, this did not seem as a transgression of the previously expressed wishes of the Rebbe.

In the fall of that year, on Rosh Hashana, the Rebbe was brought to a window constructed on the upper level of the synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway where the Rebbe was being cared for and overlooking the main sanctuary. The Chasidim sang the full version of "*yechi*," and the Rebbe appeared to encourage the singing.

Beginning with this acknowledgment of acceptance many Chasidim began to openly refer to the Rebbe as Moshiach and to include this identification in their overall campaign for Moshiach awareness.

Meshichism vs. Anti-Meshichism

Despite all of these developments many Chasidim were reluctant to introduce this aspect of declaring the Rebbe to be Moshiach to the world at large. The individual reasons for this reluctance varied from person to person, but it was hard to condemn the behavior of others when the Rebbe had seemed to encourage it.

At around this time Rabbi Berel Shemtov of Detroit, Michigan, received a letter from a respected physician and contributor to Lubavitch. The letter expressed discomfort with the identification of the Rebbe as Moshiach and reluctance to further affiliate with Lubavitch in light of this behavior. Rabbi Shemtov faxed this letter to a number of prominent *shluchim* (Lubavitcher emissaries) explaining that it was his position that the Rebbe did not want anything to be done that would turn Jews away from Lubavitch, and that the public identification of the Rebbe as Moshiach fit squarely into that category.

This moment was the birth of both Meshichism and Anti-Meshichism, and to this day Rabbi Shemtov is seen as the father of Anti-Meshichism. "Meshichist" (pronounced mi·shi·khist, with stress the on the final syllable), became the title for those who were open about Moshiach's identity, and "Anti-Meshichist" became the title of those who kept this knowledge amongst the initiated.

With this development Lubavitch became divided in two. The Meshichistim (pronounced mi·shi·khis·tim, stress on second to last syllable) claimed that the Antis were ignoring the Rebbe's message about Moshiach, while the Antis countered that the Meshichistim were turning people away from Lubavitch in stark contrast to the Rebbe's instructions.

This split, however, was more sociopolitical than it was ideological. In fact, it broke evenly along preexisting (yet invisible) sociopolitical alliances. These issues then became a front for all the issues that divided these two groups.

During this period the Rebbe began to come out on a special balcony built for this purpose, usually in the afternoon for a few minutes, at which time the full "*yechi*" was sung, and the Rebbe enthusiastically encouraged it. I do not know of any Chasidim who refrained from singing this song when the Rebbe was out on the balcony. Although unable to communicate efficiently, the Rebbe was able to communicate with his secretariat to some degree, indicating when he wanted to appear on the balcony and when he wanted to return to his room. The Rebbe was also able to follow the services, and seemed to be able to unambiguously express pleasure and displeasure at what was going on. On one occasion the Rebbe remained out on the balcony for over six hours. It is hard to claim that the Rebbe did not want the full version of the song to be sung, at least within the confines of the Lubavitch synagogue. There is no report of an instance when the Rebbe expressed desire for himself to be identified as Moshiach on a public scale.

On 10 Shevat, 5753, one of the Meshichist leaders, Rabbi Shmuel Butman, announced a satellite broadcast of a coronation ceremony for the Rebbe as Moshiach. The Rebbe was consulted and he consented for the event to be broadcast. Despite this, the head *shaliach* of the state of Connecticut, an Anti, threatened the crew that came to broadcast the event with physical harm. I was present in 770 when an objection to this behavior was announced, citing the Rebbe's consent for this broadcast. That evening, just as the broadcast began, Rabbi Butman recanted, saying that this was not a coronation ceremony after all. The Rebbe came out and, as usual, encouraged the singing of "*yechi*." Significant statements were made by Rabbi Butman identifying the Rebbe as Moshiach. The following night I heard one Detroit rabbi consulting with Rabbi Shemtov as to whether he thought the Rebbe really consented to the broadcast. Rabbi Shemtov reserved his response for criticizing the unacceptable Meshichist character projected during a satellite broadcast of such an event, but did not speculate as to whether the Rebbe was aware that it was being broadcast or its potential implications.

By this point the full "*yechi*" was a standard by any prayer or recital of Pslams, even in Detroit, the birthplace of Anti-Meshichism. The main divide remained between whether the Rebbe's messiahship should be prematurely exposed in order to hasten his revelation

(by gaining "acceptance" as king by his "nation"), or it should be kept private until the Rebbe reveals himself openly at the true "coming" of Moshiach.

On June 12, 1994, the Rebbe passed away in Beth Israel Medical Center, Manhattan, following complications resulting from cataract surgery and then a second stroke which left the Rebbe completely incapacitated.

Messianism Phase II

On the morning of the Rebbe's passing no one was a Meshichist. There were close to thirty people dancing and singing "*yechi*" that morning, and they were still singing and dancing at the Rebbe's funeral. I heard that they believed that this was part of the process of the Rebbe's becoming Moshiach and that they were jubilant that the revelation was unfolding. Everyone knew that it was just "those thirty wackos" who were saying that the Rebbe was Moshiach.

On the morning of the Rebbe's passing each person was an individual, separated from his social clan. There was no terminology to address this event and each person had to understand it in his own way. By evening this had mostly ended, and people were once again falling under the charms of group influence.

I don't know how long it took for the assumption that the Rebbe was not Moshiach to come to an end. Maybe it was an hour, maybe it took a few days, I don't know. It was only a matter of people communicating with each other as a group for their ideas to reformulate and finally dominate any individual sentiments. I do know that by evening a page was circulating with a selection of the Rebbe's talks from just after the passing of the previous Rebbe, including the references to him as Moshiach. They also contained many references to him as a dead person, expressing hope that he would soon be resurrected. Reading this alone after the Rebbe's passing there was no room to consider the possibility that the Rebbe meant that his father-in-law could actually resurrect to be Moshiach. Under group influence though, this became the only way to read it.

There still remained a contingent devoted to publicizing the Rebbe's messiahship, but this effort gradually waned as the urgency for this failed to present itself.

The bulk of Meshichistim today do not hide their belief that the Rebbe is Moshiach, but do little to advertise it. Some keep their vocal acknowledgments among Lubavitchers and avoid public awareness of their beliefs.

After the Rebbe's passing the Anits decided retroactively that the Rebbe had never allowed the appendation to his title to begin with, and that it was not acceptable to use the title "king Moshiach" for the Rebbe even in private. Also, in contrast to the Meshichistim, Antis do not indulge in discussions about the Rebbe being Moshiach, they simply accept it and await the Rebbe's revelation when they will be able to admit it publicly.

Who is a Meshichist?

In 1997, Rabbi Berel Levin, librarian of the Rebbe's personal library at 770 Eastern Parkway, published a series of small journals debating the belief that the Rebbe is Moshiach.

In the second of seven issues, Rabbi Yoel Kahn, the most prominent scholar of Chasidus in Lubavitch, wrote a lengthy article "proving" that the Rebbe is Moshiach. Before the Rebbe passed away Rabbi Kahn was a vocal Meshichist, but after the Rebbe's death he admitted that he had been presumptive and is now an ardent Anti-Meshichist.

While most Antis have not read his article, as they do not involve themselves with this discussion at all, they are uniformly committed to the authenticity of Rabbi Kahn's dissertation. To question this would not only be to question Rabbi Kahn's reliability, but to question one's unequivocal devotion to the Rebbe. Rabbi Kahn can be considered the father of the Anti-Meshichist position on Moshiach, which, unlike his adversaries, demands that this teaching be limited to those who can incorporate it. What the Antis do know is that the Rebbe is certainly Moshiach, it is not a matter that needs further investigation, or even permits it, and it is not something that should be forced upon others who might be reluctant to accept it.

I asked Rabbi Levin why he discontinued his publication seeing that the issue had not been resolved. He told me that his objective had been primarily to let people know that such an opinion (that the Rebbe is not Moshaiach) is "out there" and that it is based upon a rational foundation, and he felt that his publication had already met that goal.

Shortly before this publication, an Israeli Lubavitcher, Yechezkel Sofer, published a book in which he describes this generation as the eighth generation and regards the Rebbe as no longer being a candidate for Moshiach. I do not know what kind of readership this has in Israel, but among the American Antis his entire theory is regarded as unacceptable heresy. Some Antis refer to him as Yechezkel "Kofer" ("heretic"), and in general this position is simply dubbed "*kefira*" ("heresy").

This position, while held by ten or twenty mainstream Lubavitchers, is almost exclusively found among the periphery. While there is no set standard for what makes someone a Lubavitcher, there are many external elements that are characteristic of Lubavitchers, and these elements serve to create the image of Lubavitch to the world at large. In general, if one is affiliated with Lubavitch to the extent that he performs the ritual handwashing at his bedside each morning (rather than at a sink), then he is almost certainly carrying enough Lubavitch characteristics to be perceived as mainstream. If he does not, then he is most likely perceived among the periphery.

A student who was raised in Lubavitch educational institutions and is now attending a Lubavitch institution while living away from home will unquestionably believe that the Rebbe is Moshiach, even if he or she has never been told this by a parent or educator. Not

teaching that the Rebbe is not Moshiach is the equivalent of insisting that he is. No Lubavitch institution teaches that the Rebbe is not Moshiach.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, chairman of the main Lubavitch organization set up by the Rebbe, and the executive leader of Lubavitch, believes the Rebbe is Moshiach. He was recently quoted challenging his interviewer to find someone who fits the messianic criteria as successfully as the Rebbe. Based on the Rebbe's teachings, if the Rebbe is eligible then he is Moshiach.

In 1996, a year and a half after the Rebbe's passing, I personally heard Rabbi Avrohom Shemtov, chairman of the executive committee overseeing the central Lubavitch organizations, and the second most powerful person in the Lubavitch movement, announce at the annual conference of Lubavitch emissaries that the Rebbe is Moshiach. Rabbi Shemtov continues to make such statements within Lubavitch circles to this day.

While Rabbi Berel Shemtov is the ideological father of Anti-Meshichism, Krinsky and Shemtov (Berel's brother), as leaders of the main Lubavitch organizations, are the political leaders of this faction. Rabbi Berel Shemtov also privately acknowledges that the Rebbe is Moshiach.

During the period of the Rebbe's illness another element had made a name for itself, this was "Detroit." Detroit, referring to the students that had graduated from the yeshiva of that city as well as the rabbis of that community, became known as an extreme "Anti" contingent, being the most vocal opponents of Meshichist behavior. While their attitude towards identifying Moshiach publicly remains uniform with the rest of the Anti community, they seem to want to constantly distinguish themselves. Today, Detroit is known as a category of its own, albeit a subset of Anti-Meshichism.

Being that the divide is more sociopolitical than ideological, there are a few Meshichist rabbis who do not say "*yechi*" after the Rebbe's death. In the fall of 1997, an Anti from Crown Heights, Rabbi Shlomo Friedman, bid for the honor of reciting the verse of "*yechi*" by the Simchas Torah services. When the bidding ended at \$40,000 he announced that he had purchased this honor for the rabbi of his congregation, Rabbi Avrohom Osdoba, one of the leading rabbis of the Meshichist community. Rabbi Friedman did this to demonstrate that even Rabbi Osdoba would refuse to proclaim this slogan, and when he indeed refused the bid was retracted.

In the Meshichist camp there is an even wider variation of strata than by the Antis. There is a vocal group that prefers to refer to the Rebbe as though he is still alive. The Rebbe too referred to his father-in-law as though he was alive after his passing, although he also referred to him as one who had passed on and indeed conducted himself accordingly. The phenomenon of this group is not the terminology that they employ, but the fact that there is a huge audience which would like to believe that they are actually convinced that the Rebbe did not die. While these people do not visit the Rebbe's gravesite (they generally do visit the adjacent gravesite of the previous Rebbe) and employ titles reserved for the living in regard to the Rebbe, their overall behavior acknowledges that they are aware

that the Rebbe is not alive in the most literal sense. The only people who experience confusion are those who believe that this group denies the Rebbe's death. In fact, I have seen many people get quite angry at the suggestion that this group is cognizant of the reality.

Another element of the Meshichist group are those who refer to the Rebbe as God, further amending the "*yechi*" verse to include the term "*boreinu*" ("our creator"). This group has no illusions about the indefinability of God, which, as Orthodox Jews, they unequivocally affirm. There is also no confusion regarding the corporeality of the Rebbe, which it is impossible to deny. When they refer to the Rebbe as a divine being they are either attributing God's character to the corporeal Rebbe or the affectation of the Rebbe to the indefinable God.

The Rebbe himself made a statement, which he edited and printed, stating that it was his sentiment that his father-in-law was "*Atzmus*," the cabalistic term for the indefinable aspect of God, "situated in a body." In the vast literature of classical Judaism there are a number of instances where the equation of God and man is no less explicit. Even today such terminologies exist, but in the context of the Jewish axiomatic approach to God these expressions go completely unnoticed. The introduction of novel terminology, no less benign, can be the cause of much reactionary outrage.

The people that have become comfortable with this new terminology are known as "Boreinuniks" or "Elokistim."

Alongside this group is another sector known as "Tzfatim," from Safed, Israel. This contingent has also made its name with its abrasive terminology and behavior. This includes obsessive utilization of "*yechi*" during the prayer services, constant reference to the Rebbe as though he is alive, a strong Boreinunik contingent, dancing to "*yechi*," flag waiving, bumper stickers, and much more. A large contingent of this group has taken hold of the day to day functions in the main sanctuary at 770 Eastern Parkway. This includes, but is not limited to, deciding when the Rebbe's chair will be set for prayer or to be placed at Chasidic gatherings and the like. Starting in the summer of 2002 they began to clear a path, known as the "*shvil*," for the Rebbe to enter and exit before and after each prayer.

The Tzfas group that dominates the synagogue at 770 is mostly comprised of students from Tzfas (Safed) who have come to New York to study. These are generally referred to as the "Tzfas *bochurim*," but are increasingly dubbed by the Antis as "the Taliban."

Finally, there is one more sector that cannot be ignored, although it is comprised of only one person. While the Tzfatim are abrasive and provocative, they direct their behavior mainly within Lubavitch settings. There is one man living in Tzfas who is somewhat more noticeable, Meir Baranes. Along the main road leading into the city he placed a large photo of the Rebbe with the Hebrew caption "God" beneath it. He has also circulated much paraphernalia displaying, from the Rebbe's own words, that the Rebbe is both Moshiach and God. I cannot read this man's mind, but as an Orthodox Jew it can be

assumed that he understands the indefinability of God etc. After several run-ins with the local Lubavitch establishment, he has been forced to now sign his name on all of his material rather than publishing it in the name of Lubavitch.

Many Lubavitchers in Israel suspect that Baranes is working for the General Security Service in order to slander the right-wing contingent by displaying fanatical behavior. It is hard not to take this suggestion seriously after Baranes was let off with a small fine for running his car over Rabbi Levi Bistrisky, the chief rabbi of Safed, for "not believing the Rebbe is Moshiach," just after one Israeli citizen received a three-year prison sentence for throwing a cup of tea at a Knesset member.

Yechi or not Yechi

A quick summary of the strata divided over the Moshiach issue goes: Meir Baranes; Boreinuniks; Tzfatim (a.k.a. "the Taliban"); regular Meshichistim; regular Antis; Detroit; and finally, Levin and Sofer (or simply "*kefira*" — "heresy").

The final category, "*kefira*," differs from the others in that the other categories comprise sociopolitical groups that generally affiliate with each other. The handful of mainstream Lubavitchers holding the position of "*kefira*" have no group of their own, but are simply isolated elements of the Anti contingent. The total percentage of mainstream Lubavitchers holding this position is so negligible that it can be compared to the percentage of Orthodox Jews who consciously violate the Sabbath.

The entire collage of sociopolitical groups is generally divided more broadly into two main groups, the Meshichistim and the Antis.

What sets aside a Meshichist from his Anti counterpart? As I have mentioned, there is no single ideology distinguishing any of these groups. However, there is a clear distinction that uniformly follows the colloquial designation of the Meshichist vs. the Anti. This is: When "*yechi*" is recited after the prayers, does the individual answer by reciting "*yechi*" or does he refrain from answering?

There are many Lubavitchers who are not particular to recite this slogan every day, let alone by every prayer, but would recite it if they heard it being recited in 770. These people will often identify as "neutral," but "everyone knows that 'neutral' is just another word for Meshichist." There is no one who simply doesn't answer; one can either answer or *refrain* from answering.

If someone refrains from answering "*yechi*" then he has clearly placed his affiliation among the Antis. If he answers, then he has identified with the Meshichistim. Even Rabbi Levin, who wrote that the Rebbe is not Moshiach, is by default an Anti, and anyone would consider him as such.

Non-Messianist

Dr. David Berger wrote a lengthy book detailing his personal experience in battling the Lubavitch position regarding a dead Moshiach. In his book he distinguishes between "messianist" and "non-messianist" Lubavitchers. What he considered messianist was anyone who holds the belief that the Rebbe is Moshiach, and non-messianist was reserved for an individual who, at the very least, is not convinced that the Rebbe is Moshiach.

The deception he conveys by using this terminology, whether or not it was deliberate, has outweighed all the deception of the Antis regarding their beliefs. With this small choice of terminology he allowed the Antis to masquerade under the guise of the "non-messianist," thereby avoiding any conflict regarding their beliefs.

Perhaps the best thing that ever happened to the Antis was the Meshichistim. The idea that a dead man could resurrect as Moshiach, whether or not it is tolerated by classic Judaism, is generally anathema to most Jews. This poses a significant difficulty to the Antis, who market their brand of Judaism in order to support themselves. But just as this issue was coming into the fore Berger secured them with the perfect cover, thereby easing the strain of broaching this subject.

Another element is the "might-be-Moshiach" factor that Berger neatly covers up. While any Lubavitcher is aware that if the Rebbe can be Moshiach then there is no possibility that he is not, this claim is exceedingly popular among the Antis, reassuring all that they are not from the "messianists."

If I did not know any better I would think that Berger was put up by the Antis to make this whole hullabaloo just in order to whitewash the Antis and besmirch their adversaries.

Rabbi Zalman I. Posner, a prominent Anti from Tennessee, recently accused some of the Meshichistim of deluding themselves that the Rebbe is alive and the Boreinuniks of going "beyond the pale" in their assertion that the Rebbe is God, all the while justifying statements made by the Rebbe regarding the previous Rebbe's divine status and ignoring statements that the Rebbe made treating the previous Rebbe as alive.

The best thing that ever happened to the Anti establishment was the Meshichistim. Now they can brush off all accusations saying, "Oh, no, it's just those guys." The best thing that ever happened to the Meshichistim was the Tzfatim and the Boreinuniks, who they can blame for any abrasive and even "heretical" behavior. The Tzfatim and the Boreinuniks can in turn point to Meir Baranes, identifying him as the lone cause of all discontent with Lubavitch messianism and the only one to really go too far. In regard to the God terminology, which is accepted by all Lubavitchers on some level (considering that the Rebbe introduced it), everyone is happy to turn on Meir Baranes as "the one who took it to an unacceptable level." Meir Baranes himself, well, he seems quite happy with his lot in all this, so it works out conveniently for everyone.

Summary

Lubavitchers uniformly believe that the Rebbe will return as Moshiach. The negligible handful of mainstream Lubavitchers who do not accept this are isolated and do not form any contingent.

While no single ideology distinguishes the sociopolitical groups in Lubavitch, terminology does. A Lubavitcher who will answer *yechi* when it is recited is a Meshichist, if he refrains from doing so he is an Anti.

The Lubavitch sectors carry varying levels of novel terminology, but they are essentially the same. The only people who mistake the terminology are those who choose to turn on the other's terminology for reasons of personal advancement, with the claim that the other is misinterpreting what the Rebbe said and while keeping themselves in the clear.

Professor Berger strikes the final blow in the campaign of deception by fabricating the non-existent contingent of the non-messianists, providing the missing element needed for complete Lubavitch infiltration and integration within the wary mainstream of Judaism.