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Women's Studies in Religion Program

May 12, 2006

Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin  
Director  
Jewish Educational Media  
784 Eastern Parkway, Suite 403  
Brooklyn, New York 11213

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin:

The efforts of Jewish Educational Media to preserve and provide public access to moving images of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the Chabad Movement will provide an enormous benefit to students and scholars of American history and culture, religious studies, and Jewish history and life. The film and video in this archive give access not only to the record of an important religious leader, but also to the lives, practices and beliefs of participants in a significant cultural sector that has influenced American society, history, and religion. The images document many important historical events to which the Lubavitcher Rebbe brought a moral and ethical perspective through the lens of Jewish values. Whether one shares his perspective or not, the application of a moral framework to American society provides a valuable resource for discussion and analysis. The footage of lay participation in the Lubavitcher Movement will be invaluable to anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, and documentarians seeking to understand American religious life, ethnicity, the relation of church and state, the role of religion in economics, race relations, and a host of other topics.

The archive is especially valuable because of the long time frame it covers and its early preservation of moving images. For social and cultural historians it is heartbreaking to find how few moving images have been systematically preserved. We search in vain for footage of old television interviews and important historical footage that we know was filmed and aired only to learn that the video tape was simply reused or discarded. An archive like this is quite rare and needs to be preserved. I am hoping the NEH will provide support for this invaluable project of Jewish Educational Media which will lead to access to these moving image materials.

Sincerely,

Ann Braude  
*Director, Women's Studies in Religion Program and Senior Lecturer on American Religious History*