



Rochester, NY 14627

May 11, 2006

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

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin:

I am writing in support of the Jewish Educational Media (JEM) application for an NEH Preservation Assistance Grant to provide an assessment and methodology to both preserve and make available the considerable moving image resources in your archive. This collection, containing invaluable film and video information on the history and significance of the Rebbe and the Chabad/Lubavitch movement in the United States, is unique in its scope and can be of tremendous value to members of the Lubavitch community, as well as to scholars, researchers and the public world-wide.

I was such a scholar myself and was involved with the Lubavitch community from the mid-1970s through the death of the Rebbe. As an ethnomusicologist, I was interested in understanding the importance of music, specifically Lubavitcher *nigunim*, within the philosophy of Chabad and in documenting *nigunim*'s many performance contexts and social structures. This resulted in a book, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 2000.

Had the JEM Archive been available to me at that time, it would have provided an extremely rich treasure-trove of text, photographic, audio, and video materials, covering over eighty years, documenting the life of the Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson and his importance to the Lubavitch community, his centrality to twentieth century Jewish history worldwide, and the significance of his teachings. If properly preserved and made available, these materials will be of considerable value to documentary film makers and to the general public wishing to know more about the Chabad/Lubavitcher movement.

More broadly, though, they will be of interest to scholars of American history and those interested in larger social movements, such as the development of diasporic communities and how they negotiate secure niches in new places. Lubavitch history in the United States (the period this Archive documents) is the very model of a successful negotiation strategy, one that has allowed the community to thrive and grow in new soil. Thus, these materials, in addition to providing important local information, will be more broadly useful to scholars who study larger social and religious movements worldwide. Now is the time to preserve these materials and I believe that Steven Davidson, an experienced moving image archivist in the field, is the best person to advise JEM on this important project.

I enthusiastically support this project and am hopeful that the National Endowment for the Humanities will share this enthusiasm. It is imperative that these materials be preserved and given access to a wider community. Such a project can be made possible by a grant from the NEH and with the dedicated work of the Jewish Education Media staff.

If you have any questions or need any additional information concerning this project, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you. Good luck with the project.

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