



**Department of Jewish Studies**

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To whom it may concern:

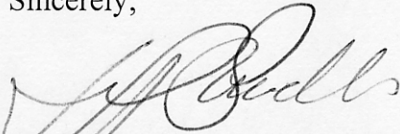
I am happy to write on behalf of Jewish Educational Media's application for funding for restoring, preserving, and facilitating access to a comprehensive inventory of film, audio- and video-recordings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the last Lubavitcher Rebbe. This corpus of media is unprecedented in scope, running the entire length of the Rebbe's near-half-century of leading one of the largest Hasidic communities in the world. No other Jewish religious leader's life and career has been so extensively documented by these media. In addition to recordings of discourses given by the Rebbe to his followers, this inventory includes images of him celebrating a variety of religious rituals and other communal events, meeting with government leaders and other public figures, as well as interacting with the general public in a variety of ways. This documentation provides scholars of American religion with an invaluable resource for understanding the public religious life of this distinctive Jewish community, in particular as it relates to the role of their leader. Thanks in large measure to these mediations, the Rebbe became one of the most widely recognized religious leaders in American Judaism—and, indeed of any American faith community—during the final decades of the twentieth century.

Moreover, this inventory of media evinces the unique approach of Lubavitcher hasidim (also known as Chabad) to the use of these media, following the Rebbe's own teachings. Broadcast media—including, in recent years, re-mediations of photographs, audio, and video on the Internet—have played a strategic role in the culture of Chabad throughout the post-Holocaust era. Remarkably, the Rebbe established an extensive international network of followers and supporters (including many outside the Jewish community) without ever traveling beyond New York City. From the 1950s until the 1990s, Lubavitcher hasidim undertook an expansive approach to using media in all available forms to promote religious values to fellow Jews and ethical teachings to the world at large. Since the Rebbe's death in 1994, his followers have turned to this inventory of media to create new media works (documentary films, sound recordings, websites) as part of their efforts to continue the Rebbe's spiritual mission and educate a growing community about the Rebbe's legacy. Because the Rebbe did not name a successor to lead the Chabad community, as is usually the case in Hasidic groups, the media record of his life and career assumes an especially powerful role for his followers and for the continuation of Chabad Hasidism.

As a scholar of contemporary Jewish culture with a special interest in the intersection of religion and media, I can attest that the case of Lubavitch film, audio, and video is one of the richest resources I have encountered. The community's ongoing, creative use of media and their distinctive philosophy about the role of technology in religious life have begun to attract interest among scholars of religion in America and in the growing field of media and religion. Access to this material will enable greater understanding of a singular phenomenon of American media culture and its relation to American religious teachings and practices. The opportunity to preserve, inventory, and make available to the public this extensive corpus of media is singular and deserves support, as it promises to have a lasting and wide-ranging value for those interested in researching American Judaism, American religious life, and the impact of these media on faith communities in the modern world.

If you have any further questions for me about this undertaking, please contact me at the address above or by email or telephone (below).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Shandler', written in a cursive style.

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