



**New York University**  
*A private university in the public service*



Tisch School of the Arts  
Department of Performance Studies  
721 Broadway, 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10003-6807  
Telephone: (212) 998-1620  
Facsimile: (212) 995-4571

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

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin,

I initially learned about the work of Jewish Educational Media from your presentation at New York University in response to the invitation from Jeffrey Shandler and me to present your work to the Working Group on Jews, Media, and Religion at the Center for Religion and Media, which was initiated with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts—we co-convene this group. The scholars, curators, and archivists who attended this session were very inspired by the value of the material itself (there is absolutely nothing to compare with the video and audio documentation of a Jewish religious community that you have collected) and your exemplary approach to preserving this archive and making it accessible both to the community for whom it is so meaningful and to a wider academic and general public. This material is of enormous scholarly value, not only to those interested in Jewish religious life, but also to scholars who study other religious communities and who are interested in the role of media in their lives. Since then I have followed the work of your organization and had the opportunity to view even more of your precious archival materials.

I enthusiastically write this letter in support of your ambitious plans to preserve and make accessible the film and video collection that documents the life and times of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and the Chabad-Lubavitch movement he has led in the twentieth century. As a scholar and teacher, I can attest to the value and uniqueness of this wonderful collection of thousands of hours of film and video materials spanning over seven decades, together with thousands of audio recordings and hundreds of thousands of photos. The Living Archive provides a window into the growth and development of the Lubavitch community. Its story is a quintessentially American one.

As an institution, JEM is involved in both production and preservation. What truly sets it apart is the access to this collection that you will provide. While I value all the archival materials that you release to the public in various formats every year, I am especially impressed with your outreach to the academic world, which we saw in action during your presentation at New York University. Not only were my colleagues intrigued by the materials themselves, but also they were impressed by your openness and your receptivity to suggestions; indeed, they declared their willingness to help in any way they can and offered their enthusiastic support of this important project. Moreover, they were most impressed with your state-of-the-art approach to the restoration and

digital reformatting of your collection, the urgency to preserve the collection before it degrades any further, and commitment to make the collection widely accessible. This priceless repository of one-of-a-kind film and video materials must be preserved for current and future generations within the community, the academy, and an interested general public.

Some may think this collection is narrow in scope and only of interest to those with an interest in Orthodox Judaism or only in the Chabad-Lubavitch community. That would be a mistake. This archive is a one-of-a-kind treasure trove for scholars across the academic spectrum, speaking as it does to religious studies (one of the best *self-documented* religious communities in the United States); American studies (relationship of this religious movement to others in the American context); Jewish studies (modernization without secularization) and Yiddish studies (an extraordinary resource for the study of spoken Yiddish within a contemporary community); metropolitan and transnational studies (the transnational nature of the movement and use of media to create and sustain a far-flung network); media studies (the role of media in religious life); rhetoric, sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, and performance studies (self-documentation of complete events offers a perfect resource for these fields); sociology and anthropology of contemporary religious communities; ethnomusicology (a treasure of music performed in its social contexts) and folklore (rich source for studying verbal art as performance); and education (how educators might use such an open-access electronic archive as the basis for a more research-centered pedagogy) .

The sampling that I have viewed from the vast archive is breathtaking. As an anthropologist, Past President of the American Folklore Society, former member of the Advisory Council at the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies at the Smithsonian Institution, longtime associate of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, professor at New York University, and currently leader the core exhibition development team for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Warsaw), I can identify many more ways in which the JEM's collection would be of value to scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Having conducted research in libraries and archives around the world and familiar as I am with recent efforts at New York University to digitize collections and make them available according to current and future best practices, I know all too well the commitment of resources, staff, and funds necessary to carry out a project of this scope and importance.

The project could not ask for a more dedicated, capable, and professional leader than Rabbi Elkanah Shmotkin. I am confident that under your able leadership, this project will succeed. Everything that you have done to date inspires full confidence that with support this project will fulfill your inspiring vision. It would be my great pleasure to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett  
University Professor  
Professor of Performance Studies  
Affiliated Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies