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

Dear Rabbi Shmotkin:

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of the Living Archive Restoration and Preservation project sponsored by the Jewish Educational Media. An imaginatively conceived and technologically sophisticated attempt to preserve and make accessible the wealth of audio, photographic, film and video materials which the Chabad-Lubavitch community has made a point of collecting over the course of the 20th century, the Living Archive Restoration and Preservation project stands poised to contribute significantly to how both scholars and laypeople think about religion in the modern and postmodern world.

As a longtime member of NYU's Working Group on Jews, Media and Religion, where I first had the opportunity to learn about the Jewish Educational Media and its unparalleled holdings, as well as an historian and teacher whose stock-in-trade is the relationship among religion, modernity and vernacular culture in late 19th and 20th century America, I was struck hard by the inventive and self consciously modern ways in which the Chabad-Lubavitch community has sought consistently to document itself. I know of few, if any, American Jewish communities, let alone American religious communities at large, that has literally trained its sights on itself. As a result, we have at hand a long-running, intimate, internal, firsthand account of how people of faith, at the grass roots, actually live out their lives within the context of modern America—and on the streets of Brooklyn, New York.

Of undeniable importance to those within the Chabad-Lubavitch community, the Living Archive Restoration and Preservation project contains a treasure trove of material that is certain to be of considerable value to those outside its precincts as well, from anthropologists and folklorists to historians and sociologists. Those interested in

contemporary media practices or, more broadly still, the entangled relationship between religion and modernity would find this material of inestimable value, as would those who study dance, music and other forms of expressive culture bound up with religious rituals.

Taken as a whole, the Living Archive Restoration and Preservation project promises to challenge, expand, complicate and even redefine our understanding of the modern religious experience. Given its potential, this is a project eminently deserving of the closest consideration and the most wide-ranging support.

Sincerely,


Jerina Weissman Joselit
Senior Lecturer with the Rank of Professor