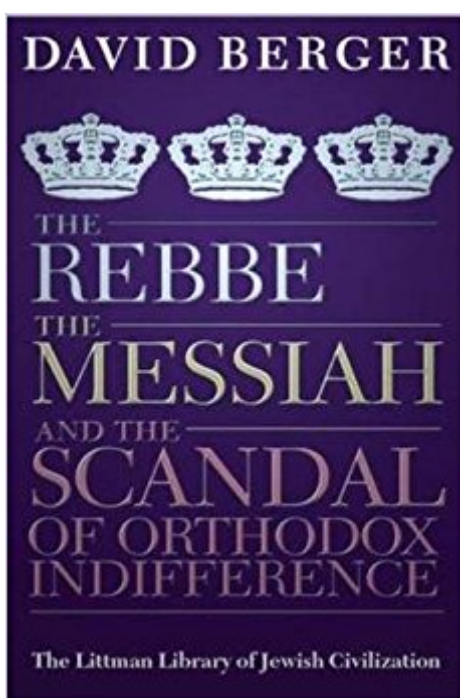


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Rebbe, The Messiah, And The Scandal Of Orthodox Indifference: With A New Introduction (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization)



Synopsis

This book is a history, an indictment, a lament, and an appeal, focusing on the messianic trend in Lubavitch hasidism. It demonstrates how hasidim who affirm the dead Rebbe's messiahship have abandoned one of Judaism's core beliefs in favour of adherence to the doctrine of a second coming. At the same time, it decries the remarkable equanimity with which the standard-bearers of Orthodoxy have granted legitimacy to this development by continuing to recognize such believers as Orthodox Jews in good standing. This dramatic abandonment of the age-old Jewish resistance to a quintessentially Christian belief is a development of striking importance for the history of religions, and it is an earthquake in the history of Judaism. David Berger chronicles the unfolding of this development from a personal viewpoint. He describes the growing concern that impelled him to undertake an anti-messianist campaign-publications, correspondence, and the sponsorship of a Rabbinical Council of America resolution excluding this belief from authentic Judaism. He argues that a large number, almost certainly a substantial majority, of Lubavitch hasidim believe in the Rebbe's messiahship; a significant segment, including educators in the central institutions of the movement, maintain a theology that goes beyond posthumous messianism to the affirmation that the Rebbe is pure divinity. While many Jews see Lubavitch as a marginal phenomenon, its influence is in fact growing at a remarkable rate-to the point where its representatives are poised to dominate Orthodox religious institutions not merely in isolated outposts but in several major countries throughout the world. This book analyses the boundaries of Judaism's messianic faith and its conception of God. It assesses the threat posed by the messianists of Lubavitch and points to the consequences, ranging from undermining a fundamental argument against the Christian mission to calling into question the kosher status of many foods and ritual objects prepared under Lubavitch supervision. Finally, it proposes a strategy to protect authentic Judaism from this assault.

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Customer Reviews

'Years from now, this work will likely be seen as a primary text that formed part of the internal Jewish debate.' N. R. Deutsch, Choice 'The growth of Lubavitch does cause concern, and Berger's book must be read to why it can be a danger to all of Judaism. This book is a brilliant exposition of the parameters of contemporary messianism ... both the author and the publishers must be commended for their courage and openness.' Uri Ben Alexander, European Judaism 'A passionate account of one man's involvement in a controversy that may well be one of the new century's major religion stories.' Alan Cochrum, Fort Worth Star-Telegram 'Compelling ... imperative reading, as it carefully and systematically documents the true nature and scope of contemporary Lubavitch missionary work.' Allan Nadler, Forward 'Passionate, powerful, brilliant ... records not only conviction, but evidence and argument ... This is simply the most important book of Judaism-not about Judaism but of Judaism-to appear this year, and the most urgent in decades.' Jacob Neusner, Jerusalem Post 'A profoundly fascinating and at the same time a profoundly disturbing story of admiration turning to adulation, thence through mass hysteria and mysticism to messianism ... authoritative.' Geoffrey Alderman, Jewish Journal of Sociology 'A courageous and very troubling memoir ... His criticism cannot be easily dismissed ... Berger has performed an important service to world Jewry by raising an issue that for too long has been swept under the rug.' Lifestyles Magazine 'A courageous and important book ... It is courageous because it is the first book of its kind and is directed against an icon of Orthodoxy. It is important because it has something important to say to a number of different constituencies ... carefully and clearly argues, and generally persuasive ... enhanced, in this regard, by its memoir form, which draws the reader into Berger's legitimate agony as his awareness of the problematics of Chabad messianism grows along with his equal despair that no one else seems to care.' Lippman Bodoff, Midstream 'Until now, no one has made the case as forcefully as Berger ... If its j'accuse is ignored and its author dismissed, it will mean that the leadership of Orthodoxy is too timid to confront a major challenge to Jewish faith, and that would be tragic indeed.' Jack Riemer, Moment [a similar review by Jack Riemer appeared in American Jewish World] 'Thoroughly engrossing book ... Berger's abiding Orthodox religious commitment, deep

familiarity with religious texts and ideas, and specialized training in historical scholarship have singularly positioned and qualified him to embark on this defense of Judaism ... Astute historian that he is, he offers trenchant and compelling explanations for this lack of aggressive Orthodox reaction to this latest false messianism ... an articulate, thoughtful, and passionate book.' Benny Kraut, Shofar 'Carefully and vigorously argued ... a compelling, jarring, deeply disturbing polemic and precisely what Professor Berger intended it to be: [A] memoir, a history, a religious tract ... an indictment, a lament, and an appeal.A" It is passionate, yet scholarly and precise. Its message is emotional and religiously inspired, yet its careful treatment of evidence bears the unmistakable mark of a seasoned scholar.' Yaakov Kermaier, Tradition ENDORSEMENTS 'The principle is right, the passion is right, and the deeply classical nature of David Berger's book is very moving. It is rare that the scholarly study of Judaism so intensely engages with living Judaism. Berger's erudite ferocity is exhilarating.' Leon Wieseltier

David Berger, who received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and rabbinic ordination from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University, is Professor of History at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University. For many years he was Broeklundian Professor of History at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and co-chair of the Academic Advisory Committee of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. He is a Fellow and Executive Committee member of the American Academy for Jewish Research, and a member of the Council of the World Union of Jewish Studies, the Academic Committee of the Rothschild Foundation Europe, and the editorial board of Tradition. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard and Yale, and from 1998 to 2000, he served as President of the Association for Jewish Studies. He is the author of *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (1979), which was awarded the John Nicholas Brown Prize by the Medieval Academy of America, and co-author of *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?* (1997), a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in Jewish Thought.

Who is brave enough to stand up to the aggressive expansion of Chabad? Thank G-d for this important work by David Berger. May there be many more like it.

It is interesting to read the depth and danger of the philosophy being created by messianic chabad. However, I am skeptical as to the universality of the problem, as posed by Mr. Berger. It is my observation that a good part of orthodox jewry has for a while (before the death of the Rebbe)

looked at chabad, and their messianic tendency as an errant offshoot from the Tzibur (body of the Jewish people). The Yeshiva (Lithuanian), Chasidic (non-Lubavitch) and Modern Orthodox camps are little touched by the severity of chabad messianic thought. I do mourn, however, what I believe is the sad turn of events for chabad chasidim. History has given us examples of where such beliefs lead, such as Christianity. The sadness is that the Tzibur will probably lose this important group, as they continue to marginalize themselves, and separate from Klal Yisroel. May the Rock of Israel bring the redeemer before too much damage is done....

This is a very important book for non-Chabad Orthodox Jews, every one of whom should read it. I don't think it matters one iota for anyone else. Unfortunately, Berger spends far too much time comparing modern Messianism to Christianity rather than getting to the heart of the matter, which he finally does in the final chapter: Can you trust the hashgacha of a Chabad Messianist Rabbi? (Check with your own rabbi; the answers are complex.)

Rabbi Berger has written a very important book outlining the problems with Habad-Lubavitch messianism after the death of their leader in 1994. Because Berger clearly respects the rebbe, he fails to attack the rebbe for faults -- like claiming that his deceased father-in-law was the 'essence of G-d in a body' -- that brought us to this terrible crossroads. While the book suffers somewhat from anti-messianists within Habad being quoted anonymously (this because of legitimate fear of reprisal within the Habad community), I can personally attest to much of what Berger writes. Even before the rebbe passed away, leaders in the movement were known to tell students to 'daven to the rebbe' (pray to the rebbe). I personally confronted one of these leaders. His answer? 'What do you do when you pray? You ask G-d for what you need. So ask the rebbe for what you need.' I should add that his employer, a senior member of Habad-Lubavitch, claimed to have reprimanded him for this. Somehow, though, he did not seem to be able to stop him from saying it. Habad-Lubavitch has returned us to a debate that raged in Judea and Galilee almost 2000 years ago: Can a messianic candidate die with his mission unfulfilled only to be resurrected at some future date to complete his mission? If, as Habad-Lubavitch claims, this is possible, then any messianic candidate among Jews -- Bar Kokhba, for example -- may return to serve as the messiah, in direct contradiction to Maimonides and dozens of other Jewish legal sources cited in Rabbi Berger's book. Even more problematic, at least for Jews, is that nothing would prevent one from believing the same about Jesus. After all, he certainly had a messianic mission, his Jewish followers did keep Jewish law for the first few generations after his death (and would still be doing so today if not for the persecution

of them by the Gentile Church), and (as Berger points out) his followers did spread a type of monotheism to a formerly pagan, polytheistic world. But, sadly, as anyone can see, most of the anti-Berger reviews posted here consist of name-calling and mud slinging. If Habad-Lubavitch had real arguments to bring to bear against Rabbi Berger, you would have already seen them posted here. Buy the book, read it, share it with your rabbi, the head of your Jewish Federation and the program director of your local JCC. Do not let Judaism be hijacked by these messianists, no matter how well-meaning or attractive they may be.

The Chabad bulls*** revealed in this amazing book. The scandal of Chabad lie. Crazy people. And as Rav Shach said, Chabad is the closest religion to Judaism. But idolaters as the Christians. Same thing.

Rabbi Berger wrote a thoughtful analysis on a hype which has developed over the last 10 years. He also shows what is mostly kept underground and which is, nevertheless, of great importance for Jews elsewhere, especially in smaller communities, where Chabadniks are often the ones in charge. Although admittedly, I at first thought : "this can't be true" when reading the book for the first time, experience has shown and is still showing that it IS true.

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