

A Schematic for Assessing the Attribution of Charisma in Followers of New Religions: A Case Study – Lubavitcher Hassidism

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“Everyone believes the Rebbe is the Messiah”

“No one believes the Rebbe is the Messiah”

The above quotations are taken from the Rebbe’s followers at similar moments in their organization’s history. Both share equal devotion to their leader while at the same time demonstrating different ways of understanding exactly who their leader is. Scholars looking at new religious movements have long been aware of the diversity of perspectives within some groups. There has not, however, been a clear way to articulate the distinctions among these perceptions within groups or to compare charisma across new religious movements. The following study attempts to provide a micro-sociological examination of the varieties of understandings of charismatic leadership that appear in a religious group, the Lubavitcher Hassidim also called Chabad, in order demonstrate a schematic for articulating distinctions in followers perceptions of their leader’s charisma. The method of classification developed here, termed charismalogy,¹ blends the methodologies of biblical scholarship that categorize the different ways Christians perceive Jesus and studies from the sociology of religion that examine the attribution of charisma to a leader. In addition, this paper will explore how the Lubavitcher attempt to control the face of charismalogy they present to the world. Although this schematic may be applied to traditions arising from Eastern religions, it is designed to analyze groups that develop from Abrahamic traditions.

Max Weber’s work on charisma is the necessary starting point for this exploration. For Weber charismatic authority stands as the antithesis of rational-legal authority, serving as both an eruption within and a disruption to the established order. Standing outside the dominant group, the charismatic leader articulates a pronouncement against it that the followers come to accept. To Weber, this leader has a “certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men.” (1978:241) Weber also notes that the personality of the leader is only one part of the charismatic equation: When charisma is acknowledged the charismatic leader is “treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers of qualities.” (1978:447) What makes a charismatic leader, then, is a three-fold combination of extra-ordinary personality, the ethical pronouncement against something

¹ Although the term Christology would be appropriate here since *Christos* is the Greek translation for the Hebrew term *Moshiach*, it would add an unnecessary layer of controversy. Many groups, including the Lubavitcher Hassidim would find the term problematic.

in the culture and acceptance of the messenger and the message by the charismatic audience. Together, these lead to attribution of charisma to the leader by the followers.

In his outline of the characteristics of the prophet, Weber sketched two ideal types of prophets: the exemplary and the ethical (originally termed the emissary type). As the name exemplary implies, this type leads by demonstrating the principles he/she expounds and sees him/herself as a “vessel” through which the divine operates. The ethical prophet, in Weber’s terms, functions in response to a divine commission and sets out new norms or abstract principles, demands obedience and construes him/herself as chosen to fulfill a mission. Seeing these as ideal types, Weber was well aware that only a few charismatic leaders would fit snugly into one category or the other. Instead, he noted that the whether an individual was an ethical or exemplary prophet was an issue of predominance and the perception of followers. Moreover, Weber believed that these qualities could merge in one individual. (1978:263)

Because Weber thought that charismatic authority and the movements it spawned would quickly move toward routinization, he did not dwell on the particulars of charismatic authority as it manifested itself in specific forms over time.(Dawson, 2002) Both because of what Roy Wallis calls Weber’s “fragmentary treatment” and because of the revolutionary nature of charisma itself, scholars have attempted to clarify and elucidate the original concept. (Wallis, 1993). Some like Charles Lindholm and Len Oakes focus on the first half of Weber’s equation, the extraordinary quality of the charismatic leader; others look at the attribution of charisma to the leader by the followers (Dawson, Melton, Barker). The current study takes this latter path in order to understand and categorize what according to Weber, “is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by . . . by his followers or disciples.” (1978:242)

A number of studies have uncovered differences in the way followers attribute charisma to their leaders. Bryan Wilson, for example, noticed differences in the understanding of Christian Scientists towards Mary Baker Eddy, Eileen Barker observed variations in categorizing Sun Myung Moon by his followers, Spencer Olin noted wide-ranging attitudes toward John Humphrey Noyes among Oneida Community members, Lorne Dawson and Simon Dein (2008) comment on distinctions in perspectives of the Lubavitcher toward their Rebbe.

Since Weber, there have been only a few attempts to classify the differences in prophetic types. George Chryssides provides an insightful examination of different presentations of charismatic authority in the founders of the Latter Day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Scientology and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Len Oakes developed the categories of the messianic and prophetic types that are loosely based on Weber’s types. This system is, however, overly complex and as Jane Pinzino notes, Oakes’ “categories overlap and his subjects do not fit easily into either category.” Moreover, Oakes studied small groups, whose followers appear to agree on their leader’s charisma. While this is true for some groups, it is not true for all.

To provide a system for specifying how perceptions of charismatic authority differ within the Abrahamic traditions, I would like to offer a schema that is grafted onto the sociology of religion from the Biblical Studies concept of Christology. It will allow for

comparisons of charismalogical perceptions within communities and charismalogy across groups. This study will, however, confine itself to the internal comparison.

Compelled to develop a schematic capable of differentiating among radically different portraits of Jesus presented by the early Christians, biblical scholars began using the concept of Christology to discuss the ways in which followers attributed charisma to Jesus. In the gospel of Mark, for example, the reader first encounters Jesus as an adult, who though endowed with special qualities, is still a human being. Mark's Jesus shows anger and fear, occasionally has to redo a miracle to get it right, is unable to carry his cross and groans in agony on the cross after shouting, "My God My God, Why have you forsaken me?" Mark's Jesus worships God. These characteristics typify what is termed low Christology. Jesus is a charismatic leader, to be sure, whose authority comes from God, but he is neither co-existent with nor equal to God.

John's gospel, in contrast, proceeds from the standpoint of high Christology. The reader encounters John's Jesus at the creation of the world. John's Jesus gets his miracles right the first time. Missing in the Gospel of John are some of the features that present the humanity of Jesus in other gospels, including the reluctance of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and the demonstration of agony on the cross. Instead of a loud cry before his death, John's Jesus proclaims, "It is finished," before giving up his spirit. John's Jesus is always in control and is worshipped along with God.

Where high Christology sees Jesus as divine, low Christology portrays Jesus as chosen by God but fully human. What I call mixed Christology describes Jesus as "born of a woman" but with the Holy Spirit as his Father. This Jesus carries some of the human characteristics of the low Christology but vacillates between this humanity and divinity.

These categorizations of different ways the Christian community views Jesus can be helpful in understanding charismatic attribution in newer religious movements. New Testament scholar, Jack Sanders, has called on his fellow biblical scholars to adopt the methods of scholarship used in studying new religious movements to further clarify the early Christian community. Here, I would like to appropriate the methods of biblical methods to understand more fully charismatic leaders and their followers. By drawing on the categories of high and low Christology, and developing a system for exploring charismalogy, the differences among perceptions and changes over time can be more precisely described and analyzed.

To demonstrate this schematic, I will analyze the different views of the Lubavitcher Hasidim towards their seventh Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Every Lubavitcher considers their leader to be spiritually gifted, and chosen by God. However, within this tradition there are three sub-types. One articulates a high charismalogy, calling their Rebbe Moshiach King Redeemer. Another finds the high Charismalogy problematic, even offensive, and a third group holds a fluid, mixed view that vacillates and can change to either of the other two.

Sources

This study draws on a variety of sources including writings of the followers, live and web-based archival radio Moshiach broadcasts, interviews with Lubavitcher and observations of my research assistants, Lily Aram and Emily Keeler who lived for a time

with a Lubavitcher cousin in Crown Heights as part of their research for me. In addition, I am drawing on interviews and analysis by several sources, notably Simon Dein, William Shaffir and Rachel Elijor.

Methodology – The Schematic of Charismalogy

By charismalogy I mean the level of the gift the followers perceive the prophet to have received. The highest possible charismalogy paints the prophetic figure as God---many views of Jesus as co-eternal with God, and the opinion of the followers of Father Divine, for example, would fit the highest view. Believers at this level draw on biblical imagery to develop the symbolic description of their leaders, find direct and specific references to them in Biblical texts, and can develop rituals of reverence toward them.

The lowest charismalogy sees the individual as prophet, to be sure, but a person selected by God for a particular purpose. Weber's construct of exemplary prophet fits this perspective well. Meekness, honesty, integrity, humility are words used to define this type of prophet who is typically characterized as having more and better admirable human qualities than anyone else has ever had.

Followers holding to a mixed charismalogy vacillate between a high and low perspective when discussing their leader but they do not use biblical titles or language to describe their leader. While they may compare their leader to biblical figures, they do not see the *Bible* discussing their leader directly. People with the mixed perspective will usually state their own lack of clarity in interpreting the charisma of their leader.

The Lubavitcher Hasidism Background

Founded in 1813 by Rabbi Schneur Zalman in the town of Lubavitch in White Russia, the Lubavitcher (or Chabad as it is also called) is a form of Hassidic Judaism. Hassidism differentiates itself from other types of Judaism in various ways, but most important for this study, is the Hassidic focus on their leader, the Rebbe, who is viewed as a holy man, *tzaddik*. As *tzaddik*, the Rebbe's special insight into scripture and life comes from his unusually close relationship to God. The authority of the office of Rebbe comes through a combination of heredity and charisma. The general Hassidic belief that there is a potential Messiah in every generation, together with the charisma of office can support the possibility of messianic claims for any Hassidic Rebbe. In the mid-twentieth century the focus of the Lubavitcher turned messianic.

Beginning in 1941, in direct response to the Shoah, the sixth Rebbe, Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn began making messianic statements.(Elijor) Judaism as a whole did not turn to messianic expectations, but for the Lubavitcher the events conflicted so acutely with their views of God's presence in and plan for the world, that Rebbe Yosef embraced it to understand the world and the divine plan in a time of extreme persecution. The sixth Rebbe assured his flock that God's restorative plan would be realized in the midst of destruction. From 1941 onward, hope in the coming messiah assumed a predominant role for the Lubavitcher.

Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Biographical information about Menachem Mendel Schneerson (hereafter the Rebbe) is colored by his followers' high regard for him and as M. Avrum Ehrlich notes, "reliance on written and oral sources provided by Chabad is problematic" because they blend fact and legend, can be "true, partly true, exaggerated or blatantly false." (34)² In reconstructing a biography, these issues with sources would be highly problematic. In this study, the biographical and textual revisions different groups within Chabad make as they discuss the Rebbe become an asset since they provide further insight into the charismalogical persuasion of the biographer.

In 1950, Menachem Mendel became his father in law's successor as the seventh Rebbe, bringing to that office charismatic authority transmitted both through his father – in-law and his own lineage within the Lubavitcher Rebbe line. Three types of charisma merge in this one individual, namely, the charisma of office, hereditary charisma, and what Weber would call the prophetic.

The Rebbe's Ambiguous Self-Perception

The Rebbe's proclamations about Moshiach become more and more vigorous over time; outside observers and many Lubavitcher do not think he ever clearly denied or affirmed his own messianic status. As Ehrlich notes, "it's virtually impossible to determine what the Rebbe thought about himself." The lack of clear statements on the part of the Rebbe leaves the door open for a variety of responses to his charisma.

Charismalogical Responses among the Rebbe's Followers³

One Lubavitcher summed it up nicely with a non-scientific but probably accurate observation about the different attitudes of the Lubavitcher towards their Rebbe. "About 10 per cent believe he is Moshiach, about 10 per cent believe he is not. The rest are in the middle." (Dein 2001: 389) Individuals of the high and low type are typically convinced that almost all Lubavitcher share their perspective. One states: "Today only one person fulfils the criteria for Moshiach. This is the Lubavitcher Rebbe. If pressed, all Lubavitchers will say he is Moshiach." While another man with doubts about the messianic claims strengthens his own view by stating: "No one believes he is the Moshiach." (Dein 2001:392)

² To address this, the biography written by Heilman and Friedman, draws on letters, government and school records to produce a reliable record.

³ The Lubavitcher support a variety of charismalogies, but it is quite possible for a group to share a more uniform view. Among the American Shakers for example, the earliest group had a uniformly high charismalogy that considered the founder, Ann Lee, the "Second Appearing of Christ." One hundred years later a uniform Shaker group sported a low charismalogy and argued that no one ever thought Ann Lee was the second coming. When charismalogy rises in the group as a whole, as it did for the followers of Father Divine and contemporary charismatic leader, Jose deJesus Miranda, members who do not approve of the new view may exit the group leaving behind those with a shared charismalogy.

High charismalogy is clearly expressed in those convinced that the Rebbe is the actual Moshiach. This group consults Scripture and determines that it clearly supports the Rebbe's messianic stance. They draw their titles for him from the Bible and compare him to important Biblical figures. He is called the Judge, the "Moses of our generation," the suffering servant referred to in Isaiah. A few followers go so far as to claim the Rebbe is God, the 'materialization of the infinite.' This latter group draws heavily on the language Isaiah uses as names for God, especially the titles, Creator and Redeemer, to talk about their Rebbe.

Until the Rebbe's stroke in 1992 which is discussed below, it is difficult to differentiate between low and mixed charismalogy in the group. But, everyone who does not exhibit the tendencies of high charismalogy draws on their Rebbe's great personal attributes to describe him rather than using biblical language. He is the "best Torah scholar of our day," "the kindest person who ever lived," "no one knows Torah like the Rebbe," "he is one of the most respected leaders in the world" are typical comments from these charismalogical persuasions.

Much of what the Rebbe says is interpreted through a particular charismalogical lens. For example, Chabad sources repeatedly state that the Rebbe often claimed that his father-in-law was Moshiach; those with a high charismalogy add "whatever a great *Tzaddik* states concerning the spiritual level of another *Tzaddik* is also true about himself, for only one on the same or higher level can appreciate and grasp that level of spiritual greatness." (Butman: 13) Hence, Lubavitcher with a high charismalogy interpret the Rebbe's statements about his father in law to be definitive statements through which he definitely claimed messianic status for himself. Others with a lower charismalogy believed he was actually speaking about his father-in-law.

Charismalogy in Response to Crisis: The Rebbe's Abdication, Declining Health and Death

Beginning in 1991 the Lubavitcher experienced several crises of charismatic authority: the Rebbe's "Transmission Statement," the deterioration of his health, and his death. With each crisis, differences in charismalogy become clearer as views solidify, become more public and cause dissension.

The first crises called 'The Transmission' by the Lubavitcher, refers to the Rebbe's announcement that he had done all he could to bring Moshiach and that it was now up to the believers to assume responsibility for ushering in the messianic age.⁴ After a long period of innovation, messianic proclamation and proselytizing, he stated:

How is it that the Redemption has not yet been attained? That despite all that has transpired and all that has been done, Moshiach has still not come? What more can I do? I have done my part. From this point on, all is in your hands.

⁴ Palmer adds the category of abdication to Roy Wallis's four possible ways charismatic leaders typically handle the challenge presented by the institutionalization of charisma. The transmission statement is a possible example of this.

The Lubavitcher were united in their interpretation that it was now their responsibility to bring Moshiach even though they did not share a unified charismalogy. Following the “Transmission Statement” charismalogical differences become more apparent.

The highest charismalogy faction interprets every event through the lens that their Rebbe is undoubtedly Moshiach. Not surprisingly the words and actions of the Rebbe and their reading of Scripture consistently reinforce their views. When the Rebbe repeatedly failed to acknowledge or deny his own messianic status, those holding the high Charismalogical view took this as confirmation that he *was* Moshiach because he would certainly tell them if he were not. Searching Talmudic sources they concluded that a messiah can not reveal himself until he is given a sign by God. “We’ve accepted the Rebbe as Messiah,” one man stated, “We’re waiting for God to give him the word.” (Andres)

To accomplish what the Rebbe asked of them in his Transmission Statement, the high charismalogical Lubavitcher launched a highly visible “Bring Moshiach” campaign employing a wide range of media—from the web to billboards, bumper stickers, radio and print media advertisements.

Individuals holding mixed or low charismalogical perspectives do not appear to take much issue with those involved in the bring Moshiach campaign at its onset even though not all are convinced that the Rebbe is the potential Messiah.

Charismalogical Responses to the Rebbe’s Stroke

In 1992, the Rebbe suffered a stroke while praying at his father-in-law’s grave. From this time on, he was unable to speak. At this point, views on the Rebbe’s messianic status begin to diverge more sharply.

Lubavitcher convinced the Rebbe is Messiah immediately interpreted the stroke and resulting inability to speak as completely within the Divine plan. One follower stated, “of course, God with the Rebbe are planning everything--everything is planned together. (Shaffiir 1994:49) They turn to scripture to understand what was happening and find explanations in the book of Isaiah, which they interpret to mean “for their sake he[Moshiach] will suffer.” A controversy develops about appropriate medical treatment; some in this high group argue that to intervene medically is against God’s plan while others go so far as to say that because the Rebbe does not have typical human biology, no physician has the knowledge necessary to treat him. (Ehrlich 2005: 241)

Despite the Rebbe’s deteriorating physical condition, this groups’ messianic fervor accelerates. High charismalogy adherents begin to sing *Yechi Adoneinu*—Live May Our Master Guide and Teacher, King Moshiach, for Ever and Ever--to the Rebbe and believe that he approves of this song. Earlier, the Rebbe had clearly shown his displeasure when people sang this song to him or called him Messiah directly, but now, when he can no longer speak, the high charismalogical followers interpret his every movement as an indication that he, in fact, now approves. When he nods and drums his fingers to the messianic song, they jubilantly see that as his clear acknowledgment that he is Moshiach.⁵

⁵ See the Honk for Joy website which hosts this video.

In contrast to the high charismalogical understanding of the Rebbe's stroke, most Lubavitcher exhibit a mixed perspective and assume that the Rebbe is the *potential* Moshiach, but that he must recover to fulfill the messianic task of ushering in the age of redemption. They take on the responsibility of praying for his recovery and conclude that if the redemption does not occur, it is because of human failure.

Those who were not convinced the Rebbe was the actualized Moshiach at the outset of the campaign do not agree that he came to approve of being treated as Moshiach after his stroke. His response to the singing O *Yechi*, is interpreted differently by those holding a low charismalogy—in fact the video showing the nodding and drumming that the high charismalogy group sees as proof that the Rebbe accepted the Messianic mantle is interpreted by this group as showing that the Rebbe does not approve.

A third group dismisses outright the messianic claims; one man states, “What we have now is the odd phenomena of a Rebbe who is alive and dead at the same time. . . Everything he does is subject to interpreting.” This group begins to state their disagreement with the high charismalogical interpretations that the Rebbe was consciously and purposefully accepting the Moshiach title. “The controversy now is what is the Rebbe's nodding, to what extent it implies an acknowledgment or does not. Personally, I believe it is not, . . . We are not sure that he really approves of this song.” (Shaffir 1998:124) Lubavitcher with these views might agree that their Rebbe *was* the designated Messiah, but they are not convinced that he will ever realize his messianic role.

The Plan for the Rebbe's Coronation and the resulting dissension: 1993

Not long after they begin singing *Yechi Adoneinu*, some high charismalogy followers fashion an elaborate crown and develop a plan for a coronation ceremony to proclaim that the Rebbe is King Moshiach. They arrange to transmit the coronation via satellite to Lubavitcher around the world. This is the first in what will become a series of symbols and rituals high charismalogy Lubavitcher use to materialize charisma. (Geertz) In addition, they draw on the prophet Isaiah for the symbols to describe their Rebbe and proclaim him to be, “He Who Will Redeem Us.” They claim the Rebbe supports the upcoming coronation.

The low and mixed views coalesce in response to these events and begin to see the energy of the Moshiah campaign as misplaced, even contrary to the Rebbe's wishes. One British Lubavitcher hailing from a low charismalogical perspective criticizes the Moshiah campaign but is not quite prepared to say that the Rebbe is definitely not the Messiah.

I cannot come to terms with the fact that the Rebbe is the Messiah. If Moshiah comes will he be the Lubavitcher Rebbe? I think he will be a Jew. I think a lot of this messianic behaviour is strange. There are making a crown to crown the Rebbe as Moshiah on his anniversary. . . My son is embarrassed . . . The people can not force the Moshiah to reveal himself. (Shaffir 1993:124)

Others are waiting for the Rebbe to give a clear sign but do not believe he approves of the coronation plan:

Have there been individuals that maybe wanted to make a coronation? Maybe. Did the Rebbe sanction a . . . coronation: I would say absolutely not. . . I'm opposing it unless the Rebbe would have okayed it. (Shaffir 1993:120)

One shows her ambivalence quite clearly—she is not convinced the Rebbe is Moshiach but fears it may be a sin to think that way.

If someone does not believe in all of this, can they call themselves a Lubavitcher? I should not really be saying all of this. It may be a sin. Perhaps the Rebbe knows that I'm criticizing him. Something may happen to me. In his book, *Wonders and Miracles* there are stories about people who have gone against the Rebbe's advice and have been harmed. (Dein 1997:198)

The charismalogical disagreement becomes public when *The New York Times* announces a potential showdown between the different factions.(January 29, 1993) The coronation day arrives, the media and cameras are ready, but rather than a coronation an announcement is made: "This is not a gathering for a coronation. . . This is a gathering for all of us to announce our outright declaration to Almighty God. (Shaffir 1993:120) The highly visible Messianic coronation is aborted. From this point on Chabad as an institution begins to attempt to present a lower charismalogy to the public and followers wonder what the future holds. Openly admitting ambivalence, one unknowingly predicts how the high charismalogical perspective will evolve:

I feel I should be a believer. I don't want to do the wrong thing. If, God forbid, I was wrong, what would be my position. I do not feel the Rebbe can be wrong. People do not entertain the idea that the Rebbe could die. Outsiders ask who will follow him? Lubavitcher believe that the Moshiach will not die. I believe the Rebbe is only human and will die. I don't know what will happen. . .Would they say they were wrong? Would they say he is coming back? (Dein 2001:393)

Responses to the Rebbe's Death

When the Rebbe died in June of 1994 thousands of mourners gathered in front of what is called, 770, the home of the Rebbe and the center of Chabad; most wept or sat in stunned silence. Some however, sang and danced in anticipation of the Rebbe's immediate resurrection as Messiah. The varied responses to the Rebbe's death reflect differing charismalogical views. Though mixed and low charismalogical Lubavitcher mourn the death of their beloved leader, those who claimed he *was* the actual messiah must make significant theological adjustments.

Joseph Zygmunt has outlined several typical responses to the disconfirmation of prophecy including placing the blame for the failure of events to proceed as expected on either external or internal events and asserting that the event did happen including the spiritualization of events that were originally expected to be empirically verifiable. Simon Dein and Lorne Dawson note that the death of their Rebbe caused the Lubavitcher to 'spiritualize' their expectations by substituting unflsifiable beliefs for

empirically verifiable ones.⁶ I would adjust this view to argue that different charismalogies respond differently to the Rebbe's death. Those with a low charismalogical perspective had never been completely convinced that the Rebbe was Moshiach so for this group there was no disconfirmation. For some with a mixed perspective the explanations include reappraising their expectations and stating that they had misunderstood God's ways and placing blame by stating that it was the Lubavitcher's fault because they had "insufficient merit."

For the high charismalogical group, however, the situation was acute for two reasons. First, their staunch belief in the Rebbe as Moshiach was undercut by his death because they fully believed he would be healed. And secondly, they had to deal directly with the tradition that a Messiah can not "come from the dead." In the face of these problems, the highest charismalogy begins arguing two distinctly different points simultaneously. On the one hand, they claim that the Rebbe had to die in order to complete the messianic role and on the other, they spiritualize his death and state that he did not die.

In the first argument, that the Rebbe had to die, followers attempt to satisfy both their unmet expectations and external criticism that it is Christians, not Jews, who follow a dead messiah. They use the Rebbe's death to further support their belief that he is Moshiach. They argue that the death was necessary because it is written that the Messiah must come from the dead. They draw on a wide variety of interpretations of a Talmudic passage (Sanhedrin 98A) to argue that if the people have **sufficient merit, "then Mosiach will be 'from the dead.'"**(Butman:12)⁷ As mentioned above, Zygmunt has noted that the one response of a group to the 'failure' of their expectations is to blame themselves for the fact that the prophecy did not come to pass as expected. This does happen for the low and mixed charismalogy groups, but high charismalogy Lubavitcher take a surprising tack when they state that their expectations were not fulfilled because the people had sufficient merit.

Their second argument interacts paradoxically with their first. Here, they claim that the Rebbe did **not** die. The second argument is necessary to counter Maimonides declaration that the one "who does not succeed . . . who is slain, it is known that he is not the one the Torah promised."⁸ To make their point that the Rebbe is not dead, they draw on the story of the Biblical patriarch, Jacob, and note the lack of an explicit statement that Jacob actually died. Although the passage they cite, Genesis 49:33, "Jacob breathed his last," is almost universally seen as recounting Jacob's death, they see it as ambiguous. They go on to argue that all Jews pray to Jacob each time they pray the *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel). Because they are praying to Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel), they reason, Jacob cannot be dead. They see their Rebbe as holding the exact same status as Jacob—not here on earth, but not dead. (Central Lubavitch Yeshiva Students)

⁶ See Dawson (1999) for a cogent discussion of the original work by Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter and subsequent discussions of this work, most importantly by Joseph Zygmunt and Gordon Melton.

⁷ Emphasis is in the original.

⁸ Much of the external criticism of Lubavitcher messianism after the Rebbe's death hinges on the fact that to some the Lubavitcher look like Christians because "they follow a dead messiah," as David Berger puts it.

These arguments provided the high charismalogists with the tools to adapt, appraise and spiritualize the relationship between the Rebbe's apparent death and their messianic expectations. They proclaim that the Rebbe is not dead but has been resurrected, hence they change the 'Bring Moshiach' campaign changed to 'Moshiach has come.' They publicize their beliefs widely, including a full-page *New York Times* advertisement that "The Rebbe, no longer bound by physical limitations, is accessible to all of us, everywhere. Anyone, however great or humble, can turn to him with their innermost thoughts and deepest prayers. There are no barriers. There is no need to make a pilgrimage or stand on line to receive his blessing." The ad was titled "The Third of Tammuz is Not the Rebbe's Yahrzeit." (Shofar Association of America Inc.)⁹ Since the high charismalogy group does not believe the Rebbe remained dead, they are offended by any mention of his passing or commemorations of his death. Rather than using the traditional acknowledgement, 'of Blessed Memory,' for someone who is deceased, this group says "May He Live for Ever and Ever."

The high charismalogy Lubavitcher articulate this spiritualized view by saying, "The Rebbe is here, we just can't see him." (Fishkoff 273) This perspective among the high charismalogists was not transient; years later, another Lubavitcher tells a fellow bus passenger, "The Rebbe isn't dead." (Medad) High charismalogical Lubavitcher continue to believe that the Rebbe will become visible to all when the world performs the proper acts. A few followers report on seeingtherebbe.org that they have already see the Rebbe. Others hope for the high level of spiritual development that will lead them to see their Rebbe as well.

The high charismalogy group always drew on the Bible to describe the Rebbe as they came to see him as Moshiach. With the belief that he has been resurrected, new rituals augment the use of biblically based titles. These are elaborate and include the reverent uncovering of his chair at the beginning of each service, making a path for the Rebbe to enter the area, gazing as one to the area from which the Rebbe had typically entered, passing in front of his chair and taking wine from him, and facing a picture of him while praying. (Krauel-Tovi and Bilu, Dein: 2011) As Krauel-Tovi and Bilu note these practices are designed "to make the absent Rebbe present."¹⁰

Mixed Charismalogy

The statement of a North Carolina Chabad rabbi sums up the ambivalence of the middle position. At first reluctant to discuss his views of the Rebbe when a student interviewed him, he finally responded:

"Time will tell; either yes or no. I've run hot and cold with this personally, I mean he referred to his father-in-law as the Moshiach. He is among, if not **the** foremost scholar of our generation. To say that he knew the entire Talmud by heart doesn't do justice to the depth and the breadth of his knowledge. He was not one to simply make statements."(Rubin)

⁹ The third of Tammuz was the date the Rebbe died; in Judaism on the anniversary of anyone's death a Yahrzeit or remembrance is held to honor the deceased individual.

¹⁰ Bilu later comes to call this 'phantom charisma.' (2013)

This Lubavitcher rabbi he implies that had the Rebbe been clearer, he himself would be less ambivalent. Most telling, however, for the mixed rather than high charismalogical stance is the language this Rabbi uses to describe the Rebbe – brilliant scholar, the greatest human being—rather than the biblical titles of the high charismalogical group. This rabbi, then recounted a statement by another Lubavitcher Rabbi: “Anyone who believes the Rebbe is Moshiach is crazy. Anyone who believes he is not is doubly crazy,” (Rubin) providing a humorous example of mixed charismalogy.

Low Charismalogy

This group is appalled by the ‘Moshiach is Here’ campaign and the symbols and rituals the high charismalogy develops. They do not accept the arguments offered by the high charismalogy group; they do not believe the Rebbe saw himself to be the Messiah nor do they think that when the Rebbe made statements that his father-in-law was the Messiah of his generation that he was actually talking about himself. This group universally honors the date of the Rebbe’s passing in the traditional way. When they refer to him they call him the Rebbe of Blessed Memory.

Both the mixed and low groups follow the traditions of Hassidism in the reverence and devotion they show to the dead Rebbe. They continue to visit his grave and remember the date of his death with special prayers. They do not create new rituals that underscore the invisible, though fully present, resurrected Rebbe.

Management of Charismalogy: Institutional and Personal

When the high charismalogy group began to advertise their views in public venues, the disagreements among the internal views became more pronounced. In New York City, high charismalogical Lubavitcher sponsored billboards proclaiming the Rebbe, Moshiach, while their lower charismalogical counterparts took out advertisements in the *New York Times* denouncing the messianic claims. In Canada, two opposing groups of Lubavitcher rabbis placed full-page newspaper ads. Twelve rabbis declared “the Messiah has come;” another group announced: “To say he is the Messiah is to do violence to everything he stood for. It’s blasphemous.” (*Canadian Jewish News*) Low charismalogy Lubavitcher individuals articulate this same view: “It’s embarrassing. It’s reaching more people and when it begins to reach more people, some aren’t capable of sorting things out.” (Fishkoff: 270) The low charismalogy faction becomes more vocal in its disagreement with high charismalogy counterparts with the onset of the Moshiach has come campaign. Most of the discussions from this perspective comments less on the rightness or wrongness of the view that the Rebbe is the Messiah and more on how the public announcement of that view influence the way the world looks at their community.

Orthodox non-Chabad, Rabbi David Berger wrote a book and many print and on line articles sharply critical of the high charismalogical stance. In 1996 he called for the exclusion of Lubavitcher from Orthodox Judaism and called for Chabad leaders to summarily dismiss “anyone who teaches the Messiahship of the Rebbe.” When that occurs, he writes, the Lubavitch, “will deserve to be placed at the apex of our philanthropic priorities.” His accusations become even more pointed as he accuses the Lubavitcher of believing as Christians do in “the Second Coming.” He goes on to state that “The Lubavitcher Rebbe is becoming God” and cites as proof the new slogan, “May our Master, Teacher, and Creator (instead of 'Rabbi') the King Messiah live forever,” and

the declaration that it is permissible to bow to the Rebbe because "his entire essence is divinity alone."

Highly negative external criticism such as Berger's and material on websites such as MoshiachListen.com and MoshiachTalk.com propels the majority of mixed and low charismalogy Lubavitcher to repudiate the high charismalogy proclamations of the Rebbe's status.

The charismatic leaders of many new religious movements begin by setting themselves and their followers apart from the dominant group. When confronted with opposition from the dominant group, new religious movements may accentuate their differences or they may acquiesce. (Bromley) For the Lubavitcher Hasidism, acceptance by the larger Jewish community is highly valued. They long for universal recognition of their Rebbe by the Jewish community and the world and rely heavily on non-Lubavitcher funding to accomplish their all-important mission of bringing Jews back to Judaism. Because high charismalogy became a key focus of their opponents, Chabad leaders began to deflect external criticism by lowering the public presentation of charismalogy. The first instance of this was the cancelling of the coronation. After the Rebbe's death and the launching of the Moshiach Has Come Campaign, key Chabad leaders continued to attempt to control the public image. According to Simon Dein (2011:67) Chabad leadership has "attempted to remove Messianism from the public eye" and "officially opposes overt messianist (high charismalogy) propaganda." The leadership has deployed videos to articulate their views by showing photos of the Rebbe with the caption "of sainted memory" and using prominent non-Lubavitcher Jewish leaders to help articulate their views. Lubavitcher missionaries are now prohibited from discussing their views on the messianic character of the Rebbe, though they may indeed see him as Moshiach. (Dein 2011) In the United States, Chabad as an institution has turned to law suits and newspaper advertisements in denouncing high charismalogy in order to assure the larger Jewish community that the high charismalogical perspective is an aberration.¹¹

Management of charismalogical levels continues to be a key problem and remains difficult for this group to tolerate. Desire to continue the mission of the Rebbe, the need for external funds to accomplish this goal, and the yearning to be seen as the central component of contemporary Judaism has compelled the group to hold the three charismalogies in a sometimes uneasy tension; the Lubavitcher does not excommunicate high charismalogical individuals. Prohibitions against using any high charismalogical language or symbols by the Stonewall England Chabad Rabbi has led to a breakaway group, *Beis Moshiach* where all members share a similar high charismalogy and accuse their former Rabbi of financial motivations (Dein 2011: 68) All other Lubavitcher groups remain together physically despite ideological differences and tensions.

The center of Chabad, '770' houses a high charismalogical group who call themselves Congregation Lubavitch, Inc. in the basement and its low charismalogical counterpart in the offices on upper floors. In the basement, the continuing belief that the

¹¹See Bromley (2002) for an excellent discussion of how NRM's may respond to external pressure. Although here the authors are discussing groups which turn violent, the categories they develop are flexible enough for a broader application to groups such as the Lubavitcher.

Rebbe is Moshiach is visible in the rituals, symbols and language of this high charismalogy segment of Chabad. Banners here proclaim “Long Live Our Master.” Lubavitcher holding other charismalogical views refuse to pray in this area and use a smaller synagogue upstairs. (Dein 2011: 90). A skirmish broke out at ‘770’ when the low charismalogy group put up a plaque referring to the Rebbe ‘of blessed memory,’ indicating their belief that the Rebbe is dead. Their counterparts spray painted over it.

Management of Charismalogy on the Personal Level

Three distinct positions are identified by the Lubavitcher themselves in relation to the view of the Rebbe: the Meschicists, anti-Meschicists, and the non Meschicists. Meschicists openly proclaim their high charismalogy, are firm in their belief that the Rebbe has been resurrected and is simply not visible yet and overtly announce it through language, symbol and ritual. They are offended by the reference to the Rebbe "of Blessed Memory." Their Rebbe is their Righteous King and they wear emblems on their clothing announcing this belief, young boys sport the abbreviation HrH (*Melech ha Moshiach* meaning, King Moshiach) on their yarmulkes, men wear patches with the royal symbol of the Rebbe, King Moshiach, houses are decked with yellow banners with Rebbe, King Moshiach, and automobile license plates proclaim the Rebbe as Moshiach. These are the new symbols the high charismalogy group uses to signify their belief.

The non-Meschicists do not believe that the Rebbe is the Messiah nor do they believe he will be the one to bring in the Age of Redemption. They believe that the Rebbe died and perform the traditional Jewish rituals on the anniversary of his death. He is not called King, Redeemer or Creator but is revered as an individual who had "no sense of ego or self," who led a "life of devotion." Each year, on the anniversary of the Rebbe's death, which they accept, the official Chabad website acknowledges the Rebbe's passing and indicates that the leadership will make its way to his grave to offer their respect and prayers. Though the non-Meschicist group continues to revere the Rebbe and visit his grave to talk with him, they accuse the high charismalogical Lubavitcher of praying to him and believing him to be alive.

The anti-Meschicists are a blended group of high and mixed charismalogy. The title is, however, misleading. Some believe the Rebbe is Moshiach others believe "It is not impossible that the Rebbe will be resurrected."(Dein 78)They are called anti's by the Lubavitcher, not because they do not believe that the Rebbe is either the Messiah or the potential Messiah but because they are opposed to any discussions of the Rebbe's messianic status. This view that one should not talk about Moshiach publicly has become widespread. The reticence of this group to discuss their views has led to an interesting set of problems. Other Lubavitcher would like to know the perspective of the group they call the ‘anti’s’ but the ‘anti’s’ will simply not discuss it. One non-Meschicist blogger, writing under the name Frum Satire, writes that he is not disturbed by the messianic disposition of some fellow Lubavitcher, acknowledges that some are and provides tips on how to tell that an ‘anti’ believes the Rebbe is Moshiach. He writes, “When you visit their home, look at their calendar. If they believe the Rebbe is Moshiach, the Rebbe’s yahrzeit (day of passing) will not be on their calendars.” On a more serious note, individuals who want to move into a mixed charismalogy or low Lubavitcher area seek answers to questions about how they can tell the predominant position in the area. And

recently, matchmaking services promise to make a match in which the bride and groom share charismalogical perspectives.

Summary and Implications

The perceptions of their leader the followers of the Rebbe hold can be categorized into three different charismologies. This schema for assessing charismalogy can be useful in determining differences within groups, changes over time within a group and can serve as a vehicle for comparing follower's perceptions in different groups.

In addition to proffering a new tool for exploring charismatic authority, this research also demonstrates that contrary to popular understandings of new religious movements purveyed by members of the anti-cult movement, believers whose charismologies differ from one another can hardly be brainwashed by the leader since their views are not homogeneous.

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