

The Rebbe – The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson
by Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman.
Princeton University Press 2010.

This is a superb analysis not only of Lubavitch Chasidism but of the cult of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, which reached its apotheosis with the last of the line on whom the book focuses.

The Rebbe tells the story of Lubavitch, the honing of its mission, the resources it has gathered to itself, the obsessive, quasi-fanatical nature of its followers' devotion to the Rebbe and his 'court', the outreach work it has done across the world – all well-known and well-documented; but what sets The Rebbe apart from other books about Lubavitch is the way in which the authors analyse the Messianic obsession that characterised the life, death and afterlife of the last Rebbe, and traces its origins meticulously back to the early days of the movement.

The reader is left with a range of emotions having concluded this excellent book: disbelief at human gullibility, conviction concerning the true cult-ish nature of Lubavitch Chasidism, satisfaction at the all too human frailties swirling around the Rebbe's court despite its 'saintly' pretensions, and amazement that so many Jews across the world of all persuasions continue to pay Lubavitch such disproportionate respect.

Professors Heilman and Friedman are owed a huge debt for producing this invaluable corrective work.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh