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Book Title: New Trends in the Study of Haredi Culture and Society

Book Editor(s): Steven J. Ross, David N. Myers, Nechumi Malovicki-Yaffe, Lisa Ansell

Published by: Purdue University Press. (2024)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.22177844.6>

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Serving the Jews, Serving the Empire: Discursive Hierarchy and Messianic Temporality in Russian Chabad

by *Galina Zelenina*

The last two years, since the beginning of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022, have seen a surge in Jewish emigration from Russia—not to mention other destinations. Immigration to Israel alone amounted to 45,000 in 2022 as opposed to 7,600 in 2021 and 6,600 in 2020.¹ The few friends of mine who remained in Moscow repeatedly asked me: "What about your informants in Mar'ina Roshcha? Given their dual citizenship and Ukrainian origins, surely they have all left, haven't they?"² Well, they have not.

In an interview taken about seven years ago, an informant of mine, originally from Odessa, the wife of a high-ranking member of the Moscow Chabad community, herself a rather open-minded woman, told me:

They [Moscow Lubavitchers] don't plan to leave. I don't know what should happen [to make them leave]. If [Aleksei] Navalny is elected and persecutes the Jews . . . Or if Putin leaves . . . So far, they are fine here. Their children can study [in Jewish schools], there are [Jewish] institutions where they can work. Moscow is a metropolis with a developed Jewish infrastructure. Everything is available, it's comfortable here. . . . The fact that Putin is loyal to the Jews and advertises it is nice and no one is against Putin, there is no opposition here. The Jewish community is not an opposition. [My question: So no one is concerned about other political issues beyond Kremlin's loyalty to the Jews?] Well, it's bad enough that [free] parking was banned in the city . . .³

Apparently, this attitude persists, the “special military operation” and recent developments in domestic politics notwithstanding. However, since Russian Chabad is embedded in various networks and contexts, its political positioning deserves closer examination.

The bulk of research on the contemporary Chabad Lubavitch movement has focused mainly on the development of its mystical doctrine and philosophy,⁴ outreach activities,⁵ messianism, and coping with the so-called failed prophecy after the demise of the last rebbe,⁶ whose biography, including his rise to power, leadership qualities, and political views, never fails to attract scholarly attention.⁷ In all these respects, the Chabad Lubavitch branch in Russia is seemingly of little interest. Being a young community and, by their own admission, rather light in terms of observance and Hasidic spirituality, it neither demonstrates fervent messianism nor can it boast of new achievements in the field of religious thought. As for its remarkable and much celebrated outreach successes, it follows mostly, though not exclusively, strategies elaborated in the global Lubavitch movement and already discussed in scholarship. Yet what Russian Chabad is certainly notable for is its astounding growth from scratch, the ambitions of its leadership and its representation before Russian authorities, who recognize the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia (FJCR) as such. It is also notable for its skilled adaptability, its cleverness in maneuvering among Russian, Jewish and Western agendas and its ability to leverage local settings and sentiments to their advantage.

In what follows, I will elaborate on different FJCR discourses and at the same time the internal integrity of its policy; on how Russian Lubavitchers balance their loyalties, being both heirs to a long tradition of devotion and close alliance with authorities⁸ and a part of world movement with headquarters in the United States; and on how they connect their past, present and future and link Lubavitcher messianism with a Russian national sense of mission.

MULTIFACETED HASIDIC DISCOURSE

Various Russian Chabad speakers and authors in their memoirs, interviews, and mission statements have portrayed the past of the movement in Russia in a similar vein. They emphasize its nativeness and even its leading role as a flagship of late imperial Russian orthodox Jewry and, in the era of Soviet atheism, its pivotal role as the only true keeper of Judaism.⁹ Contemporary issues are

reflected differently depending on the audience. Close reading of dozens of interviews, addresses, statements, official greetings, Torah commentaries, and social media postings delivered and published by the FJCR leadership and other Russian Chabad rabbis suggests there is no single Chabad discourse; in different situations and for different purposes, Lubavitchers choose different tones, themes and emphases.

1. The first type may be referred to as a loyalist, official, or domestic discourse. This includes speeches of Chabad leadership during meetings with the president, interviews given to national media, statements to the press on various occasions and events, greetings to Russian Jewry on major holidays, including the secular New Year (which is intended to emphasize the unity of religious Russian Jews with non-Jewish Russians).¹⁰

Official discourse focuses on similarities and even the symbiotic relationship between religious Jewish and Russian state values, designated as “traditional values” focused on the family and patriotism. The latter might be expressed as a simple appreciation of support and emphasizing that, unlike “godless” Soviet power, the contemporary state authority in Russia is neither anti-Semitic nor atheist, and contributes to the prosperity of the Jewish community and religion. In more complex and specific expressions, personalities (the president) or values (loyalty or stability) may be fitted into Jewish, biblical, or Hasidic context. Thus, the FJCR leadership regularly explains its alliance with the Kremlin through a “traditional Jewish approach”: if the State is good, that is, if it guarantees three things: “spiritual freedom, material freedom, and freedom of movement,” then Jews “should work, assist, and cooperate with State authority [. . .] to care and support, fight in wars—do all the right things.”¹¹ The author of the above quote, Rabbi Alexander Boroda, President of the FJCR, appears to be an heir to the tradition of loyalty and close ties with the authority that existed regardless of one’s religious disposition or even the nature of the regime to which one expresses loyalty (Russian or Soviet, traditionalist or socialist). Boroda, for example, proudly mentions his “distant relative” General David Dragunsky,¹² a WWII hero who later served as head of the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public (1983–1994), notorious for its vilification of Israel, Refuseniks, and Zionist activists, both secular and religious.¹³

Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar, besides justifying his loyalty to the Kremlin through Rabbinic injunctions,¹⁴ adds a prominent Hasidic theme which tends to interpret any coincidence and unexpected luck as miracles sent down from on high.¹⁵ The ongoing progress of Russian Jewry and the benevolence of the

Russian authorities are seen as precisely such a miracle,¹⁶ and in fact, predicted by the late Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson and as such, a sign of imminent messianic redemption.¹⁷ Lazar likes to recount how President Yeltsin never wanted to talk with Lubavitchers, never had any interest in or sympathy for them whatsoever, whereas the new Premier Putin was more than willing to cooperate. One month after their very promising first conversation, it just so happened—miraculously, of course—that the Premier became the Acting President.¹⁸

In his columns in a non-Jewish media outlet, Dovid Karpov, the rabbi of one of many Moscow Chabad communities, advocated loyalty to the authorities using biblical analogies. In particular, he compared the Maidan uprising in Kyiv, Ukraine, with Sodom, or a revolt against the divine order imposed from above.¹⁹ He also supported a statement saying that “Putin is Russia”²⁰ with reference to a medieval rabbinic biblical commentary,²¹ and identified the president with “the good pharaoh” featured in the Book of Genesis (“two fat years of prosperity have passed since the beginning of the new term of our Pharaoh . . . I mean, our President”). This Pharaoh could lead the whole world to Messianic redemption, no less: “If we believe Scripture, we are at the threshold of the great . . . turmoil . . . Russia, and the whole world, are entering a new era that may end, if we manage to go through this whole ordeal, in the global Exodus.”²² This equation is remarkable in the light of the well-known comparison in an earlier era of Soviet authorities who would not “let my people go” to “the bad pharaoh,” the pharaoh of Moses. As a prominent Moscow refusenik of the 1970s had put it, “we view our fight for emigration as a continuation of the great Exodus that was the crucial moment in the history of our people, and it is with great surprise that we recognize in the biblical story the familiar elements: hatred of Jews and an unwillingness to part with them, stupidity, anger, and the treachery of the Pharaoh.”²³

Never failing to emphasize the consonance of a “Jewish way of life” with the “Russian State’s traditionalism,” Chabad speakers enthusiastically juxtapose that image to the “corrupt” West with its individualistic values, “unnecessary” freedoms, “liberalism and overindulgence” that are allegedly responsible for the growth of anti-Semitism.²⁴ The overtones of this Westernphobia are also discernible in accounts of personal experience, which is especially impressive in the case of Berel Lazar, given that he and his spouse are of Western background: “When I go abroad, I feel quite a stranger in that culture. [My children] were born here, they feel completely Russian, sometimes they see what is happening in the West, and they say: ‘It’s definitely alien, strange, incomprehensible.’”²⁵

Loyalty to Russia coupled with rejection of the global West naturally lead to the anti-emigration stance of the FJCR leaders who have been building Jewish communities in Russia and have a legitimate interest in ensuring that Jews remain. They have repeatedly asserted, not without satisfaction, that “Russian Jews are no longer packed and ready to go” and, even if some do go, “certainly the majority of Russian-speaking Jews do business in Russia” where it is easier to “fend for one’s family.”²⁶

Referring to Judaism and Jewry in their official addresses, the FJCR leaders rarely make mention of Hasidism, Lubavitch, the Messiah or the late leader of the movement. Seeking to represent not only a Hasidic “sect” but Russian Judaism as a whole, they are careful to blur distinctions and speak on behalf of the Jewish people.

The same position is clearly manifest in the representational strategies chosen in the much-advertised Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Moscow.²⁷ Opened in 2012 by the FJCR which succeeded in raising significant funds and receiving support from the country’s leadership, the large multimedia museum has become a true success, attracting a steady flow of visitors and the constant attention of the press drawn to its many temporary exhibitions and cultural events.²⁸

Most of the museum’s permanent exhibition is dedicated to the history of Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet Jewry, presented—contrary to the usual victimization narrative—as a story of multiple successes and achievements. One reads that “(i)n the entire history of Jewish wandering nowhere have the Jews felt as comfortable as in the shtetl”; that imperial Jews were “confidently asserting themselves” in the spheres of banking, journalism, and legal services; that the February Revolution saw “the revival of the Jewish political and social life,” while “nearly 400,000 Jewish soldiers were faithfully serving their country and demonstrated true heroism”; and that in the Soviet Union Jews occupied “leading positions” in the theatre and science. The Great Patriotic War is the pivot of the permanent exhibition—not the Holocaust. Accordingly, Jews are portrayed as war heroes and victors rather than victims of Nazi genocide. The section *From Perestroika to the Present*—through direct assertions and rich visual and video materials—claims that despite the mass emigration of Soviet Jews in the 1990s, “the current state of the Jewish community in Russia and its religious, cultural, and educational institutions is stable,” while the section *Judaism—a Living Religion* presents an overview of Russian Jewish religious life in all its “diversity,” “from Orthodox practices to the innovations of progressive Judaism.”

Hence, the museum seems to be sending two key messages to its visitors: (1) despite the hardships and tragedies that affected the entire Soviet nation and that plagued Jews alone—discrimination, persecution, and the Holocaust—the history of Russian and Soviet Jews is rich, diverse, and glorious. Jews have made significant contribution to Russian-speaking culture, literature, science, and the victory in Second World War. (2) Contemporary Russian Jewry is the rightful heir to all the good that the past held and is immune and free from all the bad. No longer the victim of state-sponsored anti-Semitism and atheism, it continues to contribute to the life of the country while at the same time evolving as a community with its various cultural and religious groups and institutions. Remarkably, in the whole museum there is not a single portrait of the last Lubavitcher Rebbe (present in every FJCR office) nor a single word about the history of Chabad in the Russian empire or the Lubavitcher underground in the Soviet Union. At the same time, one third of the exposition portraying contemporary Jewish religious life in Russia consists of the photos of Reform communities—non-existent in Russia, according to Berel Lazar, who repeatedly, from the beginning of his career till now, has turned a blind eye to them, asserting that, “(f)ortunately, despite all efforts, it has not been possible and, G-d willing, will not be possible to introduce the American invention onto the Russian-Jewish soil” (2005),²⁹ or: “There is no such thing *chas v’shalom* (God forbid) as a Reform, Conservative temple; it does not exist in Russia” (2023).³⁰ This kind of language suggests that while acting as an outward-facing national body (which it does in its role as the museum’s founder), the FJCR follows a different, more partisan route in its own communications.

2. There is another discursive tack that the FJCR intends for a foreign audience. Quite predictably this discourse emphasizes not loyalty to the Russian government and “traditional values” but rather Jews per se. A particularly revealing element of this discourse is the issue of emigration which is presented here quite differently than elsewhere. In an interview given to an Israeli media outlet in 2018, Rabbi Lazar said he supported *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) with all his heart and considered it a performance indicator of his mission of awakening Jewishness in Russian Jews: “I do believe that any Jew who moves to Israel is a big success for us. We can make a checkmark and say, ‘Thank God, one more Jew made it to Israel.’”³¹ Whereas for Russian audiences, Chabad leaders present their community building as a means of preventing emigration, for Israeli audiences it is framed precisely as intended to stimulate *aliyah*.

3. A similar narrative is aimed at the general Russian Jewish audience (not identical to the community) which is traditionally close to—or overlaps

with—the liberal intelligentsia and is often critical or suspicious of state-sponsored agenda. Accordingly, this discourse is mostly devoid of loyalist and anti-Western declarations; quite the opposite, it attempts to maintain distance from politics.³² In a number of interviews, the FJCR leaders are asked for an explanation of their loyalty to the unvirtuous Putin regime—from the perspective of the interviewer and, presumably, the audience—and of their accepting donations from criminal businesses. In the course of this explanation, the cornerstones of the first discourse, including the common struggle for “traditional values” and the miraculous relationship with the sovereign, turn out to be merely a means to an end—the development of Jewish community. Rabbi Lazar explained his “friendship” with the president as nothing more than “a tool that allows me to achieve certain goals for my community”³³ which is his true mission in life for the sake of which he allows himself to ignore undemocratic governance, human rights violations, and a host of other problems. Rabbi Boroda argued in a similar vein that since there were Jews in need, he should not be too picky when dealing with donors.³⁴ In light of this frankly stated pragmatic approach, sensational conspiracy theories that link Russian Chabad with efforts to affect the US presidential election of 2016³⁵ come to mind: we cannot assess Chabad’s capabilities in this regard, but in theory doing Russian authorities a favor seems justified seen as serving the good of Jewish community.

4. The fourth type is an insider discourse meant for members of Chabad communities. In Torah commentaries and video lessons, community periodicals, communal and personal blogs, and news digests devoted to community life, political issues are mostly absent, with a few notable exceptions. Instead, Hasidic specificity is back, starting with a multitude of stories about the last rebbe and earlier *tzaddikim* (righteous leaders), questions of Halachah (Jewish law), twists and turns of Torah exegesis, and moral lessons. This discourse reduces Russian Jewry to the bounds of the Chabad community. For instance, the *Jewish Moscow* video digest³⁶ is devoted exclusively to the events of the Lubavitcher congregations, with no coverage whatsoever of either secular or even non-Chabad Jewish milieux. In contrast to the colorful images intended for the general public and aiming to emphasize inclusivity and diversity, the digest presents Chabad the way Hasidic communities are usually presented: as an exclusively mono-gender and monochromatic society—males in black suits and hats.

When external news does infiltrate this internal discourse, it tends to interpret actualities as a repetition of archetypal biblical events, pouring new wine into old vessels,³⁷ and sometimes in a messianic vein. The 2018 opening of the Crimea Bridge connecting Russia with the Crimean

Peninsula via the Kerch Strait, was covered in a community newspaper.³⁸ The piece talks about a secret prophecy allegedly given by the Vilna Gaon back in the eighteenth century, tying the annexation of Crimea by Russia to the coming of Messiah: “When you hear that the Russians have captured Crimea, you should know that these are the bells of the impending Redemption.” The author rejects an obvious interpretation that Gaon must have been talking about the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire in 1783. The piece is illustrated by a photograph of the Kerch Strait Bridge with a caption “*The Way to Moshiach!*”

The scheme I am proposing categorizes Russian Lubavitcher rabbis’ public utterances into four distinct discourses, which can be grouped into two pairs: domestic/global, and internal (Hasidic community)/external (Jewish public); apparently, there is yet another internal discourse, untraceable in open sources. This scheme seems to support and complicate the concept of “double standards” developed by several scholars who argue that Chabad for a long time has been operating on two levels: the level of its observant community and the level of the general Jewish public, which it seeks to involve but not overburden with strict observance.³⁹ In Russia, for a number of reasons, Chabad managed to establish itself in many eyes as the representative body of Russian Jewry, which required a more differentiated system of discourses comparable to a concentric circles system.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: PEACEMONGERS, *MESIRAT NEFESH*, AND THE CHOSEN PART OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Leaving aside the tightening strictures of the regime, which the FJCR leaders have long identified as none of their business, two major events have occurred recently that, one might assume, would expose discrepancies between the positions of the FJCR and the Russian government: Russia’s “special military operation” in Ukraine, where a significant part of the Moscow Lubavitcher community comes from, and the Israel-Hamas war. The sympathies of Russian Hasidim, of whom many have Israeli citizenship and immediate family members in Israel, clearly lie with Israel, while in Russian media coverage of the war Israel is portrayed (somewhat moderately) as an occupier and aggressor. In fact, the Russian government has repeatedly received Hamas delegations since the October 7 attack.

In Chabad media, from the Telegram channels of regional communities⁴⁰ to the official FJCR website, these topics have been almost entirely ignored. The first one is especially taboo. Communities go on with their routine: they celebrate the sabbath, educate children, help the elderly. Chabad leadership keeps extending good wishes to Russian Jewry on the holidays and preaching universal values: peace, light, goodness, happiness, freedom—all the while eschewing controversial topical issues. In general, they receive much less media coverage compared to the peak period of the 2010s at the time of the opening of the Jewish Museum and frequent meetings of Rabbis Lazar and Boroda with the president. Notwithstanding a small number of publications and a certain evasiveness, we can still detect opinions on both subjects, as expressed both in internal and external discourses.

In official statements, the FJCR leaders have repeatedly called for peace, somewhat contrary to what they might be expected to say,⁴¹ while at the same time asserting their loyalty and gratitude to Russia, for its much-praised lack of anti-Semitism as well as its harsh treatment of terrorists, which Israel should follow because “peace with murderers is impossible.”⁴² Rabbi Lazar could not have been unaware that the Foreign Ministry was welcoming a Hamas delegation on the same days that he was making this statement. Nonetheless, he focused on similarities between Russia and Israel rather than the contradictions.

Addressing foreign audiences, Russian Chabad leaders speak differently. For one, outside of the Russian and/or Russian language space, their support of Israel is much more energetic. During his visit to Israel Berel Lazar spoke before a group of IDF soldiers telling them, in Hebrew: “you are *haganah le-Israel* (a defense of Israel) not just *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel), but all of *Am Israel* (people of Israel) and we all read *Tehillim* (Psalms) and pray for you daily.” Quite predictably, this short video was reposted by Russian YouTube channels, including a Russian Islamic YouTube channel, where it received extremely hostile comments,⁴³ and even made it into the official Russian news.⁴⁴ Given the backlash, the chief rabbi had to explain that he addressed the IDF soldiers and blessed them “with the desire for peace and the fight against terrorism,” thereby, naming goals legitimate in Russian political discourse.⁴⁵ This episode demonstrates how the transgressing of boundaries between domestic and global discourses immediately causes tension.

Repeatedly asked about their position on the situation in Ukraine,⁴⁶ Russian Chabad leaders have justified themselves by resorting to traditional arguments. “We don’t get involved. It makes no difference who is right,—says Lazar.—We have a goal here: to bring Jews closer to Torah and mitzvos

(commandments), to support the mosdos (institutions), to provide humanitarian aid. . . .⁴⁷ We don't have a role in this story. . . . It's not our game. . . . Show me one ruling from our long history in exile that when the nations of the world battle with one another, the Jews need to state an opinion."⁴⁸ As a result of this non-interference the community does not feel threatened. Russian Jews may be emigrating, but it is business as usual in the synagogue: "We haven't seen a wave of *aliyah* (immigration to Israel)—there hasn't been a decline in the number of community members." In support of his position, Lazar quotes Hasidic lore, Elie Wiesel and the last Lubavitcher rebbe via Elie Wiesel. Wiesel quoted to Lazar a piece of advice he himself had received from the Rebbe; do only what relates to the Jews, let other people deal with other issues.⁴⁹ It is a long-stated position of Russian Chabad, which already twenty years ago adopted a stance opposed to that of another Jewish body—The Congress of the Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations in Russia and its leader Rabbi Adolf Shaevich—which allowed itself to take sides in Russian politics.⁵⁰ Other speakers for the FJCR have voiced this position as well, as did the head of the FJCR PR department Borukh Gorin. In his column published during the 2011–2013 protests of the so-called Snow Revolution, Gorin asserted that Jews were guests and, as such, they should "keep their heads down" and not teach their hosts how to live.

A further rationale for non-interventionism engages the concepts of *auctoritas*,⁵¹ self-sacrifice (*mesirat nefesh*), and the eradication of egocentricity (*bittul ha-yesh*), all key concepts in Hasidic discourse: "I think the first step is to put your own ego aside, and not focus on [. . .] what will be best for you personally. Rather, consider the *ratzon Hashem* (will of God) and the good of the Jews." In this interview, as well as elsewhere, Lazar constantly downplays his own role; he has not seen the president for ages, he does not influence anything, all the decisions made are either "decisions of the Russians" or the Rebbe's will which he, as an emissary, tries to capture and embody.

Hasidic rabbis are working hard to ensure that their decision to stay in Russia is regarded not as being opportunistic, keeping their sinecures, or even supportive of military action, but as self-sacrificing for the benefit of the community that they and they alone have been building for twenty years. The Convention of Lubavitcher Rabbis in Russia, *Kinus rabanei Rusia*, in September 2022 declared it their duty to continue working for Russian Jewry and solicited support from major figures in Israel.⁵² Alexander Boroda condemned non-Hasidic chief rabbi of Moscow Pinhas Goldschmidt who had left Russia in the spring of 2022 as the sort of a rabbi who comes not to invest

in his community “but only for the job contract.” Claiming that “those who remain in Russia support the war and he is the only one who opposes the war,” Goldschmidt is “wrong and disrespectful” towards the local Jews whom he views “as subhuman.”⁵³

None of the FJCR leaders mentions—perhaps to avoid unwelcome political analogies—that the last rebbe repeatedly discouraged Lubavitchers from leaving Russia in Soviet times: “Those who want to flee the battlefield with the excuse that they cannot stand up to the government should remember that they are abandoning many Jews to their fate” (1981).⁵⁴ He opposed sending invitations to emigrate to active community members, directly prohibited emigration for some Hasidim, and condemned those who left without consulting him:

Those who came to Israel did not ask for my opinion. . . . Not long ago, ten shoykhetim (ritual slaughterers), ten rabbis and ten mohels (ritual circumcisers) expressed a desire to leave, and they were, of course, helped to do so. But every Jew thus saved saves himself at the expense of hundreds of other Jews! Nothing would have happened to him or his Jewishness if he had lived there for another ten years! Hundreds of people would have been influenced by him, if only by simply seeing his beard in the streets!⁵⁵

According to the principle of *mesirat nefesh*, personal comfort must be sacrificed to the movement, to the Jewish future.

Clarifying his current position, Lazar regards the state of Jewish religious life in contemporary Russia as a credit to himself and other Hasidic emissaries: “had we left, just as there might not have been Passover in Russia back in 1993, there wouldn’t have been Passover this year.” This allows him to compare his own *mesirat nefesh*, which led him to stay in belligerent Russia, to that of Moses who “heeded the Almighty’s call and sacrifice[ed] the comforts of Midian, where he’d lived in peace, to return to Egypt and be with his oppressed brethren. It was this sacrifice for his people that enabled Moses to ultimately lead them to redemption.”⁵⁶ This seems to be in line with the last two rebbes’ idea that every Chabad leader is an incarnation of Moses: “each master of Ḥabad is an avatar of Moses [. . .] the ‘very same’ person (*der zelber moshe*), albeit reincarnated in a different body. As Moses was a mediator between God and the people of Israel, the Rebbe of Ḥabad is described both as the personification of godliness and as the intercessor through whom members of the community can receive the teaching of the Besht, the inner light of the Torah, so that they may cleave to the Infinite.”⁵⁷

The appeal to this classical Chabad theme of *mesirat nefesh*, central to the narrative of preserving Torah in the Soviet Union, allowed Lazar to inscribe himself—a foreigner, a newcomer—into the authentic Russian Hasidic tradition, that of persecution and resistance, and made him part of the Soviet Hasidic community that has always sacrificed itself in order to keep the flame of Judaism alive in this country. His account of his visits to the Soviet Union in the 1980s and of his early years as a *shaliah* in the 1990s is replete with hardships and miracles helping to overcome them, and it connects him to a community of local Lubavitcher “heroes” and allows him to take advantage of this symbolic capital.⁵⁸

So far there is no reason to believe that Lazar harbors his own messianic ambitions, but the undoubted growth of his authority is clearly visible. Non-Russian publications emphasize the “breadth and strength of Rabbi Lazar’s rabbinic leadership,” which they describe as “astounding,” as well as his “empire” of “over 200 shluchim and dozens of thriving kehillos.”⁵⁹ His name is accompanied by the designation reserved for rabbinic dignitaries *shlita*.⁶⁰ Some Russian-language publications are no less laudatory. On Sukkot 2023, upon receiving the news from Israel, Lazar said, “We know what we can do in this place on this day in this situation. It’s already happened—50 years ago. The Rebbe told us then that we must fulfill the custom of dancing with the Torah more than we always have—putting pain and hope, faith and confidence into the dancing, and so we will win!”⁶¹ And he himself danced until 3 a.m., and in the end fell and got a concussion. A community newspaper wishes “our spiritual leader” recovery, recalling the seventh Rebbe’s heart attack, which also occurred during the *hakafot* (the Torah processions during Sukkot) in 1977. Thus, Lazar has been likened to Schneerson twice—in his own speech and in the article.⁶²

The Jewry this “Moses” Lazar presides over is fantastically promising and fraught with miracles. Lazar claims there are a million Jews in Russia (as opposed to 82,000 listed in the latest census of 2020–2021), many of whom do not know they are Jewish but the FJCR will take care of it: “on the general list we have over 130,000 Yidden. In the next few months, we hope to visit 25,000 of these Yidden [. . .] go into their homes and make sure that there is a mezuzah, sefarim (religious books), candlesticks for lighting Shabbos candles, a kiddush cup and the like.”⁶³ This is a usual strategy of Chabad outreach to people who initially have no need for Jewish practice (unlike the majority of other Jewish congregations, which provide services on demand, accepting into membership those who need them), or, as the seventh rebbe had put it, “don’t even know

they're missing something."⁶⁴ Besides, Russian Jews are special and the minute they know they are Jewish, they take it very seriously and start learning Gemara.⁶⁵ Given the soteriology of the seventh rebbe, who repeatedly asserted that the more Jews got involved with Jewish practice and kept the commandments, the sooner the messiah would come, the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of Russian Jewry as presented by Lazar offer certain messianic prospects. The military situation reinforces such expectations. Answering the question "how should a Jew view the war between Russia and Ukraine?" Lazar quotes from Midrash: "If you see the great nations fighting with each other, look for the footsteps of Moshiach" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 42:4), adding: "There never was such a [level of tension]. [. . .] For sure I believe it is a sign of the *geulah* (redemption)."⁶⁶ The intensification of darkness (which might be expressed in the form of a military conflict, the battle of Gog and Magog) in the last phase of exile is a common idea in various Jewish sources that were said to have influenced the seventh rebbe.⁶⁷ Both the rebbe himself and Chabadniks in general, who constitute "a near ideal type of fundamentalist religious movement," perceive recent history as "the stage preceding total and final Redemption."⁶⁸

Publications and addresses intended for wider Russian Jewish audience are more distinctly pro-peace, calling the "military operation" a series of "regrettable events," urging "each of us to do whatever it takes to bring peace" and promising that "Torah will lead us to true peace."⁶⁹ They are also more emphatically and aggressively pro-Israel,⁷⁰ compared to "official" expressions. In addition, in recent years, Berel Lazar has honored three deceased liberal icons—politician Mikhail Gorbachev, economist Evgeni Yasin and poet Lev Rubinstein (the last two were Jewish)⁷¹—implicitly affirming liberal values and seemingly addressing himself to the Jewish liberal intelligentsia.

Much intra-community discourse is, for the most part, careful to refrain from politics beyond prayers for or collecting humanitarian aid to Israel. Yet some rabbis in their personal blogs emphatically praise the government, pointing to its alleged support for the process of winning the release of the Israeli hostages, while refusing to comment on the situation in Ukraine, saying that "only Hashem, blessed be His name, knows what is real and what is not,"⁷² which is an easily recognizable variation on the official Russian media mantra "everything is ambiguous."

One remarkable exception is the newspaper of a Moscow congregation headed by Rabbi Dovid Karpov (a Moscow-born *baal teshuvah* [a returnee to traditional observance], unlike most other Lubavitcher rabbis—either foreigners or natives of Ukraine or Belarus), which reacts directly to political news

and interprets it according to the official line and yet also in Hasidic categories. The newspaper entitled *Darkhei Shalom*, “Ways of Peace,” definitely supports the “operation” in Ukraine, likening the Ukrainian “neo-Nazis and Banderites” to Amalek, and Russia to Israel, which the whole world has commonly considered the aggressor.⁷³ In turn, the war in Gaza is likened to the war in Ukraine—“Israel has launched its own ‘special military operation’”).⁷⁴ Both wars are interpreted as *hevlei Moshiach* (messianic pangs) and in both wars “we” (Russia and Israel) will prevail “with God’s miraculous help” (*derech nes*).⁷⁵ In the wake of the war will come a “complete and final Redemption.” Most astonishingly, the Redeemer will be from the ranks of Russian Jews, which is special and uniquely worthy of it. Just as the Jewish people went down to Egypt to collect “sparks” and then were privileged to get to the Promised Land, so Russian Jewry:

having gone through the Soviet school of survival and hardened itself in hardships, coming out of this Soviet Egypt and taking with them all its priceless “sparks,” will be able to bring Moshiach. If our first Redeemer, Moshe, came out of Egypt, the last Redeemer will come out of the Soviet Union.⁷⁶

Using the kabbalistic concept of gathering the sparks of the divine light as a prerequisite for *tikun olam* (repair of the world) and the final redemption, the newspaper promotes a local version of messianism which would make a perfect argument for not leaving. Who would leave the country where the *geulah* is to take place?

An inseparable connection to Russia, replete with messianic overtones, is not foreign to global Chabad rhetoric and ideology. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the “evil empire” that allegedly sought to destroy Lubavitchers in particular, was seen as a sign of the coming redemption while the seventh rebbe’s persistent predictions of this collapse were considered proof of his power to bring it about.⁷⁷ It is a kind of Lubavitcher lore, ascribed to the last leader of the movement, that Russian Jews, most of whom are *baalei teshuva*, will have the honor of bringing Moshiach.⁷⁸

This idea is supported by numerous recollections of Soviet Chabadniks about how the rebbe tried to keep in touch with them and stay informed about them. Later, in the early 1970s, when immigrants from the Soviet Union appeared in Israel and the US, the Rebbe treated them with special attention, invited them to New York at the expense of the movement, spoke at *Farbrengen* (large Chabad assemblies) about their sacrifice, and demanded that *niggunim* (melodies) in Russian be performed in the first place.⁷⁹

Many Russian Chabadniks see the special value of the Soviet experience for Hasidim today, especially in terms of connecting with the Rebbe without his physical presence. Having never seen the Rebbe, they nevertheless thought of him incessantly and maintained a deep spiritual connection to him. Today, when the Rebbe is believed to have disappeared in order to return later, the Hasidim of Chabad must maintain constant spiritual contact with him. Just as their steadfastness led to their reunion with the Rebbe in the past, so it will lead to a reunion with him in the future.⁸⁰

In the countries with Russian-Jewish diasporas the movement presents itself as an authentically Russian brand of Judaism—one that grew up in a pre-Soviet Russian context, endured the repression of the Soviet period, and has since emerged as the dominant Jewish force in the Russian-speaking world.⁸¹ Some non-Russian Russian-speaking Chabad media, most notably the Kfar Chabad based *Moshiach.ru* website, avoid condemning the Kremlin and its master, seeing military events not as a cause for moral judgment, but as signs of imminent redemption: “If you are asked, whose side are you on in this conflict, you should answer—I am on Moshiach’s side!” “If you have seen these kingdoms fighting among themselves, you have seen the footsteps of Moshiach!” The flight of Jews from Ukraine and their emigration from Russia are seen as a fulfillment of the rebbe’s prophecy of thirty years ago that Jews would soon leave the countries behind the Iron Curtain, which was also perceived in messianic terms.⁸² Thus, it looks quite consistent that a group that miraculously survived persecution in the Soviet empire, miraculously contributed to the fall of that empire, and miraculously revived vibrant Jewish life in the territory of that empire, will be the first—either in Russia or beyond—to meet the imminent messianic moment, of which recent military conflicts are an unmistakable sign.

This sketch of Russian Chabad’s differing discourses addressed to different audiences confirms and complicates the concept of two circles, or levels, adopted in research on Chabad outreach efforts. It describes features much discussed by scholars of Chabad in other periods of its history: flexibility and adaptability, together with an emphasis on loyalty to the state power. The flexibility is manifested, in particular, in the ability of Chabad rabbis to alternate between representing the nation (Russian Jewry) and representing their religion. For instance, this skill was demonstrated on October 14, 2023, when the FJCR organized a public event in memory of Israeli victims of Hamas attack which was announced as “public prayer” and consisted exclusively of reciting and singing

prayers but which was held in the courtyard of the museum, not in the synagogue. The event attracted crowds of Moscow Jews, including some youngsters who came wrapped in Israeli flags. In this manner, the FJCR managed to act as the national representative body by giving local Jews an opportunity to express their support for Israel while officially appearing only as a religious body holding a prayer. In this way, they could avoid accusations of calling for support for Israel.

The way recent political developments are dealt with and covered makes clear that the premise that the good of the community justifies any means allows for endless adaptation to a variety of political conditions. The worse these conditions are, the more unmistakable are the signs of messianic times that Lubavitchers are constantly looking for. Nothing is new, everything that is happening now is seen as a repeat of previous events or as fulfillment of previous prophecies, including the Rebbe's predictions. As has been noted, "In Chabad, [. . .] in times of plight, the 'just as it was' credo constitutes a meaning-giving tool to grapple with disorientation and bewilderment."⁸³ The ability of some Chabad authors to root every event in a biblical archetype and color them in messianic tones is a source of consolation that must be extremely attractive to their readers.

As studies of millenarian movements show,⁸⁴ including those that deal with Lubavitcher Hasidism after the death of the last Rebbe, a "failed prophecy" does not entail immediate attempts to restore balance and harmony. Chabad tries to compensate for the loss in part both by creating the illusion of the Rebbe's presence (e.g., through regular presentation of his videos) and insistently proclaiming his imminent return—i.e., by blurring the boundaries between past and present and between present and future. But at the same time, it highlights that at the present moment, the Rebbe is not with us: this is painful, and Hasidim must simultaneously rejoice at his impending coming and cry out in anguish "until when?" (the unity of opposites).⁸⁵ The restoration of harmony and clarity does not appear to be a *sine qua non* for the survival of the movement. Prolonged deprivation and longing seem to keep the movement viable just as well. And under present political circumstances, allowing neither to act, nor to make clear statements on a number of issues, the articulation of messianic expectations, bringing them to the forefront, successfully annuls the need to make a moral choice and appears to be the optimal rhetorical and perhaps even psychological strategy. Messianic temporality is closely related to spatiality. Expecting the Messiah from among Russian Jewry seems to merge Chabad millenarianism with Russian ideas of chosenness, the "god-bearing people"

and its global mission.⁸⁶ Russian Chabadniks, both Soviet-born and emissaries, who position themselves and probably feel themselves no less Russian, are living through the period of vibrant revival (of Jewish community and religious life) that has been going on since early 1990s, regarding it as the fulfillment of God's and the Rebbe's will. They fervently hope that this prolonged culmination should move to the next culmination—the moment of redemption (*geulah*), here and now. The attachment to Russia is temporary and conditioned by messianic expectation: hastening the advent of the messiah is a job to be done in Russia, but the messianic future should unfold in the sacred space of the Holy Land. As an influential Moscow rabbanit (rabbi's wife) put it, "We are here for now because we are working for the community, but soon Moshiach will come and we will be in Israel along with everyone else."⁸⁷

Notes

1. Mark Tolts, "Emigration from Russia to Israel: Flow Dynamics and Its Components in 1990–2023," *Demographic Review* 10, no. 4 (2023): 57, table 3.
2. The neighborhood where the largest Moscow Lubavitcher community resides and Lubavitcher Federation of Jewish communities of Russia (hereinafter referred to as FJCR) main institutions are located.
3. Chana (b. 1978, Odessa), interview by Galina Zelenina, recorded in 2017, Moscow.
4. E.g., Elliot Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Naftali Loewenthal, *Hasidism beyond Modernity: Essays in Habad Thought and History* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; Liverpool University Press, 2020).
5. E.g., Sue Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch* (New York: Shoken, 2003); Elise Berlan, "Voices of Outreach: The Construction of Identity and Maintenance of Social Ties among Chabad-Lubavitch Emissaries," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 1 (2009): 69–85; Oren Golan and Nurit Stadler, "Building the Sacred Community Online: The Dual Use of the Internet by Chabad," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 71–88; Samuel Heilman, "Lubavitch and How and Why It Is Taking Over the Jewish World," in *Habad in the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Politics, Outreach*, ed. Jonatan Meir and Gadi Sagiv (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Press, 2018), 137–59.
6. E.g., Simon Dein, "What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails: The Case of Lubavitch," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 3 (Autumn, 2001): 383–401; Yoram Bilu, "'With Us More Than Ever': Making the Late Lubavitcher Rabbi Present in Messianic Chabad," in *Leadership and Authority in Israeli Charedi Society* [in Hebrew], ed. K. Caplan and N. Stadler (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2009), 186–224; Michal Kravel-Tovi, "To See the Invisible Messiah: Messianic Socialization in the Wake of a Failed Prophecy in Chabad," *Religion* 39 (2009): 248–60; Michal Kravel-Tovi and Yoram Bilu, "The Work of the Present: Constructing Messianic Temporality in the Wake of Failed Prophecy among Chabad Hasidim," *American Ethnologist* 35 (2008): 64–80.
7. Avrum M. Ehrlich, *Leadership in the HaBaD Movement. A Critical Evaluation of HaBaD Leadership, History, and Succession* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 2000): 289–406; Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, *The Rebbe. The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Chaim Miller, *Turning Judaism Outward: A Biography of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe* (New York: Kol Menachem, 2014); Alon Dahan, "Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's Outlook on the Land of Israel, Zionism, and the State of Israel," in *Habad in the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Politics, Outreach*, ed. Jonatan Meir and Gadi Sagiv (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Press, 2018), 105–36.

8. For the origin of this tradition see Hillel Levine, "Should Napoleon Be Victorious . . .: Politics and Spirituality in Early Modern Jewish Messianism," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 16–17 (2001): 66–83.
9. On the post-Soviet revival of the movement and its self-establishment as *the* Russian Judaism, on its historical vision, including the self-image of "arch-enemies of Soviet regime," see Galina Zelenina, "Our Community is the Coolest in the World': Chabad and Jewish Nation-Building in Contemporary Russia," *Contemporary Jewry* 38, no. 2 (2018): 249–79; Zelenina, "Nothing to Do with Melukhe? Two Jewish Alternative Milieus under the Late Soviet Regime: Between Defiance and Cooperation," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 62, no. 1 (2021): 42–50.
10. The President of the FJCR speaks of "the values that the Jews of Russia share with all peoples of the country": "The Rabbi Told Us How Russian Jews Celebrate the New Year" [in Russian], *Gazeta.ru*, January 1, 2024, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2024/01/01/22047295.shtml>.
11. Alexander Boroda, "The Purpose of the FJCR Is to Distance the Jewish Community from Political Intrigues" [in Russian], interview by Adam Nersesov, *Jewish Magazine*, October 1, 2017, <http://www.moscow-jerusalem.ru/intervyu/ravvin-aleksandr-boroda-cel-sozdaniya-feor-distancirovat-evrejskuyu-obshhinu-ot-politicheskix-intrig>.
12. "Rabbi Boroda on PFC CSKA Moscow, Stalin and Ivan the Terrible" [in Russian], *Mir24*, November 14, 2016, <https://mir24.tv/news/15302188>.
13. William Korey, "The Soviet Public Anti-Zionist Committee: An Analysis," in *Soviet Jewry in the 1980s: The Politics of Anti-Semitism and Emigration and the Dynamics of Resettlement*, ed. R. O. Freedman (London: Duke University Press, 1989), 26–50; Matvei Geizer, "General Dragunsky Life Story" [in Russian], *Lehaim* 98, no. 6 (2000): 24–31.
14. "Our strategy is written in the Talmud. Wherever a person lives, he must realize that the law of the land is also the law of the Jews. We must pray for the good fortune and success of the president and the authorities until, God forbid, they start acting against the Jews" (Berel Lazar, "Wherever the Jew Lives He Should Pray for the Good Fortune and Success of the President" [in Russian], interview by Ilya Azar, *Novaya Gazeta*, May 2, 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/05/02/72345-gde-by-evrey-ni-zhil-on-dolzhen-molitsya-za-udachu-i-uspeh-prezidenta>); ". . . in spite of corruption we should pray for the authorities, such is the tradition, the Mishna teaches us so" (Berel Lazar, "Prayer for the Kingdom" [in Russian], *Lechaim.ru*, November 15, 2015, <https://old.lechaim.ru/6679>).
15. Berel Lazar, "Is the Time of Miracles Over?" [in Russian], *Lechaim*, 2002, no. 1, <http://old.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/117/moscow.htm>.
16. Berel Lazar, "It Is Never Too Late" [in Russian], *Lechaim*, 2002, no. 5, <http://old.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/121/moscow.htm>.

17. Berel Lazar, "The Rebbe's Predictions Are Coming True" [in Russian], *Lechaim*, 2002, no. 8, <http://old.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/124/moscow.htm>.
18. Berel Lazar, "On Passover, We Take a Leap . . ." [in Russian], interview by Adam Nersesov, *Jewish Magazine*, April 1, 2017, <https://jewishmagazine.ru/articles/intervyu/glavnyj-ravvin-rf-berl-lazar-v-pesah-my-sovershaem-skachok-a-v-techenie-goda-objazany-uporno-dvigatsja-k-realizacii-sobstvennoj-missii/>.
19. Dovid Karpov's blog on Snob.ru, entry: <https://snob.ru/profile/27889/blog/83673> [in Russian].
20. Famously made by Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin.
21. Dovid Karpov's blog on Snob.ru, entry: <https://snob.ru/profile/27889/blog/83080> [in Russian].
22. Dovid Karpov's blog on Snob.ru, entry: <https://snob.ru/profile/27889/blog/85642> [in Russian].
23. Vitaly Rubin, *Diaries. Letters*, vol. 2 [in Russian] (Jerusalem: Biblioteka Aliya, 1988), 40–42.
24. Berel Lazar, "A Man Who Has Been to Auschwitz Once Thinks Differently" [in Russian], interview by Elena Loria, *Izvestia*, January 29, 2018, <https://iz.ru/700800/elena-loria/chelovek-kotoryi-odnazhdy-pobyval-v-osventcime-dumaet-po-drugomu>.
25. Lazar, "A Man Who Has Been to Auschwitz."
26. Boroda, "The Purpose of the FJCR."
27. The Museum's website: <https://www.jewish-museum.ru/en/>.
28. Not much has been written about it from a scholarly perspective. See Eva Berar, "Moscow Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center," *Gefter*, June 18, 2014, <http://gefter.ru/archive/12535>; thematic volume "New Jewish Museums in Post-Communist Europe," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, nos. 2–3 (2015).
29. Berl Lazar, "Don't Bargain with God, Gentlemen" [in Russian], *Lechaim*, 2005, no. 2.
30. Avraham Heschel, "Yiddishkeit under Putin: A Candid Conversation with Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar," *Hamodia* 26, no. 1285 (November 15, 2023): 31–37.
31. Yakov Schwartz, "As Chabad Emissaries Expelled from Russia, Chief Rabbi Sees a Friend in Putin," *The Times of Israel*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-chabad-emissaries-expelled-from-russia-chief-rabbi-sees-a-friend-in-putin/>.
32. Azar, "Wherever the Jew Lives."
33. Cnaan Liphshiz, "A Russian Chief Rabbi Stands by His Strongman, aka Putin," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.jta.org/2015/06/04/news-opinion/world/a-russian-chief-rabbi-stands-by-his-strongman-a-k-a-putin>.
34. Boroda, "The Purpose of the FJCR."
35. Ben Schreckinger, "The Happy-Go-Lucky Jewish Group That Connects Trump and Putin," *Politico Magazine*, April 9, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/04/the-happy-go-lucky-jewish-group-that-connects-trump-and-putin-215007>; Lee Smith, "Glenn Simpson, Conspiracy Theorist, Finds a Place for the

- Jews in His Trump-Russia Fantasia,” *Tablet*, January 24, 2018, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/253765/glenn-simpson-press-conspiracy-theory>.
36. “Mevaser Tov Moscow,” Issue 37, May 25, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBajo0Vh_Q0.
 37. As Yosef Haim Yerushalmi famously defined traditional Jewish approach to contemporary history: *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 38 and passim.
 38. *Darkhei Shalom*, May 25, 2018.
 39. Fishkoff, *The Rebbe’s Army*, 12–14, 279–84; Berman, “Voices of Outreach.”
 40. Facebook had been banned in Russia, so community pages docilely migrated elsewhere. For example, see Telegram channels of Chabad houses in Kaliningrad (https://t.me/B_C_Kaliningrad), Rostov-on-Don (<https://t.me/EvreiRostov>), Irkutsk (<https://t.me/Jewishirkutsk>), Krasnoyarsk (https://t.me/shalom_krasnoarsk), and some of Moscow congregations (<https://t.me/baischabad>, <https://t.me/JewishNewMoscow>).
 41. “Berel Lazar: The Jewish Community Is Ready to Do Everything to Achieve Peace” [in Russian], *Piter.tv*, January 26, 2023, https://piter.tv/event/Berl_Lazar_evrejskaya_obschina_gotova_delat_vse_dlya_dostizheniya_mira/; “I’m Willing to Do Any Kind of Mediation” [in Russian], *Kommersant*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5239559>; “There’s Nothing to Talk About” [in Russian], *Kommersant*, January 26, 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5785893>.
 42. “Berel Lazar Said the Struggle against Extremism Should Be Regular and Ruthless” [in Russian], *Telegram*, October 26, 2023, <https://t.me/RabbiBerelLazar/275>.
 43. “Berel Lazar in Gaza” [in Russian], Ruslan Kurbanov YouTube channel, January 23, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq4JQmB_G3U.
 44. “Berel Lazar Revealed That He Blessed IDF Units in Gaza” [in Russian], *Rambler News*, January 26, 2024, <https://news.rambler.ru/community/52160969-berl-lazar-rasskazal-chto-blagoslovliv-otryady-tsahal-v-gaze>.
 45. “Russia’s Chief Rabbi Explained His Address to Israeli Soldiers” [in Russian], *RIA News*, January 26, 2024, <https://ria.ru/20240126/izrail-1923719383.html?ysclid=lrzftbhglc128036097>.
 46. Louis Keen, “Is This Russian Rabbi Fair Game for Sanctions, or Being Held to a Double Standard?,” *Forward*, August 16, 2022, <https://forward.com/news/514192/rabbi-alexander-boroda-pushes-back-against-navalny-sanctions/>.
 47. The FJCR claims to run humanitarian programs for 120,000 regular beneficiaries, including soup kitchens, food packages, medical care, children’s boarding house, etc. (as described in “Social Work” section on the FJCR website: <https://feor.ru/activities/soczialnaya-rabota/>).
 48. Aryeh Ehrlich, “Walking a Tightrope,” *Mishpacha*, September 28, 2022, <https://mishpacha.com/walking-a-tightrope>.
 49. Ehrlich, “Walking a Tightrope.”

50. Liphshiz, "A Russian Chief Rabbi Stands. . . ."
51. According to Lazar, "when I close my eyes and think about my mission, what HaKadosh Baruch Hu (the Holy One blessed be He) wants, what halachah says, what the Rebbe who sent me here wants me to do, I'm sure that I don't need to issue statements and cause harm."
52. "Russian Rabbis Convene Emergency Conference in Moscow," *Chabad.org*, September 5, 2022, https://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/5626135/jewish/Russian-Rabbis-Convene-Emergency-Conference-in-Moscow.htm.
53. Alexander Boroda, "Any Organization Operating in a Particular State Should Follow Its Laws and the Jewish Agency Is No Exception," interview by Eldad Beck, *Israel Hayom*, August 16, 2022, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2022/08/16/relations-between-the-countries-are-good/>. See also another comment saying that Chabad rabbis never took sides in Russian politics and are not running away from the ship, they are working for the good of Jewish people, and all the Jewish revival in Russia is their merit, while Goldschmidt ran away and is now besmirching all the Jews in Russia: Boruch Gorin, "Don't Accuse Rabbis in Russia of Supporting the War," *Foreign Policy*, March 17, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/17/rabbis-war-putin-ukraine-russia-supporting-the-war>.
54. Of course, this did not apply to his father-in-law, the previous rebbe, who had left the USSR leaving his Hasidim behind because "there was absolutely no possibility to stay" (1974).
55. Zusha Wolf, ed., *Diedushka: Ha-Rebbe mi-Lubavitch ve-Yahadut Rusyah* (Kfar Chabad: Yad ha-Hamishah, 2006). Cited by partial publication in Russian-language Lubavitch magazine *Svet Moshiacha* (The Light of the Messiah), republished online on Chabad.org: chapter "Those Who Did Not Leave the Battlefield" [in Russian], *Habad.ru*, https://ru.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1385376/jewish/- .htm.
56. Berel Lazar, "A Russian Passover," *Tablet*, April 10, 2023, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/history/articles/passover-in-russia-then-and-now>.
57. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 8–9.
58. Berel Lazar, interview by Andrei Eihfus, *STMEGI TV*, July 30, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcX_HVjYeCE.
59. Ehrlich, "Walking a Tightrope."
60. This Hebrew acronym means that the honoree "should have a good and long life." "Hamodia Features Interview with Rabbi Berel Lazar on Jewish Life under Putin," *CrownHeights.info*, November 16, 2023, <https://crownheights.info/chabad-news/842868/hamodia-features-interview-with-rabbi-berel-lazar-on-jewish-life-under-putin>.
61. Alexander Rogoza, "Danced His Way to a Concussion" [in Russian], *Komsomol Pravda*, October 9, 2023, <https://www.msk.kp.ru/daily/27565/4834704>.
62. "Words of Torah and Healing" [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, October 13, 2023.
63. Heschel, "Yiddishkeit under Putin."

64. Heilman, "Lubavitch and How and Why," 144.
65. Heschel, "Yiddishkeit under Putin."
66. Heschel, "Yiddishkeit under Putin."
67. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 304 n. 13; 317 n. 23.
68. Menachem Friedman, "Habad as Messianic Fundamentalism: From Local Particularism to Universal Jewish Mission," in *Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Marty E. Martin and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 329.
69. Berel Lazar, "The Gold We Will Take to the World to Come" [in Russian], *Lechaim.ru*, July 22, 2022, <https://lechaim.ru/academy/zoloto-kotoroe-mi-vozymem-v-gryadushtiy-mir>; Lazar, "To Find Torah, to Cling to Torah" [in Russian], *Lechaim.ru*, May 25, 2022, <https://lechaim.ru/academy/nayti-toru-derzhatysya-za-toru-zhity-blagodarya-tore>; Berel Lazar, address [in Russian], *Telegram*, May 9, 2022, <https://t.me/RabbiBerelLazar/205>.
70. Berel Lazar, "The War of the L-rd against Amalek from Generation to Generation" [in Russian], *Lechaim.ru*, October 23, 2023, <https://lechaim.ru/academy/voynau-g-spoda-protiv-amaleka-iz-roda-v-rod>.
71. Berel Lazar, on Mikhail Gorbachev passing [in Russian], *Telegram*, August 31, 2022, <https://t.me/RabbiBerelLazar/225>; Berl Lazar expressed condolences on the death of Yevgeny Yasin [in Russian], *Telegram*, September 29, 2023, <https://t.me/RabbiBerelLazar/270>; "The Chief Rabbi of Russia Named Rubinstein's Main Merit" [in Russian], *News.ru*, January 15, 2024, <https://news.ru/culture/glavnyj-ravvin-rossii-nazval-glavnuyu-zaslugu-rubinshtejna>.
72. From comments to Krasnogorsk community rabbanit Bat-Sheva Malka Albatz' post, *Facebook*, February 7, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/RabbiLazar/posts/pfbid0CUcVPw1yozkPj5q4Ydu6mJt7SDSxSzhDwKjjes>. Krasnogorsk is a satellite town of Moscow.
73. "Torah and Modernity," [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, March 4, 2022; "On the Passage 'The Red Heifer'" [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, March 25, 2022.
74. "Special Feature" [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, October 13, 2023.
75. "Torah and Modernity" [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, October 20, 2023.
76. "On the Chapter Shemot" [in Russian], *Darkhei Shalom*, January 5, 2024.
77. Heilman and Friedman, *The Rebbe*, 9, 234.
78. "Reb Motl Kozliner said that the Rebbe told him, 'These Russian ba'altshuvkes, they are the ones who will bring Moshiach,'" Boruch Kuznetsov's post on Facebook, January 14, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid021xZiT5SxBoudfkYqixMhc2QzVPuUGjL1ydh1ESMT19dXtza4CuRszMh9GPVPC3HfL&id=100009079367952.
79. "Great Exodus of 5732 (1972) and Russian Hasidim" [in Russian], *A Chassidisher Derher*, Kislev 5782, 46–55.
80. "Great Exodus of 5732," 55.

81. Joshua Tapper, "'This Is Who I Would Become': Russian Jewish Immigrants and Their Encounters with Chabad-Lubavitch in the Greater Toronto Area," *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études Juives Canadiennes* 29 (2020): 57–80.
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84. Starting with Leon Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).
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