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# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

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### Is the Rebbe the Moshiach?

Question: Is the last Lubavitcher Rebbe the Moshiach (Messiah) as many Chabad Chasidim claim? If he is not, should we excommunicate them for claiming that he is?

Answer: When answering this question we are not discussing the pronouncement of a small group of Chabad Chasidim that the Rebbe is divine essence placed in a body and that his entire reality is divine, and the Rebbe therefore knows everything, cannot sin and is not limited. He is a man of G-d, i.e. a person and also G-d. One who speaks to him is like one who is speaking to G-d. It is permissible to pray towards his picture and bow to it on condition that one's intention is towards the completely Divine being. He obviously did not die and is not mortal. We are not discussing this since this small group of "Godists" is neglected, scorned and rejected by almost all Chabad Rabbis.

We are also not discussing those who hold that the last Rebbe did not die, as Rav Yaacov Ariel wrote: "...he died, and he did not merit [being the Moshiach] and we did not merit it. Those who believe that he did not die, turning him into a spring of G-d, this is a disgrace and there is a concern of idol worship, G-d forbid. We must stand up to those who err in this belief, since it is impossible that the Rebbe, may the name of the righteous and holy be a blessing, is greater than Moshe Rabbenu and all of the great authorities of the Nation who died. Even Yaacov [who the Talmud says] did not die, this is not the simple meaning..." (From "Ha-Ma'ayan, Tammuz 5766, p. 82). We are not discussing this since Ha-Rav Yoel Kahn, "Chozer" of the Rebbe (one who memorized and repeated the talks of the Rebbe), who did not depart from the Rebbe's tent for over forty years, who drew and gave to drink from

the Rebbe's Torah to the public, has already come out against this idea with all forcefulness. He explains at length "that writing 'Shilt"a' (May he live long and happily, amen!) for a righteous person after his death causes mockery and disgrace. We must publicly proclaim that this view has no connection to Chabad. We must condemn it with all forcefulness and not give it any legitimacy, since the Torah is true and not – G-d forbid – nonsense and fantasies. All of the lowly acts of those involved in the Enlightenment and Communist, who tried to disgrace the honor of our Rabbis, are absolutely nothing as compared to the disgrace which is being caused by the 'Messiahists." He summarizes: "A. This view is not a view, but vain words and evil-spirited. B. It is not connected to Chabad or Torah. The Torah is true and not – G-d forbid – nonsense and fantasies. C. This opinion causes the uprooting of the customs and laws of the Torah." He emphasizes: "We do not have permission to abandon this young generation and stuff it with false words. This view disgraces the name of the Rebbe, damages children and turns them into children with 'manias' at a time when every child needs to be healthy in his soul, a normal child without delusions. They are stuffing children with falsehoods..." (Kefar Chabad, 7 Shevat 5767).

We are therefore not discussing these views, but the claim of Chabad that the Rebbe is the Moshiach. We are discussing those who say that he did die, but he will arise by resurrection to complete his work, and it is still possible to proclaim: "May our master, our Rabbi, the King Moshiach, live forever." This is a hope and a belief, a prayer and a request for the future. Many Chabadniks repeat this proclamation at every occasion and they also accept the kingship of the King Moshiach before the shofar blowing, Ne'eilah at the end of the Yom Kippur, etc...

This is the question: Can a man who did not redeem the Nation of Israel be defined as the Moshiach? Certainly not! Since the role of the Moshiach is to be the Redeemer, if he did not redeem – he is not the Moshiach, although he may have other lofty traits of Torah, wisdom, holiness and kindness.

The Rambam defines: "In the future, the King Moshiach will rise up and reestablish the Kingdom of the House of David to the former first governing body, build the Temple, gather the scattered of Israel and reinstate all of the laws in his days as they formally were" (Hilchot Melachim 11:1). If someone did not reestablish the Kingdom of the House of David, if he did not build the Temple, if he did not gather the scattered of Israel and if he did not reinstate the laws of Israel – he quite simply is not the Moshiach!

The claim that it is possible to have a redeemer without Redemption is a Christian claim. The Rambam explicitly wrote against this: "All of the prophets have prophesized that the Moshiach redeems Israel, delivers them, gathers their scattered and strengthens their mitzvot..." It is therefore clear that "that man" is not the Moshiach (ibid. 4).

Perhaps you will say: We find in the Gemara that the students classified their rabbi as the Moshiach. The students of Rabbi Shila said that the Moshiach's name will be "Shilo." The students of Rav Yannai: Yinun. The students of Rabbi Chaninah: Chaninah. The students of Rabbi Menachen: Menachem. And they also said that if the Mashi'ach is alive today, it is Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi), and if he is dead, it is the prophet Daniel. Rav Nachman said: If he is alive today, it is me (Sanhedrin 98b). The same thing occurred in later generations. Rabbi Shalom Shachna wrote: "I say Shachna is his name" (Beit Shmuel, Even Ha-Ezer 129 and Shemot Anashim, chapter on Shachna) and the author of "Or Ha-Chaim" writes: "The name of the Moshiach of Hashem is Chaim" (Devarim 15:7 and others). This is true, but it is essential to remember: Even a great and righteous King of Israel who does wondrous things for the sake of the Nation, leads the Nation according to the Torah and wages the wars of Hashem against our enemies is only a presumed Moshiach (Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:4). Only if "he defeats all of the surrounding nations, builds the Temple in its place and gathers the scattered of Israel" (ibid.) will he be deemed as the definite Moshiach. "If he does not succeed to this point or he is killed, it is known that this is not what the Torah promised and he is like all of the proper and kosher Kings of the House of David who died" (ibid.). If so, it is clear that a King of Israel who is killed or who dies is not the Moshiach. It is clear that he will arise during the resurrection of the dead, and it is even possible that he will arise before others and perform salvations, as our Rabbis wrote. In the meantime, however, a proclamation regarding the Redemption before the Redemption does not make him Moshiach. Furthermore, the Rebbe himself never clearly said that he is the Moshiach. He scattered a few hints which are interpreted in various ways by his followers.

Regarding excommunication, there are great authorities who consider the claim that a deceased person can be the Moshiach as an uprooting of Judaism. They include: Ha-Rav Aharon Soloveitchik (he said that he loved Chabad very much, but opposed their craziness about Moshiach), Ha-Rav Aharon Kotler, Ha-Rav Shach and the Steipler Gaon. It seems, however, that we should stand on guard and preserve "Ahavat Yisrael – the love of Israel." Everyone knows that Chabad Chasidim are righteous, G-d fearing individuals who engage in saving Judaism with self-sacrifice and perform kindness without calculation. We

therefore say the words of our master, Rav Kook, to the "Messiahists": "Despite the fact that an error in divine matters is something which does great damage, the essence of the damage which comes from these mistaken ideas does not flow into action to the point of killing the person's soul. [The point of no return will be reached] only when he reveals it in action, or when he at least descends into thoughts and emotions which will of necessity be revealed in action. There is no essence uprooting here, however, as long as the matter remains in a dispersed manner" (Rav Kook, Shemoneh Kevatzim 1, 30).