

Almost four decades ago, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, he met the very influential Jewish religious leader, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Over the course of time, the two men developed a close relationship and Rabbi Schneerson became his coach. It is reported he told Netanyahu he had a mission from God to prepare Israel for the coming of the messiah and that he would be Israel's last leader before handing the sceptre over to him.

But who is this mysterious religious figure, greatly honoured by successive US Presidents, who even established a national Education and Sharing Day in honour of his birthday and awarded him the Congressional Gold Medal for his outstanding and lasting contributions toward social improvements? And how has his so-called prophecy affected Benjamin Netanyahu's political moves since then?

Menachem Mendel Schneerson was the leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch Movement. He was born in 1902 in Nikolaev Russia to the renowned Kabbalist, Talmudic scholar and leader Levi Yitzchak Schneerson.

It is said he and his wife lived in Berlin and Paris, but had to flee because of the Nazis, eventually seeking refuge in New York where they made their home until his death.

A decade later the Rebbe took over the Chabad Movement from his father-in-law. He revived and grew this Hasidic group for over 40 years, turning it into one of the most influential movements in the Jewish community.

It has an international network of over 5,000 educational and social centres, including schools, drug-rehabilitation centres, care-homes for the disabled and synagogues.

In addition to this, shortly after his arrival in the United States, he set about strengthening Judaism and Chassidic teachings through the establishment of three important Lubavitch organizations under his leadership.

They consisted of a central organization for Jewish education, a publication society and a social service agency. Also, at the urging of his father-in-law, the Rebbe also “began publishing his notations to various Chassidic and Kabbalistic treatises.”

However, the principle objective of all his work was to instil in the mind of every human being the idea that every good deed a person does brings humanity closer to the Ultimate Goal, the Era of Cosmic Perfection and Universal Awareness of God, known in Judaism as the time of Moshiach, and of which, according to the late Rabbi, the world is heading closer and closer!

Back to how this man’s so-called prophecy has affected Netanyahu’s political moves. While many in his own country were blaming him for Israel’s worst security failure in history, Netanyahu turned to the Bible to rally the country!

After the HAMAS attack, he declared, “the Bible says there is a time for peace and a time for war. This is a time for war.” Netanyahu also compared his battle with HAMAS to Israel’s battle with Amalek in the Old Testament. He declared, “You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible, and we do remember, and we are fighting.”

This appeal to Scripture on the part of Israel’s Prime Minister greatly surprised many in the non-religious world, as Benjamin Netanyahu is known to be a secular Jew. But as one Jewish commentator pointed out, throughout history the idea of Amalek has always been used to sanction violent behaviour against other people groups. After all, responding to Amalek is a response to anti-Semitism.