

Rebbe's condition worsens

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The Lubavitcher rebbe's condition dramatically worsened yesterday as doctors scrambled to stabilize the 92-year-old leader.

Exactly a month after he suffered a massive stroke, Grand Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson's blood pressure plunged yesterday morning, and doctors at Beth Israel Medical Center administered stabilizing drugs, said a spokesman for the Brooklyn-based Hasidic movement.

"At 1:24 p.m. this afternoon there was a discernible worsening in the condition of the rebbe," said Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, Schneerson's secretary and a spokesman for the Lubavitchers. "A number of procedures and medications were necessary to stabilize his cardiac and pulmonary function. The rebbe is currently very critical."

A source close to the rebbe said that Schneerson's heart had stopped and doctors used electric shock paddles to start it again.

Schneerson has been breathing with a respirator for weeks.

Lubavitchers, many of whom believe Schneerson is the Messiah, began arriving at the hospital late yesterday afternoon.

"In spite of everything we're very excited because we know it's finally happening — we know Moshiach (Messiah) will reveal himself today," said 18-year-old Mordechai Alter.

On Sunday, some Lubavitchers held a ceremony calling for Schneerson to reveal himself as the Messiah of biblical prophecy who is supposed to deliver an age of peace on Earth.

Schneerson, who has led the Crown Heights, Brooklyn, community of ultra-Orthodox Jews for 44 years, has been hospitalized at Beth Israel since March 10.

Meanwhile, one of the rebbe's guardians was hospitalized yesterday after being beaten in a dispute by Lubavitchers outside Schneerson's room last week.

Chaim Halberstam, 47, was listed in stable condition at Methodist Hospital, suffering headaches and bruises to his arm. He is the uncle of Aaron Halberstam, the 16-year-old Hasidic student slain in the Brooklyn Bridge shooting last month.