

THE
FRIERDIKER
REBBE'S
ARREST AND
LIBERATION

וְהָיָה
כִּי יִשְׁמַע
יְהוָה
הַצְּדִיקִים
וְיִשְׁמַע
הַבְּרִיָּים

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לע"נ
ר' משה בן ר' זלמן צבי ע"ה
נלב"ע אסרו חג השבועות ה'תשע"ח
תנ"צ'בה

נתרם ע"י נכדו
הרה"ת ר' שלום דובער וזוגתו מרת
ח'ל' מושקא ומשפחתם שיחיו
שוחטט

FOR SEVEN YEARS, THE FRIERDIKER REBBE LED A DEFIANT STRUGGLE AGAINST THE SOVIET REGIME. IT WAS ONE MAN AGAINST A WORLD SUPERPOWER. THE NOSSI OF THE GENERATION AGAINST THE FORCES OF EVIL. IT ALL CAME TO A HEAD ON THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF SIVAN תרפ"ז, WHEN THE SECRET POLICE CAME KNOCKING AT HIS DOOR. THE FOLLOWING IS THE STORY OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S ARREST AND LIBERATION.

BY: RABBI MENDY GREENBERG

THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR

It was a late summer night in Leningrad. Reb Eliyahu Chaim Althaus—a prominent chossid of the Frierdiker Rebbe—was settling down for the night. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

“I was lying in bed, not yet asleep, and the sudden knock frightened me. I rushed to the door.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“M. S. [our Rebbe]’ came the response.

“I immediately knew something terrible had happened in the Rebbe’s home...”¹

Earlier that night, the Rebbe (at the time, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s future son-in-law), had been approaching the Frierdiker Rebbe’s home when he noticed something amiss. All the lights were on in the apartment, and there seemed to be a police presence. Instead of entering, the Rebbe walked around the building to look for clues, and soon the Rebbetzin opened a window and said, “Schneerson, guests have come to visit us!” The Rebbe immediately rushed to Reb Elya Chaim’s home.

Reb Elya Chaim and his son Pinye quickly got dressed. “We were so overwhelmed and frightened, we didn’t know what to do.” In the end, Pinye accompanied the Rebbe to warn the Frierdiker Rebbe’s secretary; if the police were visiting the Frierdiker Rebbe, it was safe to assume he would be next. They staggered down the street as if they were drunk, to avoid attracting attention.²

Meanwhile, Reb Elya Chaim rushed to warn other Chassidim. Then—against his better judgment—he decided to approach the Frierdiker Rebbe’s home.

“As I reached the entrance to the Rebbe’s building, a

horrifying image appeared before me . . . I was shaken to my very core by a sight I had never expected or even imagined, and which I truly wish I never saw.

“Our holy Rebbe *shlit”a* was sitting in a car between two evil men, armed with weapons . . . ready to take him into the pit they had dug for him. Those *mashchisim* glared at me with an animalistic scowl, while *lehavdil*, the Rebbe gazed at me with his kind, wise eyes, lovingly nodding at me with utmost calm...”

The Frierdiker Rebbe was soon whisked away, and Reb Elya Chaim entered the Rebbe’s home. “The first image I encountered was in the shul; the Alte Rebbetzin [Shterna Sarah] was bending into the Aron Kodesh, crying out. ‘Ribono shel Olam! My only son was taken because of *your Torah!*’ ...

“The door to the Rebbe’s room—always carefully shut—was now wide open. It made a powerful impression on me . . . the door where we waited in line for hours for *yechidus* was now wide open and desecrated...”

“[The Frierdiker Rebbe’s son-in-law,] Rashag and the *yungerman* Noson Gurarie were standing at the Rebbe’s holy desk, shedding copious tears. All the drawers were open and overflowing, with endless letters and papers spread all over and even under the table... It was an image of utter desecration and destruction.”³

THE CONFERENCE PLOT

For seven years, the Frierdiker Rebbe had led the battle to preserve Yiddishkeit in Russia, defying the regime’s attempts to stamp out any vestige of religion. Secret *chadorim* were opened throughout the country, *mikvaos* were established,



REB ELIYAHU CHAIM ALTHAUS.



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S HOME AND SHUL IN LENINGRAD ON THE 2ND FLOOR AT MOKHOVAYA 22.



A GROUP PHOTO OF THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS IN KOROSTEN, CHESHVAN 5687.

and *rabbanim*, *melamdim*, *shochetim*, and *mohelim* were sent to bolster Yiddishkeit everywhere.

The Frierdiker Rebbe managed an empire of Torah, arranging shlichim, procuring funds, sending letters—and, first and foremost, leading by example. In Rostov and in Leningrad, he openly behaved as a rebbe, delivering *maamarim*, receiving people for *yechidus*, and holding *farbrengens* on special occasions. For Rosh Hashanah, hundreds of Chassidim would converge on the Rebbe's home, just like “the good old days” in Lubavitch.

One day, a visitor arrived for a *yechidus*. It was the head of the Leningrad Jewish community, who came to the Frierdiker Rebbe with an idea. “Let's call all rabbonim and Jewish leaders to a general Rabbinic conference, where action can be taken and decisions can be made to benefit Jewish life throughout the Soviet Union.” In those days, there still were active *kehilah*-structures, and religion wasn't *officially* outlawed. Perhaps a conference could be of benefit.

The Frierdiker Rebbe smelled a rat. This leader wasn't a *frum* Jew, and it wasn't clear

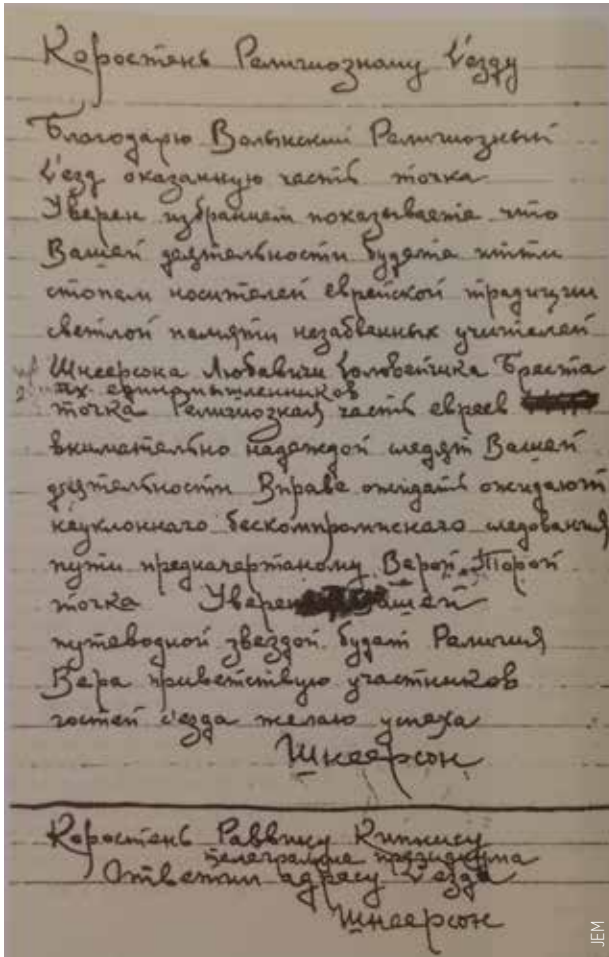
that his interests aligned with the Rebbe's—to put it mildly. In fact, the Frierdiker Rebbe suspected that he was working with the Yevsektzia (Jewish Section of the Communist Party) to orchestrate a showdown to prove that “old-fashioned” Yiddishkeit was on its way out. The Frierdiker Rebbe declined the invitation and made his opposition known to the public.

Without the support of Russia's leading Jewish figure, no serious conference could get off the ground, so the plans ground to a halt. This aroused the ire of the *chofshi'im*, anti-religious elements who plotted with the Yevsektzia to usher the Jewish community into a more ‘enlightened’ future. Further infuriating them, a small pre-conference was held with many rabbonim in attendance, and despite the Frierdiker Rebbe's absence, his agenda carried the day.⁴

Things came to a head in Adar I, around Purim Katan, in the year תרפ"ז.

Before Purim Katan, the Frierdiker Rebbe traveled to Moscow and gave notice that he would deliver a *maamar* publicly on Purim Katan. It was known that informers would be present, and messages came warning the





THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S HANDWRITTEN MESSAGE (IN RUSSIAN) TO THE KOROSTEN CONFERENCE: "...RELIGIOUS JEWRY IS FOLLOWING YOUR MOVES WITH BATED BREATH. THEY WILL HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPECT THAT YOU WILL STAND WITHOUT DRIFTING AND WITHOUT COMPROMISE AND THAT YOU WILL WALK ON THE PATH TRODDEN GENERATIONS AGO, THAT OF FAITH AND TORAH..."

Rebbe of the consequences.

At a farbrengen on Purim 5733, the Rebbe described the event:

"When the Rebbe arrived at the shul, the room was packed. He delivered a Maamar on the *posuk*, 'mipi olelim veyonkim yisadta oz,' that the Torah of children nullifies the enemies of Yiddishkeit and Yidden. After speaking in *has-kalah* terms of Chassidus, he spelled out his intentions in no uncertain terms, making sure everyone understood exactly what he meant. He said openly that one should disregard all obstacles and ensure that Torah emerge from the mouths of Yiddishe children, obliterating the enemies.

"Needless to say, the *maamar* brought about a strong, newfound inspiration to do everything possible to provide a Jewish education to every Jewish child within reach—whether tiny children or adults who were 'children' with regard to Jewish education—and to do so without regard for decrees,

difficulties, or individuals with the power to impede those efforts."⁵

In the months that followed, a number of Chassidim were arrested—Reb Bentzion Shemtov, Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, Reb Binyamin and Reb Simcha Gorodetzky. The Frierdiker Rebbe's personal secretary, Reb Chonye Marozov, was arrested as well.⁶ It was clear that the Frierdiker Rebbe himself was in the crosshairs.

THE ARREST⁷

The arrest took place at about midnight on 15 Sivan, after a long evening of *yechidus*. The Frierdiker Rebbe was sitting down to eat when the doorbell rang. It was the secret police, known as the *Chekah* (or GPU).

The 'delegation' was headed by Nachmanson and Lulav, two young Jewish men who were children of Chassidim. Guards were stationed inside and outside the home; the Frierdiker Rebbe was informed that a search would be held for 'incriminating evidence,' and that he was under arrest.

Their presence in the home lasted for several hours. "They behaved themselves somewhat courteously," Reb Elya Chaim writes. "They didn't speak disrespectfully, and the search wasn't very intense either." They tried to take *ksavim* of the Rebbe Rashab, but when the Frierdiker Rebbe refused to allow it, they returned them to him. They also promised that he would be able to keep his Tallis and Tefillin (a promise which was later broken).

Throughout the visit, the Frierdiker Rebbe retained his composure. He partook of his meal, calmed his family, and watched the officers' search, making sure they weren't touching any of the holy *kesavim*. Meanwhile, he slipped incriminating documents deep into a pile of useless mail that was saved in his drawer for this specific purpose.

The Frierdiker Rebbe also didn't allow them to rush the arrest. He warned them that his imprisonment would create a worldwide commotion that the GPU would regret, and forced them to call their superiors to request a house arrest. Later, when the officers asked the Frierdiker Rebbe to walk with them to the prison several blocks away, he responded that he was in ill-health and forced them to call a van, which took quite a while to arrive.

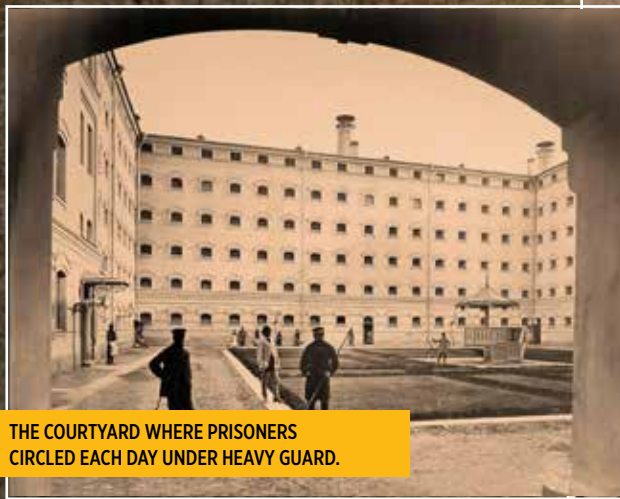
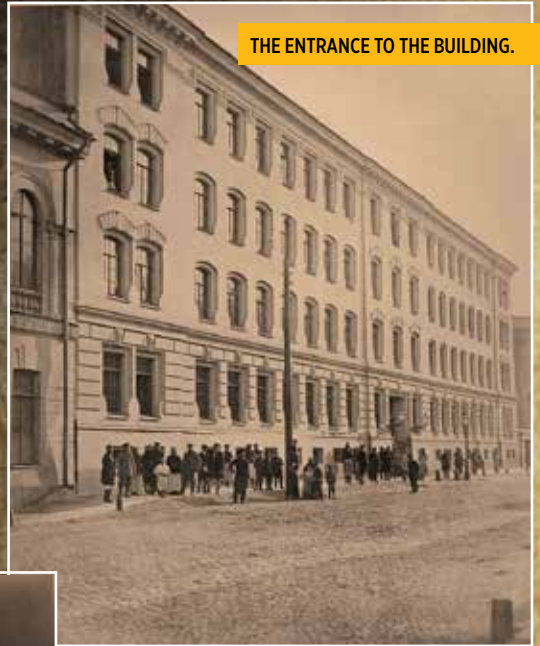
By that time, the arrest was off-schedule; it was already 2:30 in the morning.

The delays turned out to be of critical importance. The same party of officers was supposed to arrest Chaim Liberman, and the delay allowed the Rebbe to rush to his home and help him dispose of incriminating evidence. The delay was also important for another reason: that night was a very dangerous one in Shpalerka...

THE FRIEDRIKER REBBE'S ARRIVAL

A COLLECTION OF PHOTOS TAKEN JUST A FEW YEARS BEFORE THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S ARREST, GIVE US A GLIMPSE OF THE DREADED SHPALERKA PRISON.

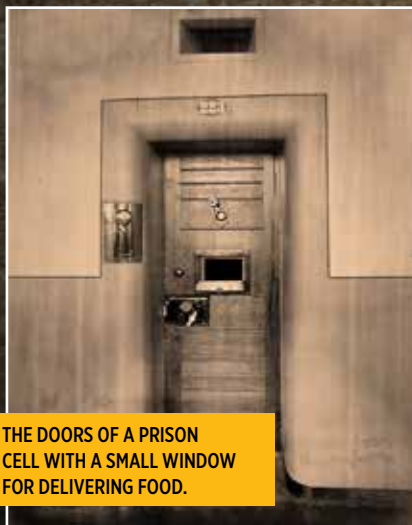
THE ENTRANCE TO THE BUILDING.



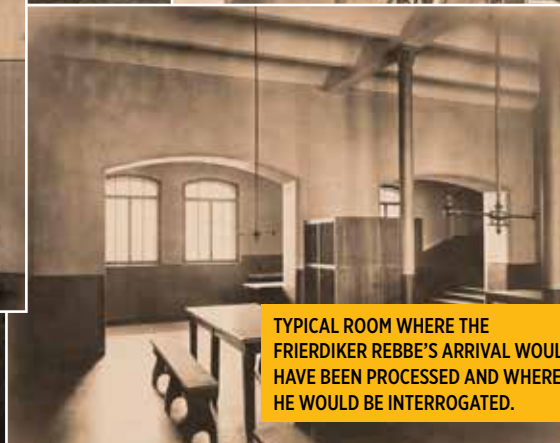
THE COURTYARD WHERE PRISONERS CIRCLED EACH DAY UNDER HEAVY GUARD.



THE CELLS WERE SPREAD OUT OVER THREE FLOORS WITH LONG CORRIDORS AND METAL STAIRWAYS. THE FRIERDIKER REBBE WAS PUSHED DOWN A STAIRCASE LIKE THIS BY A GUARD.



THE DOORS OF A PRISON CELL WITH A SMALL WINDOW FOR DELIVERING FOOD.



TYPICAL ROOM WHERE THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S ARRIVAL WOULD HAVE BEEN PROCESSED AND WHERE HE WOULD BE INTERROGATED.

THE YEVSSEKTZIA'S MOMENT

In the battle for Yiddishkeit, the Frierdiker Rebbe's primary antagonist was the Yevsektzia—the “Jewish Section” of the Communist party, tasked with “bringing the Communist revolution to the Jewish masses.” The young men who staffed this department made strenuous efforts to destroy every vestige of Jewish life.

But they had a problem. They served the Communist Party, not the government. They had no security apparatus, nor the right to detain people. They were forced to carry out their plans through intimidation and sly maneuvering. For most of the 1920s, while preserving Yiddishkeit was incredibly difficult, it was not always life-threatening. There were some instances of arrests—when the Yevsektzia managed to convince the secret police that a specific chossid or activist was a “counterrevolutionary,” endangering the Bolshevik “paradise” with “subversive political activities”; they were not very common, however.

In the winter of 5687, matters took a turn for the worse. The head of the GPU in Leningrad, an antisemite named Messing, brought the local Yevsektzia into its ranks, giving them powers they had not possessed before.⁸

Then, dramatic international events gave them the opportunity to act:

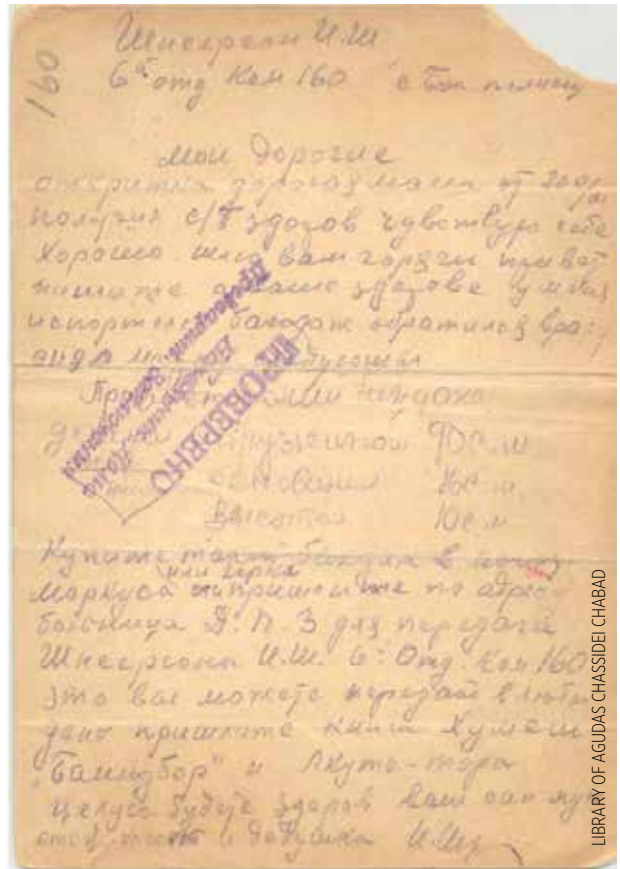
In early summer, England cut off relations with the Soviet Union and banished its diplomats from the country. This was considered a severe diplomatic crisis. Stalin ש"ת, who had just established his tyrannical rule over Russia, was paranoid that England was scheming with other countries to bring down the Soviet regime. When the Soviet ambassador to Poland was assassinated a short time later, Stalin panicked. A state of emergency was declared, giving the GPU extrajudicial powers to arrest and execute anyone they saw fit.

This took place just one week before the Frierdiker Rebbe's arrest. Fear descended on the entire population. Mass arrests and executions took place nightly—and this night was no exception.⁹

WHERE IS THE REBBE?

As the van carried the Frierdiker Rebbe off into the night, several young Chassidim, posing as drunks, positioned themselves on strategic street corners to see where the Rebbe would be taken. The driver noticed them and commented, “Look at those drunk Jews.”¹⁰ Within a few minutes, it became clear: the Rebbe had been taken to Leningrad's infamous Shpalerka prison, just a few streets away.

Dread and fear gripped the Frierdiker Rebbe's family and



A POSTCARD BEARING THE STAMP OF THE CENSOR FROM THE FRIERDIKER REBBE IN PRISON TO HIS FAMILY: “...THANK G-D I AM WELL AND I FEEL GOOD. I SEND YOU WARM REGARDS. WRITE OF YOUR HEALTH... SEND THE BOOKS LIKKUTEI TORAH AND CHUMASH BAMIDBAR...”

Chassidim. By early morning, the home was teeming with people, but nobody knew what to do. The Frierdiker Rebbe had instructed that messengers be sent to the Ohelim in Haditch, Niezhin, Lubavitch and Rostov, but what was to be done in a physical sense? Should they appeal to the GPU in Leningrad? To the headquarters in Moscow? To the international press?

Intense meetings were held for a full twenty-four hours, first in the Frierdiker Rebbe's home and then in a quiet room in the corner of a local bank. Every segment of the Jewish community was represented, besides for the Communists. Rashag traveled to Moscow to consult with community leaders there. Both in Moscow and Leningrad, the activists struggled to come to a conclusion.

Given the government's state of paranoia, reaching out to the international community would seem traitorous. Appealing to the GPU headquarters in Moscow was also dangerous, because the Leningrad department might be insulted, and harm the Frierdiker Rebbe in retribution. For the time being, the Leningrad and Moscow committees decided on appeals to the GPU in Leningrad.



Then, on Shabbos morning, the Moscow committee received dire news: The GPU had decided on capital punishment.

There was nothing left to lose. That Shabbos afternoon, they dispatched urgent messages to anyone that could be of help, including President Kalinin, Prime Minister Rikov, GPU Chief Menzeshinsky, and Madam Peshkova, a human rights activist who had very close friendships with Russian leadership, even Stalin himself.

Their argument was that the Friediker Rebbe was not a political figure; religion wasn't officially illegal in the Soviet Union, and the Rebbe could not be accused of fighting the regime; in fact, he had worked hand-in-hand with the Soviets to establish agricultural colonies for Jewish settlement. Therefore, the arrest was unjustified, and, given his beloved stature among Russian Jewry, would have

negative consequences for the government.¹¹

As the news spread throughout Russia, telegrams began arriving from all over with similar messages. Jewish labor unions and community organizations were encouraged to appeal to the authorities: the Rebbe must be released immediately.

A SIGN OF LIFE

Meanwhile, Chassidim in Leningrad were going out of their minds with worry. Was the Rebbe in good health? Did he have his Tallis and Tefillin? Was he even...?? On Friday morning, the third day, they received a first sign of life: the Friediker Rebbe signed a receipt for food that had been sent from home. A week later, another sign of life—a doctor said that the Friediker Rebbe was alive.¹²



Meanwhile, someone hit on an idea: Nachmanson, the officer who had arrested the Frierdiker Rebbe, came from a Chassidish home. His father was a known individual living in Nevel who would participate in *shiurei Torah* of Reb Zalman Moshe Hayitzhaki. Perhaps he could be of help!

Reb Zalman Duchman was a *yungerman* in Leningrad at the time, and he was appointed to the task.

“Rashag paid my travel expenses, and I traveled to Nevel, where I met with Reb Folleh Kahn and Reb Meir Simcha Chein. They called the father and asked him to travel to Leningrad with me. He really didn’t want to go; he argued that he was in conflict with his son ever since he married someone against his wishes. But ultimately, he came to Leningrad. He was a *landsmen* of Reb Michael Dvorkin—they both hailed from Osvet—so they would meet in a garden, and he would pass on information.”¹³

(The Frierdiker Rebbe later noted that while Lulav was “an uncultured boor with a filthy temper who had joined the GPU at an early age and was deeply impacted by it,” Nachmanson had been raised as a Jew and would sometimes, during interrogations, forget his role and speak civilly to the Frierdiker Rebbe.¹⁴)

As the days passed into weeks, rumors began to trickle back: the efforts were having an effect—but the verdict still hung in the balance.

THE NEWS HITS THE WORLD

Reb Boruch Yosef Kozliner was a Chossid living in Disna, near Vilna in Lithuania. One can only imagine his shock and horror at receiving a coded letter from a Chossid living across the border in Russia, written one week after the arrest.

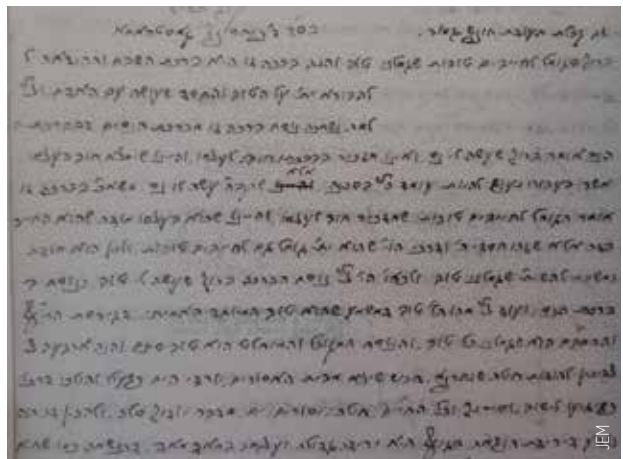
“*Eis tzarah hi l’Yaakov*. On Tuesday night 15 Sivan, our honorable friend [the Rebbe] was read the verse in *Bereishis* 39:20 [“ויקח אדוני יוסף אותו ויתנהו אל בית הסוהר”] and Yosef’s master placed him in prison] and until today, he remains in that state. I have no words. The eyes of the Yidden in our land are covered in rivers of tears of blood, and fasts are being declared everywhere...”¹⁵

Although news of the arrest had deliberately not been shared internationally, the news was trickling out. Ten days after the arrest, it was blaring on the front pages of Jewish newspapers around the world. “THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ARRESTED IN RUSSIA,” reported *Hatzefrah* in Warsaw, with an appeal to help save the Frierdiker Rebbe. An urgent telegram from Chief Rabbi Kook in Yerushalayim arrived at the American offices of the Joint Distribution Committee: “Grave news received—Rabbi Schneerson of Lubawitz arrested...” The news was soon everywhere.

International pressure began to build. Notable efforts



ORDER OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S RELEASE FROM HIS EXILE, ALLOWING HIM TO RESIDE ANYWHERE WITHIN THE SOVIET UNION.



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE'S KSAV OF THE MAAMER DELIVERED AFTER BEING NOTIFIED OF HIS RELEASE: יום קבלת תעודת חופש גמור. ד' פינחס, י"ג תמוז פ"ז קאסטראמא

took place in Germany, where the Orthodox Rav Meir Hildisheimer, Dr. Leo Baeck of the Reform movement, and Dr. Oscar Kohn of Poalei Tzion worked together to pressure the Soviets. Meanwhile, the intercessions within Russia were beginning to bear fruit; Madame Peshkova was especially instrumental. News began to circulate that the Frierdiker Rebbe would be sentenced to exile.

But to where? Conflicting reports arrived at the Frierdiker Rebbe’s home; according to one, he was to be sent to ten years of hard labor on the remote Solovki islands in Russia’s frigid north. Another report claimed that the sentence had been changed to three years exile in Kostroma. According to another disputed report, the banishment would take place on Shabbos. Intensive efforts continued around the clock to avert each new decree as it appeared.

As the committees continued to press for a complete and absolute release, Reb Elya Chaim and other Chassidim spent many hours at the train station, searching for the Frierdiker



Rebbe on every train going in the direction of the Solovki islands; they worried that the Leningrad GPU would try to carry out the sentence before anyone could stop them. Others congregated near the prison.

Finally, the dust settled. Official notice came that the Frierdiker Rebbe would be released for six hours on Sunday, Gimmel Tammuz, before being banished to Kostroma at eight o'clock in the evening.

The news spread like wildfire.

THE DRAMATIC FAREWELL

Reb Zalman Duchman was present when the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in his home. He watched as the Frierdiker Rebbe entered the Beis Midrash, went over to the Aron Kodesh, and sat down on a bench.

Sitting there, the Rebbe shared, for the first time, some of his innermost thoughts from the beginning of the arrest. "I saw *hashgacha pratis* at the door of Shpalerka," the Frierdiker Rebbe said. "I immediately thought to myself: If you commit to continue writing

about *tinokos shel beis rabban* and Talmud Torahs, good. If not, *lipesach...*"¹⁶ From the first moment, he had been firm in his resolve: nothing in the world would stop him from continuing the fight.

The Frierdiker Rebbe had one question for the Chassidim: "Have you been learning Chassidus?"

"We were saying Tehillim," the Chassidim responded. There had been no presence of mind for delving into Chassidus.

The Frierdiker Rebbe didn't approve. "I wrote *maamarim* until they took away the pencil," he told them. A few hours later, the Frierdiker Rebbe gave his future son-in-law, the Rebbe, the *ksav* of the *maamarim*—a transcript of the recent Shavuot Maamarim—to pass on to the Chassidim.¹⁷

As the news spread, streams of Chassidim began arriving at the Frierdiker Rebbe's home, filling the *zal* and the courtyard outside the building. Reb Yitzchak Eizik Karasik was a *bochur* at the time, and was gripped with a terrible dilemma: should he part from the Frierdiker Rebbe in the courtyard, or at the



THE HOME (OF REB YERACHMIEL KUGEL) IN WHICH THE FRIERDIKER REBBE STAYED THROUGHOUT HIS 10 DAYS IN KOSTROMA.

train station?

“I wandered around the courtyard deep in thought, deliberating on the options, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the Frierdiker Rebbe’s future son-in-law, the Rebbe. ‘I see you are deliberating what to do. Here is some money; order a taxi, and when the Rebbe comes out, you will take his suitcases to the train station. That way, you will see the Rebbe both at home and in the train station.’

“In the end, few people remained in the courtyard; thousands crowded the train station. It was a chaotic scene; everyone wanted to see the Rebbe and be close to him in those dramatic moments as he parted from Anash. But I had the *zchus* to see him at the house, and then to stand close to him during the famous *sicha*, when he publicly declared, ‘*Only the guf of a Yid is in Golus; a neshamah is never in exile, it is always connected and bound to Hashem...*’”¹⁸

On the train’s platform, the Frierdiker Rebbe gave a historic *sicha* to the Chassidim. Quoting his father, the Rebbe

Rashab, the Frierdiker Rebbe declared that a Jew is only under the Aibershter’s control; we are in *golus* only by His choice, and we will be redeemed by His choice as well. No non-Jew has any jurisdiction over the Jewish *neshamah*.

“We need to declare with the greatest, strongest, Yiddishe stubbornness, with the thousands of years of Yiddishe self-sacrifice: אל תגעו במשיחי, *do not touch my anointed ones*.” Nobody, not even the world’s most powerful regime, would have the power to extinguish Yiddishkeit.¹⁹

YOM TOV OR NO YOM TOV?

When Reb Michael Dvorkin heard from Nachmanson’s father that the Frierdiker Rebbe would be banished to Kostroma, he headed there immediately. He had an old acquaintance who lived there, a chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, and hoped for his help to arrange lodging for the



THE FRIERDIKER REBBE ARRIVES IN RIGA, LATVIA ON 25 TISHREI 5688. SECOND ON THE RIGHT IS REB MORDECHAI DUBIN, A CHOSSID AND MEMBER OF THE LATVIAN PARLIAMENT WHO WORKED TIRELESSLY TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM THE SOVIETS FOR THE REBBE TO LEAVE THE USSR.



Frierdiker Rebbe.

It turned out that the old chossid had passed away, but his son-in-law served as the town's shochet. Reb Michoel arranged for the Frierdiker Rebbe to stay in his house, although—Reb Michoel later recounted—there was a suspicion that the shochet was a GPU informant. Reb Michoel also began to work on the state of Yiddishkeit, arranging for a cheder and for the correction of the local mikvah.

The arrival of the Frierdiker Rebbe created a furor. Years later, the Rebbe described it as a farbrengen:

“On Shabbos, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe davened *barichus* in the shul. This caused a stir in the town—a Jew davening until three or four in the afternoon! Everyone had already finished davening, eaten *seudas Shabbos*, and also had enough time to sleep, and here stands a *rabin* and is still davening. The tumult was so great that the town priest came to the shul to see the attraction...

“Nevertheless, the fact that at that time the Rebbe was not able to write a letter to a Yid about basic things bothered him terribly, to the point that he told one of the Chassidim who were with him that in these circumstances, who needs a hand? It would be better if it would wither away...”²⁰

Aside from Reb Michoel, the Frierdiker Rebbe was accompanied by his daughter, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, and Reb Elya Chaim Althaus. Rashag joined for the first few days, and then returned to Leningrad before Shabbos to continue the rescue efforts.

The Frierdiker Rebbe's arrival in Kostroma was a tremendous relief. He was no longer in the clutches of the murderous Leningrad GPU; he needed to report weekly to the local police, but that was the extent of the exile. For many Chassidim, it was worthy of being a Yom Tov.

Reb Shmuel Levitin once related that in Nevel, an argument broke out between Reb Zalman Moshe and Reb Meir Simcha Chein: Reb Zalman Moshe (and Reb Shmuel) argued that the very fact that the Frierdiker Rebbe left Shpalerka was a reason to ‘take *mashke*,’ while Reb Meir Simcha argued that until a complete *geulah*, no farbrengen was in order.

“Ultimately,” Reb Shmuel said, “I know that the [Frierdiker] Rebbe doesn't say *Tachanun* on Gimmel Tammuz.”²¹

THE STORIES START TO TRICKLE OUT

That Shabbos in Leningrad, a quiet kiddush was held in the Frierdiker Rebbe's home, and Chassidim began to hear stories about the imprisonment. Rashag related that when Nachmanson and Lulav accused the Frierdiker Rebbe of spying and treason, the Frierdiker Rebbe sharply retorted, ‘Do you want to create a new Beilis trial?’ Accusing a Jewish leader of treason would create waves of anti-semitism in the country. This was a sharp retort; communists like Nachmanson and Lulav took pride in the claim that the Soviet regime was devoid of anti-semitism. Needless to say, the charge was dropped.²²

Newspapers outside Russia began to report on details of the arrest as well. “When the Rebbe stood up to daven in jail, he was beaten,” reported *Kol Yisrael* in Yerushalayim (referring to the Frierdiker Rebbe's attempt to put on Tefillin the first morning of his imprisonment). “The Rebbe was promised kosher food, clean clothes, and seforim, but not a single promise was kept.”

From the first moment in prison, the Frierdiker Rebbe was determined to act like a Rebbe—on his own terms, not following the dictates of petty officials. When they refused to give him Tefillin, he launched a three-day hunger strike and refused to answer questions. They put him in solitary confinement in terrible conditions, but he would not budge.²³

As time went on, the attitude of the jailers began to change. The Frierdiker Rebbe was not forced to partake in demeaning work, and the guard would knock on the door to inform him when it was *tzeis hakochavim* for Maariv. The Frierdiker Rebbe didn't join the daily walk, “because I didn't want to be seen in such a state.”²⁴ When they tried to take his picture as he was davening on Shabbos, he waved them away, and, incredibly, they actually left.²⁵

In Kostroma, the Frierdiker Rebbe shared

the following about his experience: “The story goes that when the Alter Rebbe was in prison, he was visited by the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid. Now I understand the story. My father did not leave me for a single moment.”²⁶

DANCING IN SOCKS

One afternoon in Leningrad, Reb Zalman Duchman entered the Zal with a carton of *ksavim* the Rebbe had given him for safekeeping on the night of the arrest. With the worst behind them, he reasoned that it was time for them to be returned.

The Rebbe was sitting in the back of the *zal* when he walked in. “I will repay you for your efforts,” the Rebbe said, “by informing you that the [Friediker] Rebbe will be back for Shabbos.”²⁷ It was Yud Beis Tammuz, and a telephone call had come from the Rebbetzin in Kostroma: the efforts had been successful, and the Friediker Rebbe was going to be released the next day.

That night, in a quiet hallway of the Friediker Rebbe’s home, *marshke* was poured like water. A small group of Chassidim danced, in socks, ecstatic with the Rebbe’s release.²⁸

The information was officially a secret. The Rebbetzin had said, “We are coming for *shabbos*, *bli pirsum*.” That became a code word; the Rebbe once related that when telegrams were sent to Chassidim with the news, they were signed as “*bli pirsum*,” to avoid provoking the authorities.²⁹

The Friediker Rebbe received the news when he arrived with Reb Elya Chaim to register at the police station. Although the station was closed for a local holiday, the officer told the

Rebbe that instructions had come to release him immediately. The next day, the release was processed, and the Friediker Rebbe quickly prepared to leave.

The entire Jewish community—so uplifted by the Rebbe’s presence—came to the Rebbe’s residence, and the Rebbe recited a *maamar*, “*Boruch Hagomel*.” The community sent a delegation to accompany the Friediker Rebbe all the way to Leningrad, and the Friediker Rebbe arrived home on Friday, 15 Tammuz.

That Shabbos, a quiet celebration took place in the Friediker Rebbe’s home. On Friday night, the Friediker Rebbe released the *ksav* of the new *maamar* to be learned after Kabbolas Shabbos. Reb Elya Chaim asked if the Rebbe would himself deliver a *maamar*, but the Friediker Rebbe demurred; “*Nosnim lo shabbos achas*” (he is given one Shabbos)³⁰ he said.³¹

The Rebbe once related an amusing story about the questions that arose regarding the Friediker Rebbe’s recitation of *Birchas Hagomel*:

“Usually, *Hagomel* is recited after receiving an aliyah, but since the Rebbe would receive *Maftir*—which must immediately be followed by *Haftorah*—there was a dilemma about the Rebbe’s *Hagomel*.

“The Rabbonim sat down to decide when the Rebbe should recite *Hagomel*. There were a number of suggestions: One was that the Rebbe should receive a different *aliyah*, such as *shlishi*, thereby avoiding the scenario in which the Rabbonim would be ‘forced’ to engage in the ‘immense task’ of opening a Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim and possibly also

1. From Reb Elya Chaim’s personal account of the events. See *Bor Hachassidus* Year 4 pg. 175.

2. As heard from the Rebbe by Reb Avraham Weingarten.

3. From Reb Elya Chaim’s personal account of the events. See *Bor Hachassidus* Year 4 pg. 176.

4. See *Toldos Chabad B’Russia HaSovietis* pg. 78.

5. *Toras Menachem* vol. 71 pg. 256.

6. *Toldos Chabad B’Russia HaSovietis* pg. 97.

7. After the first Yud Beis Tammuz celebration a year later, the Friediker Rebbe transcribed his account in *Reshimas Hamaasar*, and shared the story in a series of interviews with a journalist during his visit to America several years later, published as *The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Ordeal in Soviet Russia*. These incredible accounts are available in English under the titles *A Prince in Prison* (Sichos in English) and *The Heroic Struggle* (Kehos). All information in this article is culled from those accounts, unless otherwise noted.

8. *Sefer Hasichos* 5687 pg. 137.

9. “The Chassidic Member of Parliament Who Stood Up to the Soviets,” by Dovid Margolin, Chabad.org/5995678. Regarding the danger to the Friediker Rebbe himself, see *Sichos Kodesh* 5730 vol. 2 pg. 388.

10. As heard from the Rebbe by Reb Avraham Weingarten.

11. *The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Ordeal in Soviet Russia* section 7.

12. From Reb Elya Chaim’s personal account of the events. See *Bor Hachassidus* Year 4 pg. 178-9.

13. *L’Sheima Ozen* pg. 167 story #116. Other elements of the story were shared by Reb Mendel Futerfas, who was in Nevel at the time.

14. *The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Ordeal in Soviet Russia* section 8.

15. *Toldos Chabad B’Russia HaSovietis* pg. 103.

16. This seems to be a reference to the *posuk*, “*Lipesach chatas rovetz*,” i.e., if not, it would spell danger for the Friediker Rebbe.

17. *L’Sheima Ozen* pg. 159-60, story #100-101.

18. *Gevurah Yehudit B’Malchut Hareshah* pg. 66-67.

19. *Sefer Hasichos* 5680-87 pg. 167.

20. 28 Sivan 5712. *Toras Menachem* vol. 6 pg. 12

some Acharonim...

“That option was quickly rejected; the Rebbe always receives *Maftir*, and that couldn’t change. Some suggested that he recite *Hagomel* before the *aliyah*; others suggested to do so after the *Haftorah*, and the main suggestion was to recite the *bracha* between *Maftir* and *Haftorah*. I don’t remember what actually happened...”³²

That morning, the Frierdiker Rebbe spent many hours alone in his room, davening at great length, and afterwards, he sat down for a *seudas hoda’ah*.

THE TRUE CELEBRATION

Despite the obvious *simcha*, the atmosphere in Leningrad was very muted. The release had been ordered by Moscow’s GPU chief, Menzhensky, who wasn’t a friend of the Yevsektzia or the Leningrad GPU. The Leningrad GPU was furious that they had been overruled, and continued to plot against the Frierdiker Rebbe. For this reason, the Frierdiker Rebbe decided to relocate to Malachovka, near Moscow, until matters were resolved.

The true *simcha* of Yud-Beis Tammuz, the

Rebbe once explained, began the following year, when the Frierdiker Rebbe was already over the border, in Riga.

“The first year, when the news arrived . . . one could not have known how the Yom Tov would become established for generations to come. But the next year, when the Rebbe was already across the border, outside of their control, it was clear that the victory was complete... That year, it was celebrated on a much greater scale, and will be celebrated so until the coming of Moshiach...”³³

That year, the Frierdiker Rebbe penned a public letter—cited countless times by the Rebbe—in which the Frierdiker Rebbe writes about the meaning of his liberation:

“It was not myself alone that Hashem redeemed on Yud-Beis Tammuz, but also those who cherish Torah, those who observe mitzvos, and all those who [merely] bear the name ‘Yisrael’...”

“Today, Yud Beis Tammuz, is the Chag Hageulah of *all* Jews involved in the dissemination of Torah.”³⁴

It was not a personal liberation; it was a celebration for the entire Jewish people, until the end of time. ❶

21. As heard by Reb Avraham Weingarten.

22. *L'Sheima Ozen* pg. 161-2, story #104-5.

23. *Sefer Hasichos 5701* pg. 138. See *Toras Menachem* vol. 34 pg. 140.

24. *L'Sheima Ozen* pg. 168, story #120.

25. *Sefer Hasichos 5689* pg. 69. See *Toras Menachem* vol. 3 pg. 194.

26. *L'Sheima Ozen* pg. 169, story #123.

27. *Toldos Chabad B'Rusia Hatzaris* pg. 339.

28. *L'Sheima Ozen* (Hebrew Edition) pg. 23.

29. From the Rebbetzin's testimony, and *Sichos Kodosh 5739* vol. 3 pg. 300.

30. A reference to the *halacha* that a baby who is ill is given a week to heal before the bris. See *Shabbos 137a*.

31. *L'Sheima Ozen* pg. 166, story #105.

32. 10 Shevat 5723. *Toras Menachem* vol. 36 pg. 134.

33. 12 Tammuz 5716. *Toras Menachem* vol. 17 pg. 50.

34. *Igros Kodosh Admur Harayatz* vol. 2 pg. 80.

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