

BY: RABBI MENDY GREENBERG (Twinsburg, OH)



“*Not*
Just My
Liberation”

*The Rebbe's
account of
Yud-Beis Tammuz*





BASED ON JEM'S "INTERACTIVE
TIMELINE" ON ASHREINU AUDIO.

לזכות שלוחי כ"ק אדמו"ר זי"ע
ומשפחותיהם שיחיו בכל רחבי תבל
להצלחה רבה ומופלגה בעבודת
השליחות מתוך בריאות נכונה, פרנסה
בהרחבה ונחת חסידותי מכל יו"ח

נדפס ע"י הרוצה בעילום שמו

Lead Up to Arrest

The first seven years of the Frierdiker Rebbe's nesius were fraught with danger. Every day, the Frierdiker Rebbe risked his life by combating the forces trying to stamp out Yiddishkeit in Russia.

Things came to a head around Purim Katan, in the year 5687.

In the Rebbe's words:

Before Purim Katan, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe traveled to Moscow, the capital city, source of the many terrible decrees against the Jewish people. The news of his impending arrival spread among the Yidden in the area, and it also reached the “higher-ups.”

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe announced that he would deliver a *maamar* on Purim Katan at the last remaining shul in Moscow.

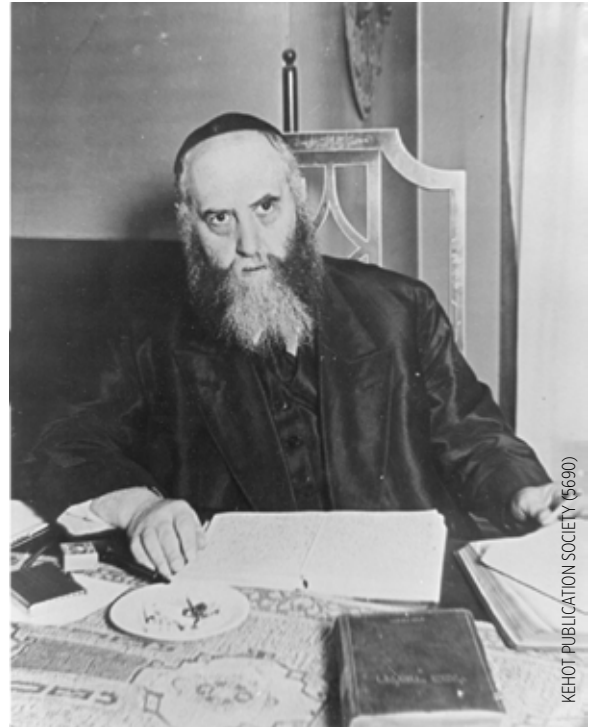
A messenger immediately arrived from the higher-ups, a Jew who was also a good friend. He told the [Frierdiker] Rebbe—although the Rebbe obviously knew this on his own—that there was clear information that informers would be present at his *maamar* delivery. They would immediately pass on whatever he said to the necessary officials. Therefore, he said, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe should consider the potential consequences of his words...

When the [Frierdiker] Rebbe arrived at the shul, the room was packed. He delivered a *maamar* which was based on the *possuk*, “*mipi olelim v'yonkim yisadta oz... l'hashbis oyev umisnakem*” that the Torah of children nullifies the enemies of Yiddishkeit and Yidden. After speaking in *haskalah* terms of Chassidus, he spelled out his intentions in no uncertain words, to make sure that everyone understood exactly what he meant. He openly said that one should disregard all obstacles and ensure that Yiddische children emit from their mouths studies which will obliterate the enemies.

Needless to say, the *maamar* produced a strong, new-found 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 who had the power to impede those efforts.¹

The Arrest

Sure enough, the GPU soon showed up—on 15 Sivan—to arrest the Frierdiker Rebbe. They barged into his home late at night, just as the Frierdiker Rebbe was sitting down



to eat something after a long night of yechidus.

The Rebbe pointed out that the miracles began immediately.

There were many open miracles that took place throughout the story [of the Frierdiker Rebbe's imprisonment]. At the very beginning, there was an open miracle.

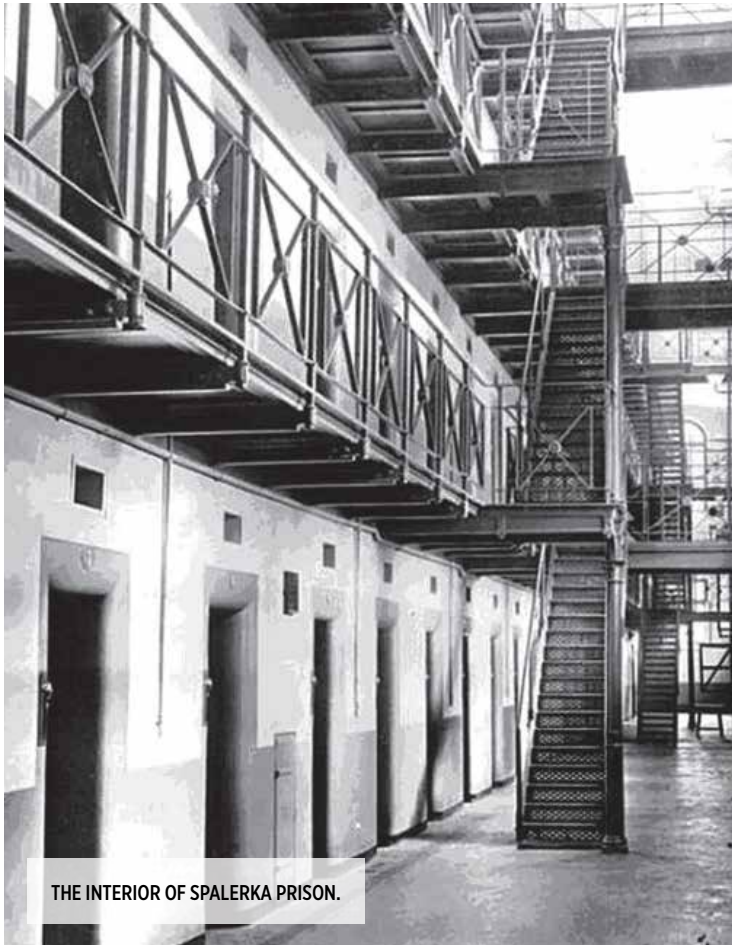
When they entered his home for the search, they posted guards in every room to ensure that nothing could be hidden and no information could be passed [to others]. Then, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe's mother, Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah, entered the room and began crying uncontrollably; nobody was able to calm her down.

The Jew among the officers told the [Frierdiker] Rebbe to go into a private room with her and calm her down. That allowed the [Frierdiker] Rebbe to give over important instructions regarding what should be done—instructions that ultimately led to his release. Again, when he was walked out of the house, only the non-Jewish guards were present, and they did not hinder the [Frierdiker] Rebbe from giving over additional instructions...

This completely defied logic and protocol—and it was these very moments that led to the ultimate release.²

On a different occasion, the Rebbe described the Frierdiker Rebbe's tactic to avoid divulging incriminating evidence during the search:

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe related that in his private study, he had a drawer filled with letters and papers that were



THE INTERIOR OF SPALIERKA PRISON.

old and irrelevant. They were kept there so that in the case of a police search, the large pile of letters would make it difficult to find the real, incriminating ones.

This is exactly what happened. When they came on 15 Sivan and wanted to search his study, he pulled out that pile and inserted all the incriminating paperwork into it; they could find nothing among the massive amount of irrelevant papers.³

In Prison

From the first moment in prison, the Frierdiker Rebbe made a decision to act like a Rebbe—he would behave on his own terms, not as dictated to him by the prison officials.

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe related that when he first arrived at the prison, he made the firm decision that he wouldn't 'lose himself,' and he wouldn't be intimidated by them. He would treat them as if they didn't exist.

When he refused to answer their question, they put him in solitary confinement in a cell covered in mud where there was nowhere to lean, a room crawling with rats. He was there for some time—a day, or half a day. Nonetheless, he refused to give in to them, not only in matters of *yiras shamayim*, but in everything—acting as if they simply didn't exist.⁴

On another occasion, the Rebbe gave more context:

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe's arrest was on the night of a state-of-emergency after a certain Soviet ambassador was killed in a different country; that night the authorities decided to arrest (and execute) a certain number of people...

Despite being aware of the situation, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe behaved *b'harchavah* not only after his release, but also during his imprisonment. He entered prison with the decision that, despite the state of affairs in the world—*Chazal* say, "Do



Not Just My Liberation

The Rebbe's account of Yud-Beis Tammuz



not provoke a *rasha* when he is doing well”—he couldn’t allow [fear] to be evident in his behavior or speech, or even appear on his face... He knew that he was being accompanied by “all those who cherish Torah, observe mitzvos” and even those “who are [just] called ‘Yisroel!’”...⁵

In truth, the Frierdiker Rebbe related, there was something that happened earlier, on Rosh Hashanah, that gave him the strength to carry on despite the terrible situation.

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe related that in the *maamarim* of Rosh Hashanah 5687, the year of his arrest, he spoke about the concept of *Hashgacha Pratis*, as taught by the Baal Shem Tov.

It was not directly related to the *maamar*, but it was mentioned during the *maamar* nonetheless. Without that, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe said, he did not know whether he would have been able to withstand the arrest.⁶

One story about the Frierdiker Rebbe’s imprisonment stands out. When the Rebbe retold this story, he was overcome with emotion:

During his imprisonment, they came on Shabbos to take his picture. It was Shabbos afternoon, and the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was davening with his tallis over his head. When they walked inside and saw him in his tallis, they left.

Some more time passed; they came again, and the

[Frierdiker] Rebbe was still davening, but his tallis was no longer over his head. Seeing the whole delegation, he motioned to them with his hand—not wanting to interrupt his davening—and they left again.

Soon, they came a third time. This time, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe informed them that it was Shabbos and photographs were forbidden, so they left and set the matter aside for later.

This story doesn’t make any sense. They shouldn’t have been impressed by a tallis—the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was arrested for being a Rebbe, after all...

What is the explanation?

When you go with a *bitual atzmi*, and therefore with a *tokef atzmi*, even the spark of holiness hidden in the lowest *kelipah*, when seeing... *atzmus umehus* with a tallis on his head... It wasn’t something they could explain, but interrupting wasn’t an option. They simply lost themselves entirely...⁷

After several weeks in prison, the Frierdiker Rebbe was informed that he would be exiled to Kostroma for three years. As the Rebbe related on several occasions, the Frierdiker Rebbe was first sentenced to receive capital punishment. The sentence was then changed to ten years in the Solovki Islands prison camp, and subsequently, it was again changed to three years of exile in Kostroma.

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe received the news on Thursday, 1 Tammuz; he was given permission to go home and meet with his family for six hours before he would have to go to the train station for his journey to Kostroma.

However, the journey was ultimately delayed to 3 Tammuz, because when, in response to his question, he was told that he would arrive in Kostroma on Shabbos, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe adamantly refused and stated, “Under no circumstances will I travel on Shabbos.” He was told that he would not be allowed to stay outside of the prison until after Shabbos, and that if he refused their orders he would remain in prison for longer, but the Rebbe nonetheless said, “I will sit as long as it takes, but I will not travel on Shabbos!”⁸

Kostroma

At the train station before he left, a large crowd of Chassidim gathered. The Frierdiker Rebbe addressed the assembled with the same words his father, the Rebbe Rashab had used during the famous conference of Rabbanim, against Czarist attempts to interfere in matters of Yiddishkeit:

“*Yehi Hashem Elokainu imanu kaasher haya im avosaynu...* This is not only a prayer, but also a promise and blessing—that Hashem will not forsake us, even when we are in exile.

“Let the nations of the world know and realize. We did not go into exile of our own will, nor will we return to Eretz Yisroel by virtue of our capabilities. Hashem, our Father and King, sent us into exile, and He will redeem us by sending us Moshiach. However, only our bodies were sent into exile and subjected to foreign rule. Our souls were not.

“We are obligated to publicly proclaim before all, that on any matter affecting the Jewish religion, *Torah, Mitzvos* and even its customs, no one can impose his beliefs on us nor coerce us to act contrary to our beliefs...”⁹

When the news arrived that the Frierdiker Rebbe would be exiled to Kostroma, Reb Michoel Dvorkin was immediately dispatched to the distant town, where he had an old acquaintance, to prepare for the Frierdiker Rebbe’s arrival.

The friend that he had known had since passed away, but his son-in-law still lived there and 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 this shochet was an informant for the GPU. In addition to finding suitable accommodations, Reb Michoel had the town’s mikvah repaired, and he began organizing a cheder for the local Jewish community.

In essence, he began to engage in the very activities for which the Frierdiker Rebbe was being punished (in sichos, the Rebbe compared it to the story of Yehuda doing the same for Yaakov Avinu before he arrived in Mitzrayim).

The Frierdiker Rebbe himself took part in these efforts, but he was not satisfied.

During the time the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was in exile in Kostroma, he continued to be active in *hafatzas hamaayanos*, such as creating *chadarim* and *mikvaos*. On Shabbos, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe davened at length 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 furor was to the extent that the town priest came to shul to see the attraction...

Nevertheless, the fact that at that time the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was not able to write a letter to a Yid concerning basic things bothered him terribly, to the point that he told one of the Chassidim who were with him—either Reb Elya Chaim or Reb Michoel—that if this is the case, who needs a hand? It would be better if it would wither away.

This was the hand of the [Frierdiker] Rebbe, with which he laid tefillin, and did many acts of *kedusha*. Nevertheless, he said that since a few days had gone by without writing to another Yid, it would be better for it to wither! The lesson to each of us is obvious...¹⁰

However, salvation was soon at hand:

The Geulah

On Yud-Beis Tammuz, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was supposed to register [at the police station]. He went there with Reb Elya Chaim Althaus. It turned out that it was a holiday of some sort, and the office was closed; there was only a person responsible for the most important matters. The [Frierdiker]



Not Just My Liberation

The Rebbe’s account of Yud-Beis Tammuz

Rebbe was informed that a message had arrived from Moscow stating he was free to return home, but since the office was closed, he would need to come the next day to collect his official papers.

The [Frierdiker] Rebbe noticed that Elya Chaim was too overwhelmed, and he needed to calm him down.

By the time they returned, the news had already reached the home they were staying at—the shochet of Kostroma. Reb Michoel Dvorkin, hearing the news—in general, he wasn't always *b'medida v'hagbala* (calculated and measured), and in his great excitement, he took a large bottle of mashke—he didn't *chas v'shalom* drink it—but he danced around the house where the [Frierdiker] Rebbe stayed, singing a song in Russian, a Chassidische song about *ein old milvado*—Nyet Nyet Nikavo... He continued dancing like that for quite a while.¹¹

On several occasions, the Rebbe reflected on the miracles that occurred throughout the story.

Dozens of people were involved in the release efforts. There is no question that their movements were carefully monitored, especially the movements of those who openly entered the most dangerous locations to demand the [Frierdiker] Rebbe's release. Nonetheless, not a single one of them was affected, neither during the imprisonment nor later...

Thinking back, a question arises: What is the greater miracle? The miracle of the *baal hageulah*, which came about through activism through natural means (*derech hateva*), or the fact that all those who openly advocated for his release in the most dangerous places weren't touched, not even in their livelihood. It is totally unexplainable, even from a spiritual point of view...¹²

The miracle was evident even in the way the release

was handled:

When he came to sign the papers for his release, they asked him to sign in a manner that indicated they weren't at fault for the matter being delayed by one day. Imagine the change—from capital punishment to the point that the officials were afraid of being punished for delaying the Rebbe's freedom for a single day...¹³

Arriving Back Home

The Rebbe once related the following amusing story about the Frierdiker Rebbe's arrival back home:

When the [Frierdiker] Rebbe arrived in Leningrad, he needed to recite *Hagomel*. In general, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe would receive *Maftir*. Now, the *brachos* of *Maftir* and *Haftorah* are connected to each other, and are in a specific order and number. Usually, *Hagomel* is recited after receiving an *aliya*, but since he would receive *Maftir*, which must immediately be followed by *Haftorah*, there was a dilemma about the [Frierdiker] Rebbe's *Hagomel*.

The *rabbanim* sat down to decide when the [Frierdiker] Rebbe should recite *Hagomel*. There were a number of suggestions: One suggestion was that the [Frierdiker] Rebbe should receive a different *aliya*, such as *Shlishi*, thereby avoiding the scenario in which the *rabbanim* would be 'forced' to engage in the 'immense task' of opening a Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim and possibly also some *Acharonim*...

That option was quickly rejected; the [Frierdiker] Rebbe always receives *Maftir*, and that couldn't change. Some suggested that he recite *Hagomel* before the *aliya*; 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...¹⁴

Established the Following Year

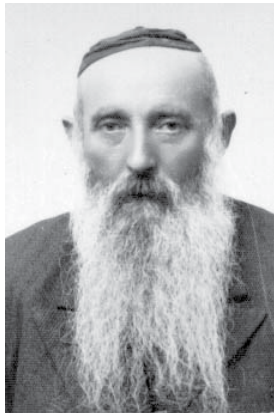
News quickly spread about the Frierdiker Rebbe's release, and Chassidim throughout Russia began to celebrate. However, the celebrations were muted.

When the news of the release arrived, the instructions were that it should be celebrated *bli pirsum* (without publicity), because the future was still uncertain. Therefore, it wasn't celebrated properly.

The following year, the [Frierdiker] Rebbe was already over the border, outside of their dominion, and it was clear that the victory was complete; not only in a personal way, but in the words of the Rebbe Rashab, "not



REB ELYA CHAIM ALTHAUS.



REB MICHOEL DVORKIN.

THE FRIERDIKER REBBE, SUMMER, 5687, IN MALAKHOVKA, NOT LONG AFTER HIS RETURN FROM EXILE.

REPRINTS OF THIS PHOTO—TAKEN SHORTLY BEFORE HE PERMANENTLY DEPARTED THE SOVIET UNION—WERE DISSEMINATED AMONG CHASSIDIM AND WERE A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND CONNECTION FOR DECADES TO COME. IT IS THE ONLY KNOWN PHOTOGRAPH OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE DURING THE YEARS OF HIS NESIUS IN RUSSIA.



only with our *atzmi*, but also with our *hisphashtus*.” This atmosphere was felt throughout the home and beyond. It was celebrated on a much greater scale, and will indeed be celebrated in this manner until the coming of Moshiach...¹⁵

That year, the Frierdiker Rebbe penned a public letter—a letter cited by the Rebbe countless times, in which the Frierdiker Rebbe clarifies:

It was not I alone that Hashem redeemed on

Yud-Beis Tammuz, but also those who cherish Torah, those who observe mitzvos, and so too all those who merely bear the name “Jew”... Today, 12 Tammuz, is the Chag Hageulah of *all* Jews who are involved in the dissemination of Torah.¹⁶

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

1. Purim 5733, Toras Menachem vol. 71, p. 256.
2. 12 Tammuz 5727, Toras Menachem vol. 50, p. 93.
3. 12 Tammuz 5718, Toras Menachem vol. 23, p. 160.
4. 13 Tammuz 5722, Toras Menachem vol. 34, p. 140.
5. 12 Tammuz 5725, Toras Menachem vol. 44, p. 83.
6. 12 Tammuz 5724, Toras Menachem vol. 40, p. 197.
7. 12 Tammuz 5711, Toras Menachem vol. 3, p. 194.
8. Chukas 5743, Toras Menachem 5743 vol. 3, p. 1693.
9. Sefer Hasichos 5680–87 p. 169. Translation from “A

Day to Recall, A Day to Remember,” by Rabbi Sholom Ber Avtzon.

10. 28 Sivan 5712, Toras Menachem vol. 6, p. 12.
11. 12 Tammuz 5725, Toras Menachem vol. 44, p. 70.
12. 12 Tammuz 5726 Sicha 1, from the audio recording. See also Likkutei Sichos vol. 28, p. 150.
13. 12 Tammuz 5711, Toras Menachem vol. 3, p. 186.
14. 10 Shevat 5723, Toras Menachem vol. 36, p. 134.
15. 12 Tammuz 5716, Toras Menachem vol. 17, p. 51.
16. Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz vol. 2, p. 80.