

THE DEEPEST DEPTHS, EVEN FOR THE SIMPLE

The Paradox of the Alter
Rebbe's Siddur

By: MOTTI WILHELM

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סדר

תהלת ה'

על פי נוסח האר"י ז"ל

כל חפלה ותפלה באה על מקומה
מבלי שיצטרך המתפלל לחפש הדפים בשע



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סדר
תהלת ה'

נוסח האר"י ז"ל

לזכות
עליזה תחי' שוחאט
לרגל יום הולדתה - כ"ב טבת

ולזכות הוריה
הרה"ת ר' שלום דוב בער זוזגתו מרת חיה מושקא
ולזכות אחיותיה ברכה ליפשא, שיינדל,
ואחיה מנחם מענדל שיחיו

In our previous article (Kislev 5785), we explored the history of the publication of the Alter Rebbe's *nusach hatefilla*. In this second installment, presented in honor of the Alter Rebbe's *yom hahilula*, Chof-Daled Teves, we will take a closer look at the *nusach* itself: Why the Alter Rebbe composed a *nusach*, what sets it apart, and how it seamlessly blends Halacha, Dikduk, Kabbalah, and Chassidus—revealing the *nusach* as a remarkable creation in its own right.

Today's Chabad bookshelf features a comprehensive collection of *sifrei tefilla* for various occasions. There are Chabad *Selichos* and *Machzorim*, a Lubavitcher *Tikun Leil Shavuos*, and even a Chabad-published *Kinos* for *Tisha B'av*. While one might view the Chabad *Siddur* as another such text—a compilation of *tefillos* following Lubavitcher Chassidic *minhagim*—in truth, it holds a distinct position. The *Siddur* represents the culmination of the Alter Rebbe's two-decade scholarly endeavor, during which he carefully curated, analyzed, and refined the text to develop a masterfully constructed *nusach*.

To properly understand the novel contribution of the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*, we need to take a step back and understand the formation of the *nusach hatefilla* from their inception.

The Rambam teaches¹: “It is a *mitzvas aseh* to *daven* every day, as the *possuk* states: ‘*Va'avadtem es Hashem Elokeichem*.’ *Mipi hashmuah* it was learned that this ‘*avoda*’ is *tefilla*, as the *possuk* states: ‘*Ul'ovdo b'chol levavchem*.’ The *Chachomim* said, “What is the *avoda* of the heart? This is *tefilla*.”

While the obligation of *tefilla* is *midioraisa*, a different picture emerges regarding the *nusach hatefilla*. The Rambam continues: “The number of *tefillos* is not prescribed in the Torah, nor does it prescribe a specific formula for *tefilla*. Also, according to Torah law, there are no fixed times for *tefilla*.”

Accordingly, one who was eloquent would offer many *tefillos*, and one who was less so would *daven* when and how he was able. “This was the ongoing practice from [the time of] Moshe Rabbeinu until Ezra,” the Rambam says.

The Formation of Nusach

So, when was a *nusach* established for *tefillos*?

The Gemara in Brachos² states: “*Anshei Knesses Hagedola* instituted for the Jewish people *brachos* and *tefillos*, *kedushos* and *havdalos*.” The Rambam spells out the process in more detail. He writes that after the Yidden were exiled in the days of Nevuchadnetzar, they became scattered among various nations, and their children grew up speaking a mix of languages, losing their fluency in *Lashon Hakodesh*. This made it difficult for them to express themselves fully in *tefilla*. “When Ezra and his *beis din* saw this, they established eighteen *brachos* in sequence...so the *tefillos* could be set in the mouths of all.”

The extent of the *takana* of *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* is a subject of debate, even among the *Rishonim*. Some, such as the *Rashba*,³ explain that *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* merely instituted a framework for *tefilla*. This included the theme of each *bracha* in *Shmoneh Esreh* and an outline of other *brachos* and *tefillos*. The exact wording of each *bracha*, however, was left to the individual. On the other hand, the Rambam quoted above seems to imply that *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* instituted the full text of the *tefillos*.

Regardless, the text of the *tefillos* did not remain static, but underwent many changes as time passed. Some of these were due to changes in circumstances—such as the *bracha* for *Yerushalayim* changing to a *bracha* for the **rebuilding** of the holy city after its destruction during the *Churban*. In addition, over the passage of time, various *tefillos* and *piyyutim* were added, some to the daily davening, and others for Shabbos, Yom Tov, other dates on the calendar, or lifecycle occasions.

During the era of the *Geonim*, the first “*siddurim*”—complete *nusachos* for all occasions—were authored. Some of the *siddurim*, such as *Siddur Rav Amram Gaon*, and *Siddur Rav*



PAGE FROM A 1200-YEAR-OLD, 4-INCH-LONG SIDDUR FROM THE PERIOD OF THE GEONIM. HOUSED IN A MUSEUM IN ERETZ YISROEL, IT IS THE OLDEST SIDDUR IN EXISTENCE.

Saadya Gaon, survive to this day, while many others have been lost. Several *Rishonim* also compiled *siddurim*, including one attributed to *Rashi*. The *Rambam* in *Mishneh Torah* also compiled the text of the *tefillos*.

As Yidden spread across Europe and the Middle East, settling in diverse locations, distinct *nuschaos* emerged in each region, each developing its own nuances and characteristics. The process of diversification continued for several centuries.

Later, as travel became more frequent and long-distance communication more reliable, the trend began to reverse. Communities and *rabbanim* gained the ability to connect with one another, leading to a gradual streamlining of *min-hagim* and *nuschaos*. This increased connectivity reduced the splintering of smaller groups and their unique practices.

The invention of the printing press significantly accelerated this unification process. It marked the near-end of individually commissioned hand-written *siddurim* and the reliance on a few manuscript copies in each location. Instead, uniform printed *siddurim* became widely available, further standardizing the text of *tefillos* across different communities.

With some exceptions, such as *Nusach Italia*, which still exists to this day, most Yidden were davening either *Nusach Ashkenaz*—for Yidden in Northern and Eastern Europe, or (a variation of) *Nusach Hasefaradim* for those in the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and the Middle East. Today, this

nusach is more commonly known as *Nusach Edot Hamizrach*. It is not to be confused with *Nusach Sefard*, which will be discussed below.

Counting Each Letter

In the year 5330, the light of the Arizal began to shine in the holy city of Tzfas. He taught the secrets of Kabbalah in an unprecedented manner, and his primary disciple was Rav Chaim Vital.

The Arizal taught many *kavanos hatefilla*, showing how each sentence, word, and even letter in *davening* has a deep *Kabbalistic* meaning. In many of these teachings, recorded by Rav Chaim Vital, the Arizal explained how the number of words or letters in a specific *tefilla*, or specific phrases, aligned with the *Olamos Ha'elyonim*, and the specific *madreiga* to which each *tefilla* corresponded. These precise word counts complemented earlier efforts by *Chachmei Ashkenaz*, such as the Rokeach, who were also *medayek* in the exact number of words in *tefillos* and *brachos*.

However, the Arizal did not author or compile a *nusach*. When the *Kisvei Arizal* specified that certain *tefillos* should contain particular word counts, multiple textual variations could satisfy these requirements. Similarly, while the Arizal provided specific annotations in works like *Shaar Hakavanos*, these were commentaries on existing texts rather than a



FIRST EDITION (FROM THE YEAR 5554) OF THE SIDDUR OF REB SHABSAI RASHKOVER, A TALMID OF THE BAAL SHEM TOV. IT PREDATES THE ALTER REBBE'S SIDDUR BY ALMOST 10 YEARS. THE REBBE CONSIDERED THIS SIDDUR AUTHORITATIVE IN DETERMINING THE ARIZAL'S NUSACH.

definitive *nusach*, leaving room for various interpretations and applications.

Another detail that left room for confusion was that while the Arizal generally preferred *Nusach Hasefardim*, there were places where he preferred *Nusach Ashkenaz*.⁴ All these factors left considerable uncertainty as to what was the proper “*Nusach Arizal*.”

Over the following generations, the Arizal’s students and their students composed *siddurim* that followed his *Kabbalah*. Some of the more famous “*Siddurei Ha’arizal*” included the *Siddur Mishnas Chassidim*—authored by Rav Emanuel Chai Ricchi, an Italian *rov*, *mekubal* and *paytan*;⁵ *Siddur Reb Yaakov Koppul*—authored by Rav Yaakov Koppul Lipshitz, a *mekubal* who lived in Mezeritch; and *Siddur Reb Shabsai Rashkover*⁶—a *mekubal* and *talmid* of the Baal Shem Tov.

While these *siddurim* were faithful to the *Kisvei Ha’arizal*, they varied in *nusach*, incorporating variations only where the Arizal had not specified a preference.⁷ Some of the *Siddurei Ha’arizal* were chiefly *Nusach Hasefardim*; others were mainly *Nusach Ashkenaz*. Even in the same *siddur*, one could find a *tefilla* in *Nusach Hasefardim* and then one in *Nusach Ashkenaz*.

At some point, several printers attempted to accommodate both *Nusach Ashkenaz* and *Nusach Hasefardim* in their *siddurim* by presenting one as the primary text and the other in parentheses.⁸ This practice led some people to recite both versions, resulting in a *nusach* that might be described as “*kilayim*” (hybrid).

It was from these efforts that *Nusach Sefard* emerged. *Nusach Sefard* is an umbrella name for the *nusach* used by

Chassidim, a middle ground between the two above-mentioned *nuschaos*, while attempting to remain faithful to the Arizal’s teachings. This *nusach* is not uniform, with variations existing between different *siddurim*. Some *siddurim* lean more toward *Nusach Hasefardim*, while others tend more toward *Nusach Ashkenaz*. This diversity has persisted until today; one can find textual differences between the many editions of *Nusach Sefard*.

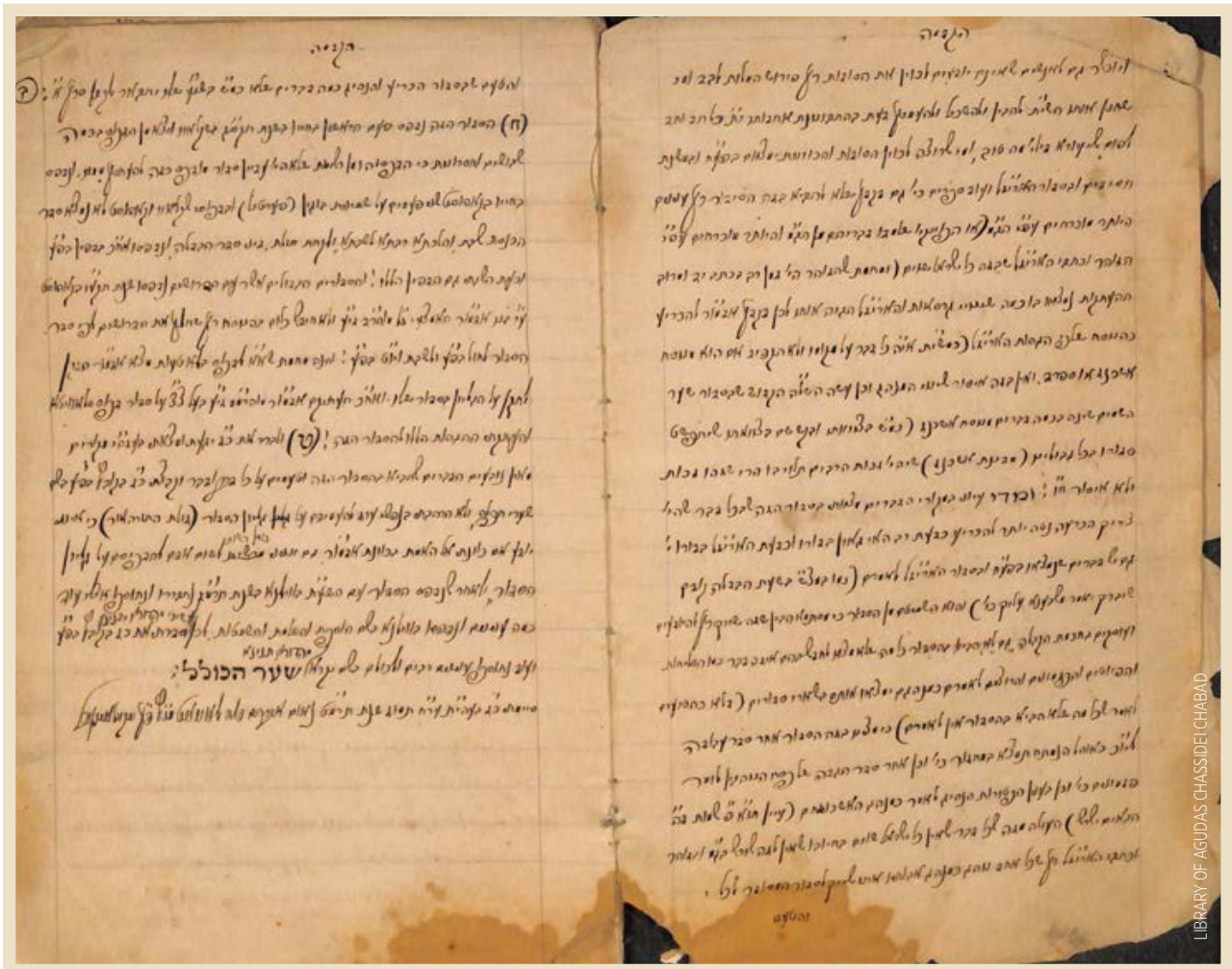
The Alter Rebbe’s Formulation

It is against this background that one can begin to understand the great need for the Alter Rebbe’s *nusach*. As Chassidim continued to spread, and with it, more Chassidim switching to *Nusach Arizal*, the urgent need increased for a curated and accurate *Nusach Arizal*.

This groundbreaking edition of the *siddur* needed to harmonize multiple considerations beyond the Arizal’s teachings. It had to align with halachic requirements as established by the *Shulchan Aruch* and *poskim*, conform to the rules of *dikduk*, and address various other scholarly considerations.

Tradition has it that the Alter Rebbe spent twenty years curating this *nusach*,⁹ and did so by carefully analyzing sixty different *siddurim* of various *nuschaos*.¹⁰ Chassidim counted the creation of this *nusach* among the “ten *zechusim* of the Alter Rebbe.”¹¹

“The Rebbe, Harav Reb Shneur Zalman z”l, author of the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya*, compiled this *siddur* according to the Arizal’s *nusach*. He included only what



MANUSCRIPT OF THE CLOSING PAGES OF THE INTRODUCTION TO REB AVROHOM DOVID LAVUT'S "SHAAR HAKOLLEL," WHICH HE COMPLETED SHORTLY BEFORE HIS PASSING AND WAS PUBLISHED POSTHUMOUSLY.

was authentically received through the Arizal's writings and aligned with the halachic conclusions that the *poskim* derived from the *Gemara*. He carefully crafted the words to contain their mystical significance while deliberately omitting explicit explanations of these mysteries and *kavanos*, making it accessible to all, including those who comprehend only the simple meaning of the words... He did not insist on following either *Nusach Ashkenaz* or *Nusach Sefard* exclusively," Harav Avrohom Dovid Lavut writes in the introduction¹² to his *Shaar Hakollel*.

In a biographical sketch of the Alter Rebbe,¹³ Harav Shlomo Yosef Zevin described the *chiddush* of the *nusach*

in the following words: "Few *siddurim* are truly the work of authors; most are the product of printers and publishers. Authors typically confined themselves to providing commentaries or following an established *nusach*—whether Ashkenaz, Sefard, or similar traditions. The Rav, however, meticulously edited and scrutinized every sentence, word, and letter in the *siddur*. Beyond embedding Kabbalistic *kavanos*—which were not meant for everyone—the very *nusach* itself evokes profound spiritual feelings of sanctity, grandeur, radiance, and beauty."

The praise for the *siddur* didn't only come from Chabad Chassidim. In a short essay written by Harav Boruch



THE TWO WORKS
PUBLISHED BY
REB AVROHOM
CHAIM NA'EH
ON THE ALTER
REBBE'S SIDDUR.



Mordechai Klein, a Hungarian *rav* who emigrated to the USA in 5670, and is described as being “far from any Chabad influence,”¹⁴ he writes that he chose to daven from the Alter Rebbe’s *siddur*, “which had all textual errors removed and was edited with the utmost precision.”¹⁵

Even more emphatically, Harav Avrohom Chaim Na’eh directly confronted those who tried to limit the *siddur’s* scope by claiming it was designed exclusively for Chassidim. He rejected attempts to use this argument to explain away halachic differences between the Alter Rebbe’s *siddur* and others.

“This is mere conjecture without substance or merit. How could Chassidim require different halachic rulings from the rest of the Jewish people regarding the laws of *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, Shabbos, and similar matters? Moreover, it is well known that the Alter Rebbe composed the *siddur* with simple people in mind—which is precisely why he omitted *kavanos*, *yichudim*, and *Sheimos* from the *tefillos*, as explained in the introduction to *Shaar HaKollel*...In addition, certainly, his aspiration was that the entire world should become Chassidim!”¹⁶

Highlighting the Uniqueness

Despite the acclaim for the *siddur*, it was 84 years before the first work on the *siddur* was published, namely *Shaar Hatefilla* by Harav Avrohom Dovid Lavut—a precursor to his *Shaar Hakollel*.

“Let us praise him, for he was the first to set his heart to creating annotations and commentary for the words of the [Alter] Rebbe in the *siddur*. And it is truly lamentable that the *geonei anash* in the earlier generations, who were close to the time of the Rebbe, did not arise to follow in his footsteps in elucidating the *siddur* and the Shulchan Aruch, for then we would certainly have merited extraordinary insights and a true understanding of the underlying reasons,”¹⁷ Harav Avrohom Chaim Na’eh wrote a generation later.

Harav Na’eh himself authored two works on the *siddur*, *Piskei Siddur* on the *halachos* in the *siddur* in comparison to the Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch, and *Kuntres Hasiddur* to clarify and correct various details in the *nusach* of the Torah Ohr Siddur—which was considered the most accurate edition of the Alter

Rebbe's Siddur.

Since *nusach* is a specialized field, and is not as widely discussed as *halacha*, it was only in the past 20-some years that additional works on the *siddur* have been published. These are *Hasiddur*,¹⁸ a compilation of articles and documents related to the *siddur*; *Shaarei Tefilla U'minhag*—a two-volume work by Harav Mordechai Shmuel Ashkenazi, *rav* of Kfar Chabad;¹⁹ and *Siddur Rabbeinu Hazaken*—a comprehensive work on the Alter Rebbe's Siddur by Dayan Levi Raskin of London, first published in a single 800-page-volume,²⁰ and soon to be released in an expanded three-volume edition.

We will now explore several examples that highlight some of the unique features of the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*, drawing on the works mentioned for a glimpse into the masterpiece that is the *siddur*.

Precision in Halacha

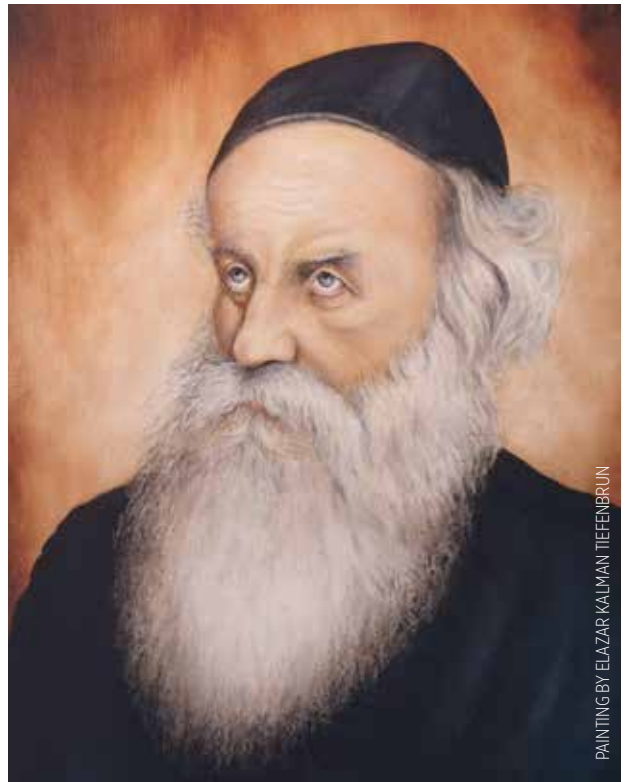
With regard to *brachos*, one of the *halachic* requirements is that it must have an expression similar to the conclusion of the *bracha* near the conclusion (“מעין החתימה סמוך לחתימה”).²¹ The Alter Rebbe was careful that this should be maintained in every *bracha* throughout *davening*. One striking example of where he modified the *nusach* to adhere to this *halacha* is in the *bracha* of *Boneh Yerushalayim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The *bracha* in most *nuschaos* concludes with “ובנה אותה” ובנה אותה ביקורב בימינו בנין עולם וכסא דוד עבדך מהרה לתוכה תכין “ברוך אתה ה' בונה ירושלים”. Therefore, the Alter Rebbe rearranged the order, placing “וכסא דוד עבדך” “ובנה אותה בקרוב בימינו בנין עולם” before “מהרה בתוכה תכין”, thereby ensuring the *halachic* principle is precisely followed.

The Alter Rebbe followed the same meticulous approach in the *bracha* of *Yotzer Hameoros* in *Birchas Krias Shema*. In the standard *nusach*, the words “אור חדש על ציון תאיר” comes immediately before the *chasima* (conclusion), “יוצר המאורות,” disrupting the *halachic* requirement of “מעין החתימה סמוך לחתימה.” The Alter Rebbe therefore omitted this line, so that one recites “לעושה אורים גדולים כי לעולם חסדו” just before the conclusion which speaks of the *Me'oros*.²²

Precision in Kabbalah

The Arizal not only taught the *kavanos* of various *tefillos* but also revealed the precise number of words in each *bracha* of *Shemoneh Esrei* and other sections of the *siddur*, showing how each detail aligns with the *kavanos*. In *Shaar Hakollel*, Harav Lavut references many of these teachings to explain



the specific *nusach* chosen by the Alter Rebbe.

The Alter Rebbe was meticulous in adhering to the authentic teachings of the Arizal, rather than simply following what was printed in various editions of *Siddurei Ha'Arizal*. One example of this precision appears before the *bracha* of *Ahavas Olam* in *Birchas Krias Shema*, where the Alter Rebbe specifies, “Even on Shabbos and Yom Tov, we say *Ahavas Olam* and not *Ahava Rabbah*.” *Shaar Hakollel*²³ explains that the Alter Rebbe explicitly rejected the *nusach* of *Ahava Rabbah*—despite generally avoiding instructions on what **not** to say—because in certain printed versions of the Arizal's Siddur, it states to say *Ahava Rabbah* on Shabbos and Yom Tov. The Alter Rebbe, therefore, found it necessary to clarify that this directive does not originate from the Arizal.

Precision According to Chassidus

“*Toras Emes* was in his mouth, and the precise *dikdukim* of words align perfectly with the desired *kavana*.”²⁴ It is with

these words that the Maharil, the Alter Rebbe's brother, describes the depth hidden in plain sight in the *nusach*.

At times, the *kavanos* and deeper meanings are discernible only to those well-versed in *Kabbalah*. Other times, the words align perfectly with the teachings of Chassidus, and the correlation becomes transparent. Sometimes, this nuance can be seen in something as subtle as a punctuation mark.

One such example is *Baruch Sh'eomar*. Some *nuschaos* read "יחיד חי העולמים. מלך משובח ומפואר עדי עד שמו הגדול" — placing the pause before *melech*. Thus, the phrase reads "a King, whose Name is praised and glorified forever." In the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*, as recorded by the Tzemach Tzedek,²⁵ the pause is placed after *מלך*, with that word part of the previous phrase.

A seemingly minor change. But when learning Chassidus, this subtle modification is illuminated in a new light. In several passages in *Likkutei Torah* and *Torah Ohr*,²⁶ the Alter Rebbe explains that the word *melech* refers to the level of *malchus*, and the entire *chayus* of the world—חי העולמים—emanates from that level, the last of the *sefiros*.

Precision in Dikduk

In *Birkas HaMazon*, we see an example of the Alter Rebbe's precision in *dikduk*. In most Ashkenazi *siddurim*, the text reads: שבכל יום ויום הוא הטיב הוא מטיב הוא ייטיב. This describes Hashem's ongoing kindness, but the formulation presents grammatical challenges. Since it is describing ongoing good—שבכל יום ויום—how can the next words be הטיב הוא, which is in the past tense?

In some earlier versions of *Nusach Sefard*,²⁷ a more grammatically coherent version is offered: בכל יום ויום הוא מטיב לנו; הוא הטיב לנו. This splits up the phrase, with the words בכל יום ויום connected to הוא מטיב לנו—in the present tense.

The Alter Rebbe's approach is characteristically nuanced. While preserving the framework of *Nusach Ashkenaz*, he introduces a critical modification: "והמטיב לכל בכל יום ויום. הוא" forming a new sentence to eliminate the previously noted grammatical awkwardness.

Precision in Meaning

To illustrate the Alter Rebbe's meticulous attention to the meaning of the *tefillos*, we turn to a letter from the Rebbe²⁸ that discusses why the Alter Rebbe substituted the words "ועל המלחמות" found in "ועל הנסים"—which appears in many *nuschaos*—with "ועל הנפלאות".

"Concerning what you wrote about the reasoning behind the Alter Rebbe's version of "ועל הנפלאות" instead of "ועל" found in some *siddurim*.

"There is a well-known story attributed to the Tzemach Tzedek (cited in *Beis Rebbe* chapter 27), that when the Alter Rebbe established the *nusach* of his *siddur*, he had sixty different *siddurim* in front of him.

"Indeed, in several *nuschaos*, the phrase 'ועל הנפלאות' is found. (*Avudarham*, the *Siddur* of Yaavetz, and the *Siddur* of Eretz Yisrael, Syria, Turkey, and Egypt, as noted by Rabbi Gagin in his book *Keser Shem Tov*, among others.)

"The Alter Rebbe chose this particular *nusach* for several straightforward reasons:

1. The phrase "ועל המלחמות" — "and for the wars" is difficult to understand on its own; the main point is lacking. It would need to say 'the victory of the wars' (הניצחון המלחמות) or something similar.
2. The *girsas* of the Razah (Rabbeinu Zerachiah HaLevi) and his explanation (as cited in the *Siddur* of Yaavetz) of "ועל התשועות (שנעשו) על המלחמות" — "and for the deliverances (that were achieved) through the wars," is also not clear. If so, it should have said "ועל הפורקן" — "and for the deliverance (that was) from the troubles" and the like.
3. The Sephardic *Siddurim* replace "מלחמות" with "נחמות", which also doesn't quite fit, as comfort does not seem to fit in the context. The complexities of interpreting the phrase "ונחמתא" in the *Kaddish* are well known, as referenced in the Tur, *Orach Chayim siman* 56.
4. In my humble opinion, this is a clear proof for the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*: In *Haneiros Halalu* we mention "niflaos" twice, while in *Al Hanissim*, not even once?! One can also learn from that context, where we see the phrases for *nissim* and *yeshuos*, that it should be so in *V'al Hanissim* as well.

Precision in Nikkud

The original *nusach* of the Alter Rebbe was extremely precise in the *nikkud* of every word. However, this was especially hard to maintain, magnified by the complicated printing process of the time. Already in the time of the Maharil, when asked about *diyukim* in *nikkud* and such, he responded, "I am unable to answer you, as not all editions are similar."²⁹

When compiling the *Siddur Torah Ohr*, Harav Avrohom Dovid Lavut expended much energy to correct all the *nikkud*,



FIRST EDITION OF THE LUBAVITCHER MACHZOR PRINTED BY MERKOS IN 5709. THE SHAAR BLATT DESCRIBES THE NUSACH AS BEING “ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF CHASSIDIM WHO DAVEN WITH THE SIDDUR OF THE ARIZAL IN THE ALTER REBBE’S NUSACH.”

and his *Shaar Hakollel* has many examples where he points out the correct *nikkud* for a word. Harav Avrohom Chaim Na'eh published his edits to the Siddur Torah Ohr in *Kuntres Hasiddur*, noting places he disagreed with Harav Lavut.

On that note, it is worth quoting Harav Zevin’s words on how much weight Chabad Chassidim gave to even one small *nekuda* in the Alter Rebbe’s Siddur.³⁰

“Every word, letter, or punctuation mark—even the most minute point in this *siddur*—is a law that shall not be transgressed. For beyond clarifying and refining the text according to the intended *kavana* of the Arizal, he carefully considered the arrangement of words to establish [them] according to true grammatical precision.

“Chabad Chassidim, for example, would not say *‘mashiv haruach u’morid hageshem’* (with a *kamatz* under the

Gimmel), but rather *‘u’morid hageshem’* (with a *segol* under the Gimmel), because this is how it was printed in the Rebbe’s Siddur (in all other *siddurim*, *‘hagoshem’* is printed with a *kamatz*), not because the Rebbe explicitly wrote to read it with a *segol*, but because this is how the Gimmel is specifically vowelized in his *siddur*.

“And might this be a printing error? Absolutely not. The *siddur* was printed three times during the author’s lifetime, and on the margins of the *siddur* from which the author himself prayed, he marked and corrected everything he found requiring correction. His grandson, the Tzemach Tzedek, later transcribed these corrections to his *siddur*, and subsequently, Rabbi Lavut of Nikolayev printed them in the ‘Torah Ohr’ *siddur* (this edition is considered by Chassidim as the definitive, carefully corrected version of the Rebbe’s Siddur), and no correction regarding *‘hageshem’* appears there. This demonstrates that the *segol* is genuinely a *segol* and must not be altered. To such an extraordinary degree do Chabad Chassidim adhere to their authoritative *siddur*.”

The Siddur for Each of Us

These examples are but a drop in the ocean of the depth to be found in the Alter Rebbe’s Siddur—encompassing *Halacha*, *Kabbalah*, *Chassidus*, and *Dikduk*.

This depth and brilliance highlights the remarkable paradox of the Alter Rebbe’s *nusach*. While fully grasping the wisdom contained within requires years of intensive study and knowledge across a wide range of subjects, the Alter Rebbe specifically arranged the *siddur* in such a way that even someone who never studied these subjects can use it to daven in the best manner possible.

In a *hadran* delivered in 5704, the Rebbe stressed this point, saying it brought out the true greatness of the Alter Rebbe.

“Consider the extraordinary stature of the Alter Rebbe—we know absolutely nothing about it! And yet—and this is his true greatness—he was concerned for every single Jew, and did not include Hashem’s names with different *nekudos* [*al pi Kabbalah*]—because he was concerned that simple Jews *‘veln zich durch dem farshrekn’*—would become frightened by this!”³¹

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Despite the meticulous *diyuk* the Alter Rebbe invested in the *siddur*, there was one area he left open-ended, sparking significant debate.

In the original *siddur* published by the Alter Rebbe, there is a notable omission: the customary *selichos* recited on fast days, as well as the *piyutim* traditionally recited during the *Yomim Noraim*, are not included. Yet, the Alter Rebbe did not entirely ignore these sup-plications. In the *tefillos* of Yom Kippur, following the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Musaf* and the *Seder Avoda*, a brief note in parentheses states: “כאהל הנמתח כו' תמצא” — For the *piyut* “*K'ohel Hanimtach*” refer to the *machzor*.

In other words, the Alter Rebbe recognized the recitation of certain *piyutim* but chose not to include them in his *siddur*. This naturally raises the question: why did he omit them? And if there are additional *tefillos* beyond those printed in the *siddur*, what exactly does that encompass?

In *Sha'ar Hatefilla*, and later in *Sha'ar Hakollel*, Harav Lavut offered his explanation:³² “[The Alter Rebbe] also did not include in the *siddur* any section of davening in which he found no need to change anything, such as *selichos*, *pizmonim*, and *piyutim*. Those who wish to recite them according to their custom will find them in other *siddurim*. (This is contrary to the mistaken belief that anything omitted from the *siddur* should not be recited.) ... The takeaway from this is

that anything which is not universally obligatory—lacking a direct source in the Gemara, Zohar, or the writings of the Arizal, and instead rooted in individual customs—is not suited for a *siddur* intended for all.”

In other words, Harav Lavut explained that the *siddur* was intended to be universal, containing only *tefillos* that are an absolute *chiyuv*. For additional recitations tied to various *minhagim*, each person could—and indeed should—follow their community’s customs.

As proof, he pointed out the note in *Tefillas Yom Kippur* and further observed that at the end of the *Haggadah*, the Alter Rebbe wrote: “Those who have the custom to recite *pizmonim* should not interrupt with them between the *bracha* [at the conclusion of *Hallel*] and the *bracha* on the [fourth] cup.” This demonstrates that the Alter Rebbe acknowledged the recital of *pizmonim*, even if he did not include them in his *siddur*.

When the Rebbe Rashab received Harav Lavut’s *Siddur Torah Ohr* with the *Sha'arei Tefillah*, he sent him a letter³³ with several critiques. One of them addressed this topic.

“Regarding what you wrote about *selichos*, *piyutim*, and *pizmonim*: I heard from a reliable source who heard from the elder R’ Binyamin Chaim of Ladi (who remembers the [Alter] Rebbe and was seven years old at the time of his *histalkus*). He knows clearly that in the [Alter] Rebbe’s *beis knesses*, they did not recite *selichos* or the full *Avinu Malkeinu* on a *ta’anis tzibur*. According to my opinion, those *pizmonim* that were not included in the *siddur* should certainly not be recited.”

In contrast, Harav Lavut later took a starkly different position in *Sha'ar Hakollel*, in the section discussing *Pesach*. In *Shulchan Aruch*, the Alter Rebbe instructs to recite a section of the *Haggadah*, beginning from *avadim hayinu*, on *Shabbos Hagadol*. However, in his *siddur*, the Alter Rebbe does not mention this custom. From this omission, Harav Lavut extrapolated that the Alter Rebbe’s opinion was not to recite *avadim hayinu* on *Shabbos Hagadol*.

The Rebbe Rashab sharply disagreed with him on this point as well. During a *Shabbos* meal attended by Harav Yaakov Landa, who served as the *rav* of the



HARAV YAAKOV LANDAU, WHO SERVED AS RAV IN THE REBBE RASHAB’S CHATZER, AND LATER WENT ON TO SERVE AS CHIEF RABBI OF BNEI BRAK FOR OVER 50 YEARS.

Rebbe Rashab's *chatzer*, the Rebbe Rashab discussed various additions and omissions that had been made in the *Torah Ohr Siddur* by Harav Lavut, expressing his displeasure. He especially disapproved of the fact that Harav Lavut had included the *yehi ratzon* to be recited after the *Parshas Hanesi'im* in the month of Nissan.

When Harav Landa asked whether one should refrain from saying the *yehi ratzon*, the Rebbe responded: "Ah! Who says it?! Just because the Alter Rebbe did not include a note in the *siddur* stating, 'Up to here you recite on Shabbos HaGadol,' does that prove we shouldn't say *avadim hayinu* on Shabbos HaGadol? And just because it says, 'refer to the *machzor* for *K'mareh Kohen*,' does that mean one must say everything in the *machzor*? It's actually the opposite! On Shabbos HaGadol, *avadim hayinu* should indeed be recited, whereas the *Yehi Ratzon* should not be said!"³⁴

Nonetheless, the Rebbe, in *Hayom Yom*,³⁵ recorded the *minhag* to recite the *Yehi Ratzon*, writing: "After reciting the *Nesi'im*, the *Yehi Ratzon* printed in the *Siddur Torah Ohr* is recited, and the Kohanim and Levi'im also say it." After *Hayom Yom* was printed, Harav Landa wrote to the Rebbe to relate his

conversation with the Rebbe Rashab on the topic. The Rebbe responded³⁵: "All the practices that I printed in '*Hayom Yom*' were included according to the instructions of my father-in-law, the [Friediker] Rebbe. Before printing, they were again reviewed by him (and there were some that he ordered to omit, saying they were not instructions meant for the public)... We also saw, several times, my father-in-law, the Rebbe, reciting the '*Yehi Ratzon*'..."

Similarly, regarding *Selichos* and *Piyyutim* for the *Yomim Noraim*, the Rebbe recorded the Friediker Rebbe's instructions about which *Piyyutim* to recite on each date. These instructions were initially printed in appendices to the published booklets of the Friediker Rebbe's *Maamarim*. Later, *Kehos* produced dedicated *sifrei tefilla* compiling these specified *tefillos* and *piyyutim*—first publishing a *Machzor* for the *Yomim Noraim*, and subsequently a *Selichos*.

This explains why neither the *Machzor* nor the *Selichos* specify that they follow the Alter Rebbe's *nusach*, as no such *nusach* exists for these *tefillos*. Instead, they are described as being "*al pi minhag Chabad*," or "according to the custom of those who daven *nusach ha'arizal*."

1. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Tefilla, Perek 1, Halacha 1.
2. 33a.
3. Chiddushei Harashba, Brachos 11a.
4. Such as in *Shaar Hakavanos – Inyan Nusach Hatefilla*, p. 331, where Rav Chaim Vital writes, "And such is the *nusach* of the *Ashkenazim*."
5. *Shaar Hakollel* notes that the *nusach* of the *siddur* was not compiled by Rav Emanuel Chai, who only authored the commentary, which was then published with a *nusach* chosen by the printers.
6. The Rebbe referred to this *siddur* as "The most authoritative to determine the Arizal's *nusach*." [Toras Menachem 5742 vol. 2, p. 910.]
7. *Shaar Hakollel* (2019 edition), *Hakdama*, p. 16.
8. *Hasiddur*, p. 66.
9. *Reshima* of the Rebbe Rashab, printed in *Hasiddur*, p. 13.
10. Beis Rebbe section 1, p. 167, quoting the Tzemach Tzedek.
11. *Likkutei Dibburim* (2021 edition), vol. 4, p. 1379).
12. Page 18 in the 2019 edition.
13. <https://www.daat.ac.il/he-il/hasidut/toldot/plaaim.htm>
14. *Hasiddur*, p. 63.
15. Ibid.
16. *Piskei Hasiddur, Hakdama*. Printed in *Ketzos Hashulchan* vol. 7–9, p. 1515.
17. Ibid, p. 1516.
18. Edited by Rabbi Gedalia Oberlander and Rabbi Nochum Greenwald, and published by Heichal Menachem Monsey, Monsey, NY, 2003.
19. Vol. 1 published by Mayanotecha, Kfar Chabad, 2013. Vol. 2 published posthumously, Kfar Chabad 2021.
20. Published by Kehot, Brooklyn, NY, 2004.
21. See *Pesachim* 104a, and *Shulchan Aruch Harav Siman 473, se'if 9*.
22. See Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch Siman 59, se'if 6*.
23. Page 23.
24. *Sheeiris Yehuda* (2008 edition) *Orach Chaim, Siman Yud Tes*.
25. *Hagahos* printed in *Siddur Torah Ohr*, p. 482.
26. See *Torah Ohr*, 40c.
27. *Temunot Tehinot Tefilot Sefarad*. Venice, 1524. Incidentally, this was the edition of the *Siddur* that was used by the Arizal.
28. Printed in *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 10, p. 315.
29. *Hasiddur*, p. 35.
30. *Sofrim V'Seforim – Poskim, Perushim, Chiddushim*, p. 27.
31. *Hadran Al Hashas Chof Daled Teves 5704* (Kehot, Brooklyn, NY, 1994), p. 15.
32. *Shaar Hakollel, Hakdama*, p. 18.
33. Printed in *Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab* vol. 1, p. 17.
34. *Hasiddur*, p. 93.
35. *Hayom Yom*, Rosh Chodesh Nissan
35. *Igros Kodesh* vol 2, page 146.