

MARKED  
WITH THE  
BAAL  
SHEM  
TOV'S  
BLOOD  
& TEARS

The Baal Shem Tov's Siddur,  
the Crown Jewel of the  
Chabad Library



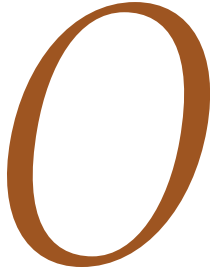


לעילוי נשמת  
שיינא גאלדא ע"ה  
בת יבלחט"א ר' מיכאל הלוי שיחי'  
גוטלייזער  
נלב"ע כ"ח אלול ה'תשע"ו  
ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'

נדפס ע"י זקניה  
הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאירי וזוגתו  
מרת לאה ומשפחתם שיחי'  
שפאלטר

### By: Motti Wilhelm

In preparing this article, we were greatly assisted by Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine's comprehensive articles on the siddur published in *Kfar Chabad* magazine. Special thanks to Rabbi Yisroel Barda for providing images of the Friediker Rebbe's *reshima* and to Rabbi Shmuel Super for directing us to the original newspaper articles about the siddur.



On Shabbos Parshas Balak 5745, during a *sicha* addressing the theft of *seforim* from the Lubavitch library, the Rebbe made a striking statement: “I am filled with awe and trepidation when it comes to the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur! Whatever the reason, the reality is that I feel a deep trepidation when it comes to the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur.”<sup>1</sup>

The siddur in question was a 496-page manuscript containing the *nusach hatefilah* and *kavanos ha’Arizal*, which was personally used by the Baal Shem Tov for years. Among its pages are the names of his *talmidim*, inscribed in their holy handwriting, for their Rebbe to remember them during *davening*. The siddur bears marks of the Baal Shem Tov’s own tears—some mixed with blood—and includes a number of corrections made by his hand.

After the Baal Shem Tov’s *histalkus*, this holy siddur was passed down through his descendants before becoming part of the extensive library of Lubavitch. However, the exact path of transmission remains shrouded in mystery. The details of the siddur itself—its contents and characteristics—were closely guarded and only came to light in recent times.



The Baal Shem Tov’s siddur first came to public attention in 5661, when historian and author Avraham Kahana published his book *Rebbe Yisroel Baal Shem Tov* in Zhitomir, Ukraine. While preparing the book, Kahana reached out to Rabbi Yitzchak Lipson, a wealthy chossid from Kaminitz, who had the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur in his possession. Rabbi Yitzchak corresponded with Kahana personally and later had his *melamed* exchange further details, providing valuable information about the siddur and the names of some of the *talmidim* inscribed in it.

In his book, Kahana wrote the following about the siddur, though some of the details were later discovered to be inaccurate:

“The Baal Shem Tov had a beautiful siddur written on parchment by his brother-in-law, Reb Avraham Gershon. Without a doubt, this siddur came into the Baal Shem Tov’s possession after his brother-in-law underwent a transformation—from a critic who was distant to an enthusiastic follower. He gave it as a gift to atone for the disrespect he had once shown toward the Baal Shem Tov’s teachings. It is also possible that the siddur was written specifically for the founder of Chassidus. Supporting this theory is the unique arrangement of *Shemoneh Esrei*: in the *bracha* ‘*Boneh Yerushalayim*,’ the writing stops in the middle of the page, leaving not only half of it blank but also two entire pages following it. The *bracha* ‘*Es Tzemach*

*Dovid*’ resumes on the fourth page.

“These blank pages served a purpose—they became a means for the Baal Shem Tov’s *talmidim* and closest followers to forge a connection with their Rebbe. Over time, these empty spaces were filled with various requests, written and signed by his students and other prominent individuals, asking the Baal Shem Tov to remember them for blessing in his *tefillos*.

“The siddur is currently in the possession of Rabbi Yitzchak Lipson of Kaminitz, a devout chossid, who kindly shared with me some valuable details about this significant artifact. According to tradition, the handwriting is that of Reb Avraham Gershon of Kitov. However, the first pages, until ‘*Hodu*,’ were added later by Reb Nachman of Horodenka, after the original pages, written by Reb Avraham Gershon, were destroyed in a fire. The main text is written in Ashuri script, while the *kavanos* are inscribed around it in Rashi script.

“In the *tefillos* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and in the *tekios*, stains from tears mixed with blood can be found. The *shinuyei nusach* (textual variations) are few—for example, in *birchas hamazon* for Shabbos, it says: ‘*Liyadecha hamelei’ah hapesuchah hagedushah*’ (‘to Your full, open, and overflowing hand’) instead of ‘*hakedoshah*’ (‘holy hand’).”<sup>2</sup>

How did the siddur make its way from the Baal Shem Tov to Reb Yitzchok Lipson? Different traditions offer varying accounts. Historian and scholar Rabbi Yehoshua Mondshine, in a series of articles on the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur,<sup>3</sup> documented three versions.

According to the first account, the siddur was inherited by the Baal Shem Tov’s grandson, Harav Yisroel, son of the *tzaddik* Harav Tzvi, the Baal Shem Tov’s only son.

During one of his journeys, Reb Yisroel stopped in the village of Yarivitch (modern-day Yurovichi, Belarus), where he fell ill and sensed that his passing was near. Reb Yisroel informed the townspeople that he possessed a siddur from the Baal Shem Tov and was bequeathing it to Harav Mordechai of Chernobyl, with whom he was very close. He instructed the townspeople to send Reb Mordechai the siddur immediately after his passing. Following Reb Yisroel’s passing, representatives of the community traveled to Chernobyl and informed Reb Mordechai about the siddur. They agreed to give it to him on the condition that he visit their town for Shabbos. Reb Mordechai accepted the invitation, and upon his arrival, the townspeople fulfilled their promise and handed him the siddur.

A second tradition places the siddur in the hands of Harav Moshe Tzvi of Savran, a *talmid* of Harav Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev and Harav Boruch of Mezhibuzh,

and the second rebbe in the Savran dynasty. However, neither of these traditions would explain how the siddur subsequently made its way to Reb Yitzchok Lipson.

The third tradition is based on a document issued by a *beis din* regarding the division of the inheritance of Harav Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov, author of the renowned Chassidic work *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, and grandson of the Baal Shem Tov through his daughter, Rebbetzin Odel.

Among the items divided was a siddur attributed to the Baal Shem Tov. The document states:

“Concerning the estate left by the deceased, the distinguished *bnon shel kdoshim*, our teacher Harav Moshe Chaim Ephraim z”l, and his son, our teacher Harav Yaakov Yechiel z”l: Their heirs selected us, the undersigned, to mediate between them... This is what we, the undersigned, have determined through mediation according to our judgment: [The siddur of the Baal Shem Tov], as well as the remaining Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, and also the *seforim*... belong to the maiden, Ms. Devorah Rachel, may she live...

“And as testimony, we hereby sign on Sunday, the tenth day of the month of Kislev, 5614...”

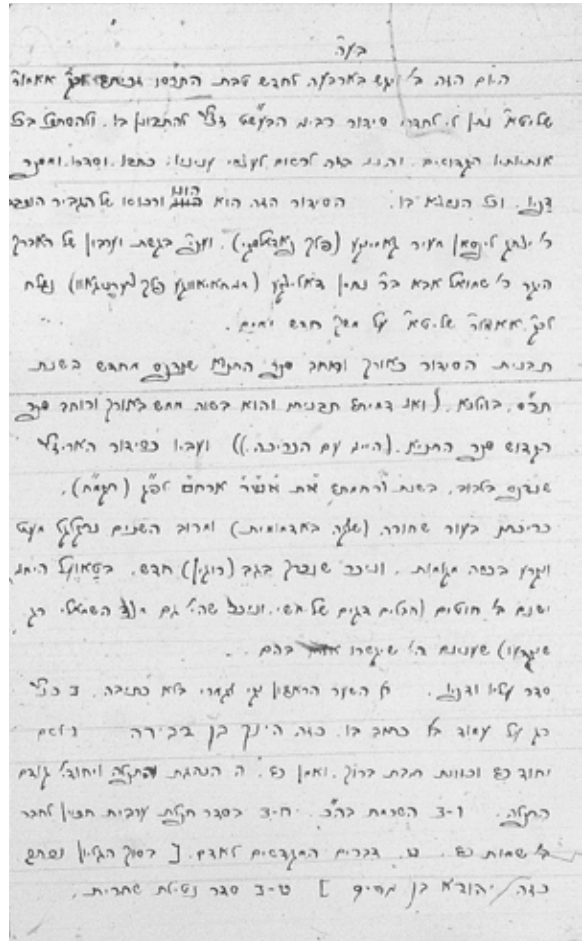
In his article, Rabbi Mondshine provides several reasons why this tradition best matches the siddur in question:

First, there’s a clear link between the siddur owned by Reb Yitzchok Lipson and the *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*: When the Frierdiker Rebbe visited Reb Yitzchok to see the siddur, he noted that Reb Yitzchok also owned the Degel Machaneh Ephraim’s tefillin—the same tefillin mentioned in the inheritance document. Second, Reb Yitzchok’s wife was named Devorah Rachel, matching the name of the young woman in the document. The timing also aligns—she would have been the right age to be the maiden mentioned in the ruling.

## The Rabbeim See the Siddur

Some time after the siddur came into Reb Yitzchok’s possession, before it had become public knowledge with the publication of *Rebbe Yisroel Baal Shem Tov*, select individuals were granted access to the sacred siddur. Among them was the Frierdiker Rebbe, then *menahel* of Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch.

In 5666, when the Frierdiker Rebbe saw the siddur for the third time, he wrote a detailed *reshima* with details of the siddur, and also recorded the previous times he had seen it.<sup>4</sup>



FIRST PAGE OF THE FRIERDIKER REBBE’S RESHIMA ABOUT THE BAAL SHEM TOV’S SIDDIR.

“I am now seeing this siddur, thank G-d, for the third time,” the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote. “My first viewing was in 5660, when traveling back from Kishinev. I stopped in Kaminka and saw the siddur there with Rabbi Y.L. mentioned above (the owner of the siddur).”

He also recorded a miraculous occurrence associated with the siddur, one whose aftermath he had personally witnessed.

“The second time was when I attended a wedding there in 5661. I arrived on Wednesday morning and saw that Reb Y.’s house had burned down, *rachmana litzlan*. Only a small house remained. They told me that one night, due to some cause, a fire had started in one of the houses near Reb Y.’s, and since he wasn’t home at the time, his house burned down too. However, the room where the siddur was kept was completely spared. I, the writer, can testify that I was there myself and saw the room that remained intact—even the ceiling plaster wasn’t singed. This room remained perfectly whole, while the entire house and all the neighboring houses were completely burned. I saw this with my own eyes.

<sup>4</sup> 5614-1853, 5666-1906, 5660-1900, 5661-1901

“The items in Reb Y’s possession include the siddur of the Baal Shem Tov z”l, a cloth belt, and an amulet said to help with three things: first, for difficult childbirth; second, for the disease of scarlet fever r”l; the third I don’t remember. I believe he doesn’t know either.

“Besides these, he also has the tefillin of the Baal Shem Tov’s grandson, Harav Ephraim of Sudilkov, the author of *Degel Machaneh Efraim*.”

In 5666, Reb Yitzchok sent the siddur to the Rebbe Rashab as a loan for one month. The Frierdiker Rebbe described the arrangement as being “at the request and with the security deposit of the esteemed *avrech*, Reb Shmuel Abba, son of Reb Nachman Dolitzky.”<sup>5</sup>

Reb Shmuel Abba was a prominent Chabad philanthropist and a leader of the Chabad community in Odessa. After the Communist Revolution, he became one of the primary supporters of the underground yeshiva network in Soviet Russia. Tragically, in 5698, he was executed by Soviet authorities on charges of “counter-revolutionary activities.”

When the siddur arrived in Lubavitch, the Rebbe Rashab allowed the *bochurim* of Tomchei Tmimim to briefly view it. Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Perlow, then a student at the yeshiva, recorded his memories of the event in *Likkutei Sippurim*, his collection of stories:<sup>6</sup>

“The siddur was sent by mail, and to retrieve it from the post office, [the Rebbe Rashab] specifically sent his *meshores*, Reb Nachman HaKohen, even though he was not ordinarily responsible for collecting packages. He also instructed him to immerse himself in the *mikvah* beforehand.

“On Asara B’Teves, around midday, Reb Shmuel Katzman (who was then a yeshiva student) suddenly entered and announced, in the name of the Rebbe’s son [the Frierdiker Rebbe], that anyone who wished to see the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur should immerse in the *mikvah*, after which the siddur would be shown to everyone.

“Naturally, everyone went to the *mikvah*. I, the writer, did so as well and merited to see it. The siddur was entirely handwritten. In one place, it bore tear stains that appeared to be blood. In the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, the names of [the Baal Shem Tov’s] disciples were included, along with their mothers’ names.

“I don’t recall the details clearly, as he wanted everyone to have the opportunity to see it. Groups of three or four, no more than five, were allowed in at a time, and we were permitted to stay for only a brief moment.”

A few days before allowing the bochurim to see the siddur, the Rebbe Rashab entrusted it to the Frierdiker Rebbe, instructing him, as the Frierdiker Rebbe described, “to study it and carefully examine all its sacred letters.”<sup>7</sup>

Immediately upon handling the siddur, the Frierdiker Rebbe noticed something extraordinary about it.

“On Monday, when I took the siddur, I noticed a pleasant fragrance coming from it, and especially the second time—that is, on Wednesday—I paid particular attention to this. Indeed, a sweet fragrance was emanating from it, like the scent of perfume. Several people came to see it, and they were all amazed by this...

“At night, when I returned the siddur to my father, the Rebbe *shlita*, and told him about this, he told me that he too had sensed this, though only slightly (this is because my father, the Rebbe, suffers from an inability to smell, even strong scents—yet he was able to smell this...), and that it wasn’t very strong. But we could smell the fragrance quite clearly, [to us it smelled] strong. It was truly like the scent of perfume.”<sup>8</sup>

On this occasion, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote a lengthy, twenty-page *reshima* detailing the features and characteristics of the siddur.

“I hereby record for myself its contents, its script, its arrangement, the number of its pages, and everything found within it,” he began.

The Frierdiker Rebbe began by documenting the dimensions and physical characteristics of the siddur:

“The format of the siddur matches the length and width of the *Tanya* printed in Vilna in 5660. (I compared its dimensions and found that they were precisely the same as the holy *sefer Tanya*—including the cover.) Its thickness was similar to that of the *siddur HaArizal* printed in Lvov in the year 5548.

“Its binding was made of black leather with a reddish tint. Due to its age, the binding had deteriorated somewhat and was torn in several places. It was evident that it had been rebound with a newer spine. On the right flap of the cover were two thin silk cords, and it appeared that there had originally been similar cords on the left flap, though they had since torn off. These cords were used to tie the book closed.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe then provided a detailed listing, page by page, of where each *tefilla* appears and the location of each signature by the Baal Shem Tov’s disciples. On the 64th folio of the siddur, where the *bracha* of *Al HaTzadikim* is found, the Frierdiker Rebbe notes:

“This *bracha* ends mid-page, a little less than half of the upper part of the page. A blank space was left, within which several *pidyonos* were written by great and renowned tzaddikim.”

Some of these *pidyonos* consist solely of the names of the *talmidim* and their mothers’ names. Others are more detailed, such as: “To serve as a remembrance to pray for us: Dovid ben Devorah, my wife Feigel bas Yentel, my sons

Shmuel and Shneur, that Hashem strengthen our hearts to serve Him wholeheartedly, and that He take us speedily out of Exile and quickly bring us to the Holy Land.”

Another reads: “As a remembrance to pray for me, Yitzchak ben Esther, that my wife not suffer miscarriages.” Other requests include supplications such as “Hashem instill in our hearts the desire to serve Him” and “that He grant us righteous, living, and enduring offspring, who engage in Torah and mitzvos.”

After documenting all the signatures, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote extensive notes, delving into the identities of the signatories and the distinct styles of handwriting. The Frierdiker Rebbe even replicated the style of some of the signatures to later compare them with other *kisvei yad*.

Regarding one of the handwritten names, he wrote:

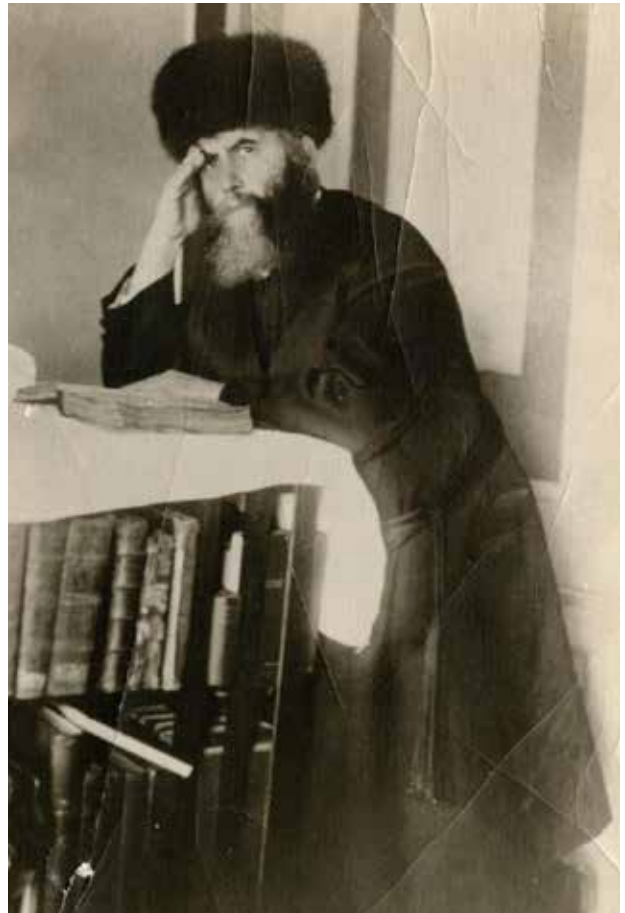
“The *lamed* letters are in the style of the Alter Rebbe’s holy handwriting. The *beis* letters resemble the writing of my grandfather, the Mittlerer Rebbe. It seems to me that this is the handwriting of the Maggid of Mezritch, though I cannot say this with certainty. Meaning, I know for certain that among the *pidyonos*, there is indeed the handwriting of the Maggid. However, I am uncertain if it is the signature ‘Dov ben Breina’ or the one signed ‘Dov ben Baila.’”

He also identified other *talmidim*, such as Harav Pinchos Koritzer, the *Degel Machaneh Efraim*, and the Baal Shem Tov’s son-in-law, husband of Rebbetzin Odel.

Regarding one of the signatures, the Frierdiker Rebbe writes: “This holy handwriting has extraordinary *chayus* shining in it. On the previous Monday night, when my father, the Rebbe *shlita*, looked at it, he remarked several times, ‘It seems that this was written by an elevated individual.’”

The Frierdiker Rebbe continues listing which *tefillos* appear on each page, interspersed with short notes, such as the following:

- *Mincha* of *Erev Shabbos*: “Here, many tearstains are noticeable.”
- *Birkas Hamazon* of *Shabbos*: “The words *hakedosha veharechava* in the weekday *Birkas Hamazon* are written as [*hakedosha veharechava*], while in the *Shabbos* version they appear as [*hagedusha veharechava*]. It is evident that the letter *beis* in *veharechava* was intentionally erased and replaced with a *vav*. In the margin, the letter *vav* is written, and it seems that this notation is in the Baal Shem Tov’s own holy handwriting.”
- *Nishmas*: “On this page, the paper is very dark—due to the abundance of tears and frequent handling by, undoubtedly, the Baal Shem Tov’s holy hand.”
- *Haggadah*, by *Maror*: “Here it is written as follows:



[*Vayevarech ve’achal beheseiba*], and it seems clear to me that this is in the holy handwriting of the Baal Shem Tov. I have copied the style of those letters here as accurately as I was able. In general, the handwriting strongly resembles the style of the letters of the Mittlerer Rebbe, as my father, the Rebbe *shlita*, remarked. This further confirms for me that these three words are indeed in the holy handwriting of the Baal Shem Tov.”

- *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Rosh Hashanah*: “On this page, at the bottom margin, there are two tear stains from the Baal Shem Tov, known as *die blutike treren* (the bloody tears).”

An intriguing detail, not explicitly mentioned in the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *reshima*, is that the *nusach hatefilah* in the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur is not *nusach Sefard*, which Chassidim later adopted for their *tefilos*. Instead, it follows *nusach Ashkenaz*. One striking example of this is the placement of *Baruch She’amar*, which appears in the original manuscript before *Hodu*.

This is particularly surprising in light of the Baal Shem

Tov's teaching, which explains "the reason we recite *Hodu* between the section of *korbanos* and *Pesukei Dezimra*, rather than including it within *Pesukei Dezimra* itself."<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Nosson Nota Donner, the compiler of *Baal Shem Tov Al Hatorah*, notes in his commentary *Be'er Mayim Chaim* that: "In the pamphlet *Beis Tzadikim* at the end of the book *Niflaos HaYehudi*, it is testified that in the Baal Shem Tov's siddur, *Baruch She'amar* appears before *Hodu*."

However, it should be noted that in the siddur, a note before *Baruch She'amar* states: "According to the *nusach* of the Arizal, *Baruch She'amar* belongs on the page preceding *Mizmor L'Todah*, as mentioned above [in the *kavanos* on the previous page]." This suggests that there is no definitive proof that the Baal Shem Tov davened according to the written *nusach* of the siddur. It is possible that he davened *nusach Sefard* while using the siddur as a reference for *kavanos*.

## The Siddur Reappears in Warsaw

Over the following years, the holy siddur remained in the care of Reb Yitzchok Lipson, who permitted select individuals to view it. Occasionally, he lent it to prominent Rebbes, including the Skverer Rebbe. Some accounts suggest that the siddur made a second journey to Lubavitch around the year 5672.<sup>10</sup> The Friediker Rebbe may have viewed it on another occasion as well, as evidenced by the Rebbe Rashab's letter to him dated 23 Adar I, 5668,<sup>11</sup> which stated: "You need to visit Kaminitz; you will surely see the Baal Shem Tov's siddur. It would be appropriate for you to document the locations where his handwritten notes appear. Additionally, please verify whether what we believe to be the handwritten notes of the Maggid of Mezritch are indeed accepted as authentic."

During this time, the Rebbe Rashab, along with other Rebbes, sought to purchase the siddur from Reb Yitzchok, but he refused to part with it. This detail was noted by Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Perlow, who described the siddur's time in Lubavitch:<sup>12</sup> "The Rebbe [Rashab] sought to purchase it for full price and offered him a large sum, but he absolutely refused."

A more detailed account was provided by Rabbi Nissan Telushkin, a prominent Lubavitcher *rav* who served in Belarus and later in the United States. Writing in *Der Morgen Journal* in 5694, he stated: "The Rebbe Rashab expressed at the time that if the siddur were to be sold and he had the means, he would give two thousand gold rubles for it. However, the owner absolutely refused to sell

it, rejecting all offers, including one from the Chortkover Rebbe, who also sought to acquire the siddur."<sup>13</sup>

Then came the First World War and the Communist Revolution in Russia. As the world plunged into upheaval, Russian Jews endured suffering under each successive regime, ultimately finding themselves isolated behind the Iron Curtain. During this turbulent period, the siddur vanished from public view.

Suddenly, in 5694, the Warsaw Yiddish Daily *Haynt* published an article with the headline "Major Chassidic Sensation Over a Baal Shem Tov Siddur in Warsaw," going on to describe that "The Lubavitcher Rebbe purchased it from the Baal Shem Tov's great-great-grandson for 1,500 dollars," and "Chassidim, *rabbanim*, and Rebbes come to



JEWISH NEWSPAPERS REPORT ON PEOPLE COMING TO SEE THE SIDDUR, INCLUDING A LENGTHY ARTICLE IN THE 'MORGAN JOURNAL' BY RABBI NISSAN TELUSHKIN.

see this rare siddur; they must first immerse in a *mikvah*.<sup>14</sup>

What had made the owner finally decide to sell? And why to the Frierdiker Rebbe?

Among some Chassidim, there was talk that it was actually a gift to the Rebbe Rashab, rather than a purchase of the Frierdiker Rebbe. As Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Perlow writes: “During the Revolution, the owner of the siddur was deeply concerned that it might fall into unworthy hands (perhaps a museum or similar institution), and therefore sent it as a gift to the Rebbe [Rashab]. This is what I heard, though I do not know the precise details of how it came to be once again in the Rebbe’s possession.”<sup>15</sup>

Other sources offer additional details, such as that the siddur was purchased for the Frierdiker Rebbe by a wealthy chossid, Reb Zalman Yitzchok Valshanik.<sup>16</sup> Another version suggests that the siddur was sold by the heirs of Reb Yitzchok Lipson after his passing. Reb Yitzchok had reportedly instructed his family to sell it within their own lineage—the Skverer dynasty—but when none of them could afford to buy it, they sold it to the Frierdiker Rebbe.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, an exchange of letters between Reb Yitzchok and the Frierdiker Rebbe was published, revealing the accurate details and timeline of the sale. In the first letter, dated *Erev Shabbos Kodesh Vayetzei*, 5688, Kishinev, Reb Yitzchok writes the following to the Frierdiker Rebbe:

“*Kvod Kedushaso* (your holiness) *Shlit”a* has known me for many years. Therefore I gather the courage to approach you with my plea and request:

“I am approaching 80 years of age, *Baruch Hashem*, and can no longer go out and engage in business dealings. For some time now... I have been left destitute and lacking everything in the fullest sense of the word, except for the holy siddur of the Baal Shem Tov, which *Kvod Kedushaso* has seen. This remains as my last remnant, and this is my portion from all my labor. Now, great necessity, *rachmana litzlan*, forces me to sell this holy siddur.

“Last year, Dr. Gorodetzky from Berlin offered me 1,500 dollars for it, and surely he would have increased the price had I entered into negotiations with him. But I refused for two reasons: First, I considered this sum far too low compared to the precious value of this holy object. Second, and more importantly, I wanted then, and continue to want the holy siddur—if Divine Providence has decreed that it leave my possession—to remain in a holy place.”<sup>18</sup>

He then offers the Frierdiker Rebbe, who had recently left the USSR following his release from Soviet prison, the opportunity to purchase the siddur for three thousand dollars, with an initial payment of one thousand or five hundred dollars, and the remaining balance to be paid in installments.

The Frierdiker Rebbe responded: “Regarding the holy siddur of the Baal Shem Tov, I must repeat what I already told your distinguished son-in-law, the esteemed Rabbi Solomon Zalman, that given my current circumstances, it would be extremely difficult for me to pay the price that would be asked for it, even if it were significantly reduced from what was mentioned in your letter. And despite how greatly I desire and long for this incredibly precious item, such an expense is simply impossible for me. I am deeply pained about this situation...”

Over the course of the following months, it seems that some arrangement was made, as later letters confirm ongoing correspondence between the Frierdiker Rebbe, Reb Yitzchok, and his children.

Later that year, Reb Yitzchok dictated a letter to send to Harav Avrohom Schneerson, the Frierdiker Rebbe’s father-in-law, in which he describes the decision to sell the siddur to the Frierdiker Rebbe.

“I wrote to [my daughter] that she should finalize the arrangements with your son-in-law, Reb Yosef Yitzchok *Shlita*. Firstly, because he has already put down some money towards purchasing the siddur, and secondly, because the siddur suits him, and he suits the siddur,” he writes.

After some additional delays and several payments made by the Frierdiker Rebbe, the siddur finally made its way to him some time between the end of 5688 and 5691.

Several years later, the Frierdiker Rebbe allowed the public to view the siddur, as reported in the aforementioned *Haynt* article, which continued: “Among the Warsaw Chassidim of various *shtibelach* and *batei midrashim*, there has been tremendous excitement in recent weeks...” The article describes how the Frierdiker Rebbe only allowed people to see the siddur after going to *mikvah*, and even instructed a Chassidishe Rebbe who had already been in *mikvah* on the day he visited to *toivel* again, “*lishma*, specifically to see the *ksav yad*.”

This “sensational” piece of news, as the *Haynt* described it, was picked up by other Jewish newspapers as well, including the Riga “*Frimorgen*”<sup>19</sup>; the New York *Der Morgen Journal*<sup>20</sup> who wrote that they received a special telegram from London with the news, *Haaretz* in Eretz Yisroel, and others. Rabbi Nissan Telushkin’s article, which provided more details about the siddur and the purchase, followed two months later.

A year or two later, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent the siddur to Łódź to the home of the renowned chossid Reb Zalman Schnnerson, in order to show it to people in exchange for a generous donation to the local Tomchei Tmimim.

Rabbi Volf Greenglass, then a *talmid* in Yeshiva, was one of the individuals who viewed the siddur at that time.

He later related: “There were several conditions for viewing the siddur. It could only be seen after immersion in the *mikvah*, and only one of Reb Zalman’s men was permitted to turn its pages and show it to visitors; they were not allowed to touch the siddur. I, too, was privileged to be among those who viewed the siddur. I had the opportunity to leaf through it from beginning to end and saw all the *chidushim* it contained.

“The siddur remained there for two weeks. At first, when it arrived, Reb Zalman secluded himself for several days, spending a few hours each day studying the siddur. On his face, one could clearly see a sense of seriousness and awe.”<sup>21</sup>

## Saved from the Fire

In Elul 5699, the Frierdiker Rebbe was residing in Otwock, Poland, when World War II erupted. As German forces intensified their aerial bombardment, he and his family relocated to Warsaw. His large collection of *seforim* and many precious *kisvei yad* remained behind, but the most valuable manuscripts, including the Baal Shem Tov’s

siddur, accompanied him.

Tishrei, 5700, was marked by constant peril. Warsaw endured relentless bombing campaigns that reduced large sections of the city to rubble, claiming countless lives. Throughout this period of upheaval, as the Frierdiker Rebbe and his family moved from one location to another, seeking safety from the aerial attacks, the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur remained by his side.

In his dramatic account of those days, Rabbi Yosef Weinberg describes how the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur remained at the Frierdiker Rebbe’s side during even the heaviest bombardments. He records that on Motzei Yom Kippur, another wave of bombing forced the Rebbe’s family and Chassidim to prepare for immediate escape.

“For about three-quarters of an hour, they sat like this in the hallway, dressed in their outer garments, each with a bundle ready in hand in case they needed to flee. Next to the stove stood the suitcase with the Rebbe’s *tallis* and *tefillin* and, among other things, the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur.”<sup>22</sup>

Six and a half weeks later, Rabbi Moshe Leib Rodshtein, who was then in Vilna and would later serve as the Frierdiker Rebbe’s *mazkir*, wrote a letter to another chossid. He detailed the Frierdiker Rebbe’s well-being and recounted how the holy siddur “never left the Rebbe’s hand,” even as other items were tragically lost to a fire.

“The library in Otwock remains intact, guarded to the best of his ability by one of *anash*. The three cases of precious *kesovim* that were brought to Warsaw are also safe. Among them is the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur, which never leaves the Rebbe’s hand.

“However, the rest of the household belongings—including clothing, valuable silver and gold items, cash, and even the Rebbe’s *tallis* and *tefillin*—were consumed by the fire. Tragically, some holy manuscripts and *reshimos* of incalculable value were also destroyed and are now lost forever...”<sup>23</sup>

The siddur traveled with the Frierdiker Rebbe throughout his rescue from war-torn Europe, one of the few cherished possessions he brought with him, until it reached New York.

## ”Do You Have a Gartel“?

After its arrival in New York, the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur was occasionally shown to individuals or the public. Rabbi J.J. Hecht related one such occasion, which occurred around 5707:

“I received a phone call from the Rebbe. He asked, ‘Did you go to the *mikvah* today?... Do you have a *gartel*?... Then please come here.’

“When I arrived at the Rebbe’s office, he explained:



RABBI MOSHE LEIB RODSHEIN’S LETTER DESCRIBING THE FRIERDIKER REBBE’S ESCAPE FROM WAR-TORN POLAND.

‘Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel wants to write a study on the Baal Shem Tov and has requested permission from the [Friediker] Rebbe to see the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur, particularly the page with the two drops of blood. ‘Normally,’ the Rebbe added, ‘I would never dare to approach or touch this siddur. However, since the Rebbe instructed me to take it out to show Professor Heschel, I want to give you the merit as well.’

“The Rebbe turned the pages of the siddur until he reached the page with the two drops of blood, and then he allowed me to hold the siddur and look at it,” Rabbi Hecht recalled.<sup>24</sup>

On another occasion, an announcement was made that anyone wishing to see the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur could do so, provided they immersed in the *mikvah* beforehand.<sup>25</sup>

At one point, the Rebbe reviewed the siddur and compiled a list comparing its *nusach* with that of other *siddurei Ha’Arizal*, including another siddur that some attribute to the Baal Shem Tov.<sup>26</sup>

Over the ten years that the Friediker Rebbe resided in America, the siddur remained constantly by his side, carefully stored in a suitcase directly behind his chair in his *yechidus* room. After his *histalkus*, the siddur stayed in its place, untouched and undisturbed. It only resurfaced in public attention during the *parshas haseforim* that unfolded in the events leading up to Hei Teves.

On Shabbos Parshas Balak 5745, the Rebbe spoke in length about the siddur, saying:

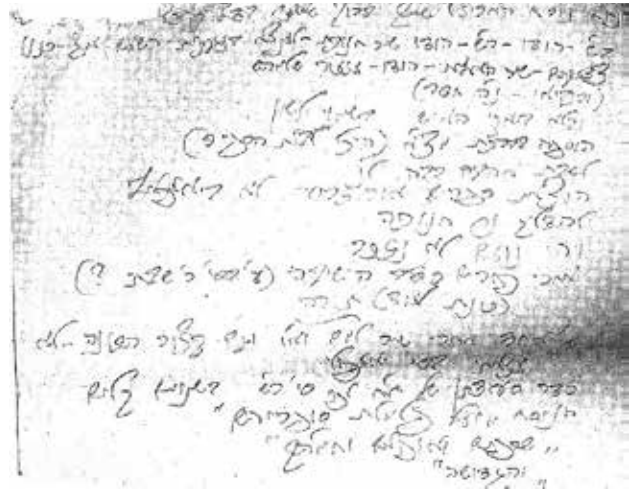
“Among the *seforim* in the possession of the [Friediker] Rebbe, there are many valuable and rare texts, both from the teachings of Chabad Chassidus and general Chassidus, including the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur.

“They set their sights on this siddur, devising schemes and strategies to remove it and take it away, *chas v’shalom*, from the Rebbe’s possession!

“The Rebbe did not allow anyone to approach or touch this holy siddur. On rare occasions, he would permit someone to kiss it, but only with appropriate preparation—such as immersion in a *mikvah*. Nevertheless, there are those who think of taking the siddur, *chas v’shalom*, from the Rebbe’s possession!

“...Why do I emphasize the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur? It is not because I wish to acquire it myself. On the contrary, I am filled with awe and trepidation when it comes to the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur! Whatever the reason, the reality is that I feel a deep trepidation when it comes to the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur, even when it comes to safeguarding it temporarily.

“...Let it be known that the Rebbe foresaw such potential schemes and took precautions. It seems that the Rebbe



THE REBBE’S NOTES ABOUT THE BAAL SHEM TOV’S SIDDIR.

anticipated the possibility of theft. For this reason, the Rebbe instructed me to create photographic reproductions of every single page of the siddur and to store these copies securely in a bank vault. This way, even if the siddur were stolen, no one could sell or distribute individual pages, as exact replicas exist for each one.”<sup>27</sup>

After the Rebbe’s victory, the siddur was placed in a safe in the library, where it remains to this day.

## For Everyone to See

Just three years ago, the story of the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur took an unexpected and remarkable turn. As part of the library’s effort to digitize and share its manuscripts and *kisvei yad kodesh*, a complete scan of the Baal Shem Tov’s siddur was made available online for public access. For the first time in history, anyone can view the siddur, including the signatures of the Baal Shem Tov’s *talmidim*, and see the handwriting, tears, and even blood of the Baal Shem Tov himself.

“We had many doubts about whether this was the right thing to do,” Rabbi Berel Levine, chief librarian of the Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad, shared at the time. Ultimately, the decision was guided by the precedent set by the Rebbe himself, who had approved sending photographs of the siddur to individuals who requested them. **T**



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DERHER.ORG/54987

# A GLIMPSE INTO THE SIDDUR.

LIBRARY OF AGUDAS CHASSIDEI CHABAD



LEATHERBOUND COVER.



THIS PAGE, AS WELL AS THE FOLLOWING FIVE, RIGHT AFTER THE BRACHA 'BONEH YERUSHALAYIM,' WERE DELIBERATELY LEFT BLANK FOR TALMIDIM TO WRITE DOWN THEIR NAMES AND REQUESTS



IN THE BRACHA OF 'RACHEM' IN THE BENCHING OF SHABBOS, THE WORD 'הַקְדוּשָׁה' APPEARS INSTEAD OF 'הַקְדוּשָׁה'.



PICTURED ARE WHAT APPEAR TO BE BLOODSTAINS ON THE SIDDUR'S PAGES.

1. Hashmata L'sichas Shabbos Parshas Balak 5745.
2. A. Kahana, Rebbi Yisroel Baal Shemtov (Zhitomir, 1901), pg. 80–83, reprinted by R. Yehoshua Mondshine in Kovetz Sifsei Tzadikim, vol. 7 (Yerushalayim, 1994), p. 72.
3. Published in Kfar Chabad Magazine, issues 906-910. Accessed December 30, 2024, at kramim.info.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Page 171.
7. Kfar Chabad Magazine, issue 908.
8. Ibid.
9. Baal Shem Tov Al Hatorah, Parshas Noach, *ois* 142.
10. Ki Karov Magazine, no. 90 (Shavuos, 2022), p. 5.
11. Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab, vol 4, p. 252.
12. Likkutei Sippurim, p. 171.
13. "Vegen dem Baal Shem Tov's siddur," Der Morgen Journal, March 20, 1934, 9, available at National Library of Israel Digital Collections.
14. "Groyse chassidische sensatsye mit a sidur fun bal-shem-tov vos gefint zich in varshe," Haynt (Warsaw), January 8, 1934, 7. Available at the National Library of Israel Digital Collections.
15. Likkutei Sippurim.
16. Rabbi Yehuda Chitrik, Reshimos Devarim, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: 1992), p. 76.
17. Rabbi Baruch Oberlander, Kovetz Sifsei Tzadikim, vol. 7, p. 90.
18. Kfar Chabad issue 910.
19. "Yidishe Naves" column, January 26, 1934, p. 1.
20. "Lubavitsher rebe handelt ein sider fun baal-shem-tov," January 11, 1934, p. 1.
21. Likkutei Sipurei Hisvaduyos (2011), p. 455.
22. Shemuos V'Sipurim, vol. 3 (Brooklyn, NY: 1990), 127.
23. Derech Tamim, no. 4 (Teves–Shevat 5777), p. 40.
24. Kfar Chabad magazine, no. 365, p. 19.
25. Reshimos Devorim, vol 4, p. 77.
26. Cf. Rabbis Levi Raskin and Boruch Oberlander, "He'aros C"K Admor MiLubavitch ZY"A al siddur HaBa'al Shem Tov 1-2," Heichal Menachem 11 (Tammuz 5765): 6-12.
27. Hashmata L'sichas Shabbos Parshas Balak 5745.