



# Principles

For the  
Observant Jew

[PrinciplesMagazine.com](http://PrinciplesMagazine.com)

**SPECIAL  
EDITION**

# The Deposition

**While in CZARIST PRISON for suspicions of TREASON, RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADY was required to submit a DEPOSITION explaining CHASSIDUS.**

**This FASCINATING HISTORICAL DOCUMENT lay untouched in GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES for centuries and is presented here FOR THE FIRST TIME in ENGLISH.**

**He** felt an ironclad-like hand landing on his shoulder as his arm reached to pick the yellowing crumbling file off the third shelf located on the far left corner of the large archive hall on the second floor of the Justice department building on a large avenue in the Russian capital of Petersburg.

Motke\*, as Reb Mordechai was fondly called, was the sole Shochet of the small Jewish community of Petersburg. As he turned around to face a grim gray-haired mustached officer, scenes from his life began to play themselves in his mind. "I'm not sure you're aware", said the officer, "what the consequences for stealing classified documents from a government archive is. A few years in a Siberian gulag is the minimum sentence."

The officer hasn't loosened his grip of Motke's shoulder; he actually tightened it further and continued with a deep, rough voice. "Who's operative are you? Who do you work for? For which government?" he demanded as his face intimidatingly closed in to Motkes'. "If you tell us,"

his vodka-laden breath reached Motke's nostrils and made him cringe, "you'll be doing yourself a big favor."

Motke didn't seem to have many other options.

Motke was a chassid of the R' Shmuel of Lubavitch. His Rebbe has recently sent him on a daring mission: With precise directions, down to the shelf number, he sent him to the attorney-general's archives to take the government correspondence and documents surrounding the 1799 arrest of his great-grandfather, R' Schneur Zalman of Liady, the Ba'al Hatanya. The Rebbe was detained by the Czarist government in response to a treason libel made by a radical faction of the party opposing the advent of the Chassidic movement which was sweeping Eastern-European Jewry in those years. A special commission questioned the Rebbe and found no ill-intention in his Rebbe's activities which were dedicated to nothing but strengthening the commitment of his followers to the traditional values of Judaism through fervent prayer.

Arguably the most important document in the entire file was the original deposition of the Rebbe in which he answered most of the twenty two points of contention was integrated on. The Rebbe requested that he be able to write these answers, since he felt he wouldn't be able to answer them sufficiently in Russian given their nature as central themes in Jewish philosophy. The deposition was sent to Vilna for translation (see p. 12) and upon its review by the commission he was released, an event celebrated to this day by Jews worldwide.

"The Rebbe of Lubavitch sent you?" said the officer as his grip on Motke's shoulder softened. "I never met him, but I knew his father, he was a holy man."

The officer let Motke go unharmed not before sharing his memories of the rabbinic conference called by the government in 1843 in which the third Rebbe of Chabad, R' Menachm Mendel of Lubavitch (the Tzemach Tzedek) took part. This grim officer was then a member of the security detail of Czar Nicholas who participated incognito in several sittings of the conference. He shared with Motke his deep impressions of the Rebbe's strong, fearless words when he felt that the government was attempting to get involved in the inner-settings of the Jewish communal life, a feat which put his life in peril for more than once.

Motke was spared but the documents remained in the archive. In the late 1980s, as the communist regime in the USSR began to fall apart, access was made possible to these files. We hereby present a free-translation of sections of the Alter Rebbe's written testimony, a historically valuable document by any standard which most importantly gives a glimpse into the inner *spiritual* life of the Jewish community in second half of the millennium.

The translation is supported by historical and linguistic notes which greatly lean on **Rabbi Yehoshua Mundshtein** a"h wonderful presentation of the arrest documents in *B'kerem Chabad*.

\* Name and descriptive details added for creative purposes, but the core of the tale itself is true and appears in Rshimos Devarim by Rabi Yehuda Chitrik.

**Translated by Levi Liberow**

As

has been made undoubtedly known, the Minsk local government has completed its investigation and it has been clarified that [the communities of the Chassidim] are of the one same Jewish religion and no new religion has been devised,<sup>1</sup> Heaven forbid. Yet in order to fulfill the request of the honored ministers to know the root and idea behind this concept [of the developing of the Chassidic "faction" within traditional Judaism] some elaboration will be of necessity, [for this] I beg the pardon of their abundant goodness and benevolence.

### **1. Jewish Divine service: study and prayer**

That which is called in our Russian language *Boga malizia* [=service to G-d], is divided among all of us Jews to two parts: the first being the reading and study of the scriptures, Talmud, Mi-drashim and their commentaries, as well as study of the *Poskim*

1. In order to understand the need to refute the branding of Chassidus as a new religion and why that would be such a grave crime, some of the inner dealings of the government at the time must be explained: The Russian Empire of 1799 was highly intimidated by the French revolution that just took place a few years before. The French revolution was largely headed by members of the Freemasonry society, and their ideology of "freedom, equality and fraternity" was the driving force of the revolution, which was in essence a revolution against the institution of monarchy.

This explains the hostility towards any new formation or group that veered of the beaten path of the ancient religions that were recognized by the imperial Russian government. Any hidden society was prone to persecution by the government and their leaders were often sentenced to slave labor in Siberia.

The leaders of the fanatical faction of the *Misnagdim* were well aware of this when they chose to present their slander to the government against the Chassidim, as they knew *precisely* what the severe repercussions to the Chassidism would be if their heinous plan would come through, Heaven forbid, and that's *precisely* what they wanted!

Indeed it was only a minute yet very powerful faction of the community that was responsible for this malevolent act, and as the Rebbe pointed out in his second interrogation, even *they* didn't dare to do this while the Vilna Gaon was among the living.

In the accompanying inter-government correspondence the Chassidim are likened to various conspiring societies that were popular in Europe of the time and were instrumental in orchestrating the French revolution: Deists (whose anti organized-religion views were problematic in dogmatic Russian-orthodox dominated Russia), Illuminati, or even the far left faction of the French revolution – the Martinists.

With this in mind, there is no ground for the ludicrous claim made by some historians that the *Misnagdim* weren't the first to expose the Jewish controversy to the authorities, rather they responded with this after the Chassidim of Vilna turned to the authorities to interfere in the internal power struggles in the Jewish community council of Vilna. How can these two be compared? One, even if it were an unjustified course of action, appeals the government to enforce measures of fair handling of communal funds and the other *asks the government to punish the Chassidic leaders for treason!*

[=legal codes] which summarize the laws of the Talmud and at times provide additional elucidation for those laws. Covering these topics we have several hundred titles published in every generation. To reach a complete understanding of this study one needs abundant wisdom.

The second aspect [of the Divine service] is the concept of prayer; anyone who has but a little knowledge and is even somewhat literate can pray properly and correctly with the intention of his heart. This is since the structure and theme of nearly the entire prayer is in essence an anthology of psalms and verses from the King David's book of Psalms and of other prophets, all singing praise to the living Creator [and describing] His great majesty and power over innumerable myriads of angles and over the heavenly spheres and that He gives them all life. [The prayers describe also] how all the heavenly hosts prostrate themselves before Him; upon the earth and bellow it as well there is nothing but Him; he [alone] appoints kings and the [true] authority is His.

We also make mention of the Creator's kindness to us by redeeming us from Egypt, and therefore, it is most befitting for us to love G-d with all our heart and soul from the depth of our heart, we must also therefore fear him and observe all the commandments He has given us, whether they command us to refrain from evil or to do good, [i.e.] to do that which is just in the eyes of G-d and man and to be good to all in general, and in particular to harbor good feelings and not to be ungrateful, Heaven forbid, to the one who provides with all forms of goodness and shields us under the shadow of his wings – the benevolent king, may his honor be exalted and his governance grow higher and higher. This too is the majesty of the Creator who is called "the supreme king of kings:" since just as the glory of a king is greater when



“Anyone who has but a little knowledge and is even somewhat literate can pray properly and correctly with the intention of his heart.”

he reigns over ministers than when he reigns over common folk, so too it is of great honor for the Creator to be titled "the king over kings." This is what we were commanded by our sages "to pray for the welfare of the kingdom" etc.

## **2. The challenges to proper prayer**

Praying with the aforementioned proper intent serves as a great support for a person to be able to overcome his evil inclination throughout the entire day, even after his prayers, [assisting him to] observe all the commandments of G-d, whether in refraining from evil or in doing good as mentioned above. This is since the memory of the prayer remains in his heart and mind during the entire day. Howev-

er, someone who doesn't pray with such intent, even if he studies the laws of the Talmud and other books the entire day, he may or may not observe what he studies and may come to occasionally transgress the commandments of G-d. But even if one never transgresses anything it is still improper that while he is speaking directly to G-d in second person, saying "blessed are You G-d" his thoughts wander to his business dealings and worldly matters. People tend to think extraneous thoughts also throughout the rest of the prayers [which aren't a *direct* form of speech to G-d], this is since the prayers are very long and they are written in a language that people are not accustomed to speak in the rest of the day.

## **3. The need to 'study' prayer**

Achieving proper intent during prayer must be taught by a wise and intelligent person. He needs to explain to every individual [seeking his guidance] in accordance with his intellectual capacity the meaning and intent of the prayers, the concepts of G-d's greatness and kindness and [how to generate] the concept of love towards Him. This is since the words of the prayers contain all the explanations in an extremely concise form as they were



“Unworthy rabbis arose in our midst that for a certain sum purchased or leased the rabbinate from the local ruler”. These rabbis, appointed by the nobles, [given the nature of their corrupt character] didn’t wish to trouble themselves to pray with intent,

written in the style of the prophets which spoke briefly and each sentence includes and contains many interpolations as those proficient in scripture know. Therefore those knowledgeable, known as rabbis, must teach and interpret to those who are ignorant. They also must offer them words of rebuke to awaken and subdue their hearts to G-d and in a heartfelt manner ask for forgiveness for their sins. [The

reason being why this is connected to prayer is] since the final part of the prayer, offered by all Jews, is requesting G-d’s mercy with regard to [forgiveness and atonement of] sins and also bequests for other needs of people such as health and livelihood. All these concepts [aren’t original teachings of these rabbis, rather they] appear in the Talmud and the Midrashim and their respective commentaries; it is only that not everyone is versed in these works and they must study from someone who is versed and understands [these texts].

#### **4. What study halls were originally built for**

The universal custom of Jews from days of yore was to have in every city two large houses of worship, a *beis knesses*, a synagogue, and a *beis hamidrash*, a house of study. The synagogue was used by the masses that were occupied with their businesses’ throughout the day, most of them being illiterate, and the study hall was used for educated people who would use it to pray intently and in length, each individual according to his mental and emotional capacity. It is clearly described in books written two hundred years prior to this date how people would extend their daily morning prayers to two and more hours due to the aforementioned lengthy [form of] intent-full prayer.

#### **5. The faults of the old rabbinic system**

After that, however, unworthy rabbis arose in our midst that for a certain sum purchased or leased the rabbinate from the local ruler in the entire Polish kingdom. [This became possible] since the king turned a blind eye [thus allowing] the nobles to give a charter called a *konsens* in return for financial lucre to the local rabbi of every city, giving him full authority over the Jews of his city with regard to any

religious matter. [This charter also gave the rabbi the authority to] also litigate in financial disputes according to his own discretion even if he wasn’t sufficiently proficient in the laws. Also [it dictated] that no one has permission to begin praying until the rabbi appeared at the synagogue or the study hall, even if he came at noon. The townspeople were forced to give the rabbi a *ksav rabbanus* [=rabbinical contract] by command of their governor.

#### **6. Rabbis to lazy to pray**

These rabbis, appointed by the nobles, [given the nature of their corrupt character] didn’t wish to trouble themselves to pray with the said intent, so in order not to be despised in the eyes of the people they began to demean the greatness of prayer and to uplift the status of Talmud study, by studying also during the time of prayer. They would pray speedily with no intent and immediately turn to study with their students the depth of the Talmud with astuteness to show off their wisdom and to gain fame in the land. All the other educated members of the study hall followed their example to pray swiftly with no intent, either out of fear or flattery of the rabbi, since he had full authority over the community. Just a select few in every generation [continued to] pray lengthily with intent. These people were always called Chassidism [=the pious ones].

#### **7. The law forbidding “bought for” rabbimates**

[This went on] until G-d bestowed his kindness upon us and aroused the spirit of the Czarina of Russia, may here honor be exalted,<sup>2</sup> to spread out and rule over

2. An alternative translation of this phrase may be “of the imperial Russian government” since the Czarina Ekaterina was no longer alive at the time this paper was written and the Rebbe uses a language of blessing that normally applies to a living

the country of Poland<sup>3</sup> and even before the last Polish king was appointed the authority of the said rabbis slowly began to drop and when the Polish kingdom was divided their authority was entirely relinquished, especially in Belorussia where an sharply [worded] ukaz [=ordinance] was issued to nullify the office of these rabbis [and making it illegal] to purchase the rabbinate from the governors. Then the entire [Jewish] nation became free in our country Russia and anyone in our country is permitted and is able to pray as long as he wishes, privately or communally, at a study hall or elsewhere, with no objection [by anyone] in our country.

### 8. Gestures during prayer

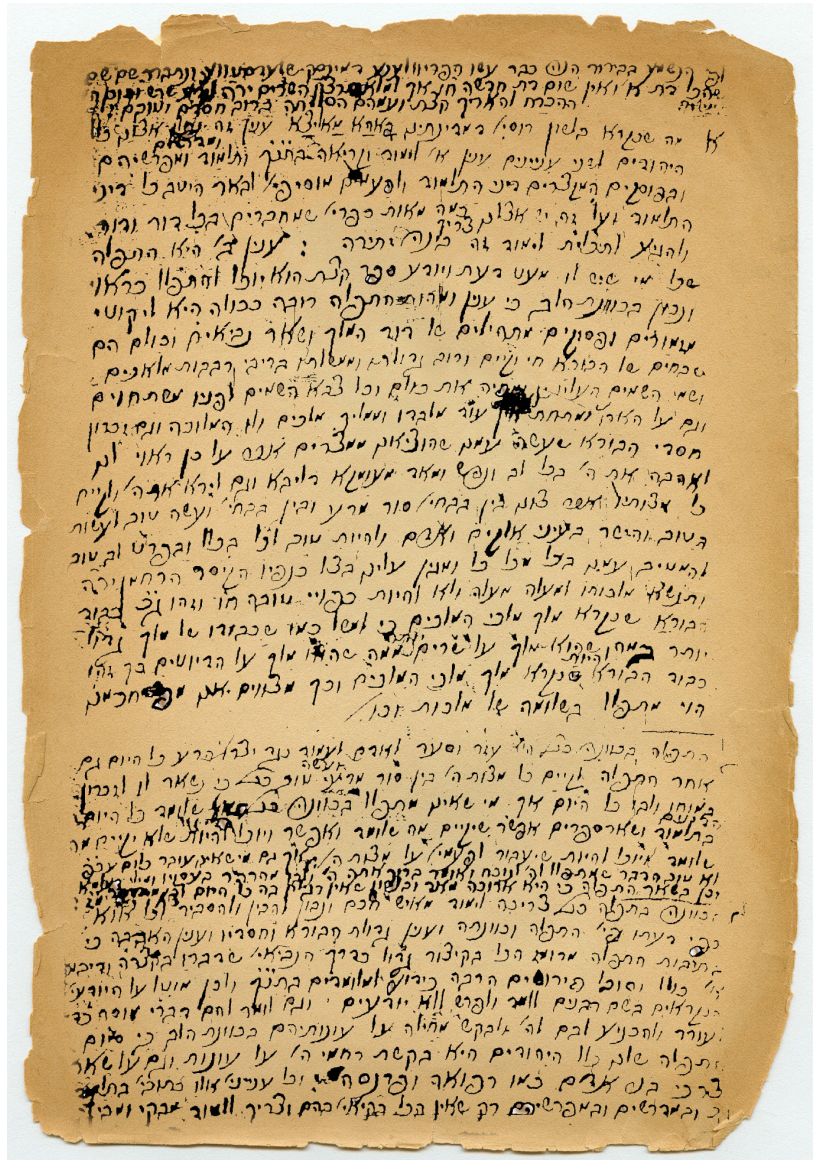
The aforementioned recent arousal to pray with intent is something that in various towns, also youngsters -- men under the age of twenty five -- practice. [The reason being,] since these young men are supported by their fathers and have no worries [of obtaining a livelihood] at all; they are also still involved in their studies and are un-engaged in worldly matters. The older men experience hardship to pray with intent, since they are engaged in [their] businesses and in worldly affairs, and they only do so on Shabbat, holidays and when [they happen to be] free on weekdays.

When praying intently, these young men -- as well as very few of the older people -- sometimes make strange unintended hand or leg gestures due to the hot-blooded nature of youth. [The reason for this is evident even] regarding worldly affairs: just like when one speaks emotionally he makes gestures with his hands and legs, each according to his nature, like how people tend to clap their hands when angry or happy, so too with regard to prayer, just in a slightly different style.

These gestures prompted some of our antagonists to proclaim: "Behold! Here are new practices which our ancestors never intended!" The truth however is that this is nothing new at all, whenever people prayed intently [they made gestures] as is written (in Nechemiah ch. 8) "the entire nation proclaimed "Amen! Amen!"

monarch. The word in the original - "קיסרית" - can translate as 'queen' as well as 'government.'

3. In the mid-1700s, Russia's neighboring state, Poland, was entirely dependent on Russian influence. In fact, the last Polish king, Stanislaw August Poniatovsky was appointed after meddling by Czarina Ekaterina "the great" in 1764. Over 1772-3 Poland ceased to exist as a sovereign power and large portions of its territory were annexed to Russia. Even before the demise of Poland, in the same year Poniatovsky was crowned, the *Seim* (the Polish parliament) decided to dismantle the *Voivod Arbatos*, a Jewish council overseeing Jewish communities of four regions in Poland as well as the *kehilos*, the local community councils. Until then, these councils had certain government sanctioned authority over the Jews of Poland. As described inside, this gave way for corrupt people to obtain authority over local Jewish communities.



First page of the deposition (Photo composition by Principles Magazine)

while lifting their hands up," [this hand gesture was obviously was due to] their hearts intent. King David too would "leap and jump" etc.

Were this [a sign indicating the formation of] a new religion, all would make identical gestures. [The fact is however that they don't make identical gestures] and many don't make any gestures at all!

### 9. The source of the title "Chassidim"

A famous fact applying to all faiths in the world is that not all members of the faith will be equally observant in heeding to the laws of the faith scrupulously and doing so with full devotion. The same is true with us; even after we became free from the said [corrupt] rabbis, still, many people who have the ability to pray intently and yet they refuse to do so out of laziness. Even great scholars must toil greatly for this, more than the work they must invest in their Talmudic

studies; some are also ashamed to make the gestures needed to banish the extraneous thoughts the inadvertently appear [in one's mind].

Therefore, those who trouble themselves to pray intently -- whether young or old -- are a minute fraction compared to the people at large. The simple-folk of all the provinces of Belorussia, Poland and of most of Lithuania call them [out of honor] Chassidim [–“the pious ones”], after the Chassidim of yore which would pray intently as described above, although those of nowadays are not as great Chassidism as the early ones.

### 10. The absurdity of the “new religion” allegation

Only the people of Vilna and those attached to them call them by a different [derogatory] title, *Karliner* instead of Chassidim. This is due to hatred and jealousy, for they do not wish to bother themselves to pray in length and with proper intent out of laziness, and [at the same time] it is below their dignity that the simple-folk will say that they are idle in their Divine service, especially since they had a great rabbi. So they chose to libel against those who pray with intent [including spreading] blatant lies [such as that] young men steal money from their fathers and bring it to their rabbis, and that their rabbis accept [these funds] from them, Heaven forbid even mentioning such a thing! This is something known to be untrue by all our Jewish brethren in Belorussia and Poland. The rest of their statements are also false rumors [circulated] by a gang of liars, all who have no support whatsoever by eye witnesses.

Since they themselves know that their claims are false, they cover-up for themselves [by inventing a new lie] – saying that [we have created] a new religion, G-d forbid even such a reference! This all has been stirred up lately due to inner-fighting amongst their leaders who were forever known to be quarrelsome men. Even in Vilna alone, the majority of the townspeople are in good terms with us but they fear to make their opinion known because of the leaders who rule the people with an iron fist and authority they have taken for themselves [during the reign] of the Polish government.

### 11. Various classes of *Maggidim*

It is common practice from days of yore [in the Jewish communities] throughout Poland, Lithuania and Russia to appoint an individual called a *maggid*

[=preacher] in every town and city. His role is to preach what in your language [Polish] is called *Kazanie* [= a sermon] to the simple-folk in the city synagogue every Shabbat or every other Shabbat. These days, due to [financial] hardships their numbers have decreased, but still many locations employ a *maggid*. Now, not all *maggidim* are of equal stature and there many levels of *maggidim*; a *maggid* who preaches very well is appointed to a [preaching position] in a larger city, while one who isn't as skillful gets a position in a smaller town; although they all develop their ideas from the sacred texts which are available to all, the style of one *maggid's* sermons differs from the style of another's because not everyone's intellectual capacity is the same and not everyone oration skills are equal. Each preaches in accordance with his own level of understanding and his own public speaking skill; as I understand, the same is true with you[r preachers].

### 12. Where the *Maggidim* source their sermons from

This [process of choosing *maggidim* based on their skills] is precisely what happened to us: now that there has been a slight increase of those who are interested in praying intently as described above, and in

order to do so they need to hear words of inspiration on the topic of prayer and on the greatness of G-d and His kindness, there has [also] been a proliferation of other *maggidim* which our antagonists call “new rabbis,” while the truth is that there is nothing new that they invent, G-d forbid, and just like the “old” *maggidim*, they teach what they choose and anthologize from the sacred texts. They only appear as “new” to them in contrast to the “old” community-*maggidim* since the latter never preached about praying intently with a pure heart.

The ranks of these so-called “new” rabbis and *maggidim* also consist of many levels; each extracts from the sacred texts themes related to [proper] prayer, [including:] the greatness of G-d, love and fear of G-d and various elaborate interpretations of the liturgy text, all in accordance with his knowledge and understanding of the ancient works. No one rabbi is akin to another just as was the case with the community-appointed *maggidim*.

Although I'm not well acquainted with most of these so-called “new” rabbis, and with nearly none of those from Ukraine and Volhynia and other provinces and I

When the lion's  
saw Daniel's  
holiness they  
became peaceful,  
and the same  
is true with any  
beast which  
can tell if the  
man before him  
lives up to his  
human potential  
or is just a more

have never heard their sermons, still, it seems to me that their sermons are about purifying ones heart to G-d and towards fellow creatures just as are mine. But the *style* of our sermons, as well as our way of rabbinic conduct greatly differ from one another's and each acts as he understands and sees fit.

### 13.

Even amongst those who don't wish to pray at length or who don't have the time to do so, many nonetheless rather hear my sermons than the ones of the community-appointed *maggidim*. This is since all their ideas are included in my sermons, and [mine] include even more due to the intelligence and understanding that I gained from my contemplation into many ancient texts. Occasionally [I insert to my sermons] a few thoughts from works of *Kabbalah*, - those that can be explained to someone who has studied Kabbalistic texts.

Many others come to me to resolve their interpersonal financial matters and disputes since they prefer to avoid litigation; they rely on my honesty to strike a fair good-willed compromise between them but not using any force of law since I have no such authority. Legal authority regarding religious matters, -- sanctioned by his majesty the Czar -- over the [Jewish community], myself included, is reserved to the members of the *Kahal Gubersky* [=the regional Jewish community council, who have the legal authority to subpoena me to appear before them] if they would have found any wrong doing in me, Heaven forbid.

After I strike the compromise-deal between the parties concerned, they deposit into my hands blank checks signed by them for me to fill out with the consent of both parties over a certain time period agreed upon by them. Also a party I am required to return to him blank or filled checks trusts me because I am famously known by all in Belorussia, even among the gentiles and the officers, to be honest and trustworthy. I implore his benevolent majesty the Czar to conduct an investigation about me in Belorussia [to prove this].

### 14. The Rebbe's biography

Because all of this I earned the jealousy and unfounded hatred of some jealous people and they de-



Corridors of the jail in the Trubetsky bastion in Petersburg

“Although I’m not well acquainted with most of these so-called “new” rabbis . . it seems to me that their sermons are about purifying ones heart to G-d and towards fellow creatures

famed me with many incredible fabrications whose falsehood is known throughout the entire Belorussia, especially in Liozna and Vitebsk, the places where I was raised since my birth.

I was born in Liozna and resided there until the age of fifteen or sixteen years, I then married in Vitebsk and resided there for approximately seventeen years; I then relocated to Horodok for approximately two years and I reside in Liozna now for over fifteen years. All can attest and proclaim my innocence and my good-hearted conduct with G-d and my

fellow man; there is no dishonest emerging from my moth, Heaven forbid.

I cannot seem to understand what crime I committed that I was arrested and brought here [to Petersburg]; if it is concerning my sermons then [let it be known] that neither do I benefit from those who travel to me because they don't pay me even a cent when they come to our city. To the contrary, this [status] causes me great distress due to the jealousy [it stirs up], but what can I do that our religion mandates than anyone who is knowledgeable must teach those ones who don't know; this is precisely why *maggidim* are appointed in every town as I explained above and I too was appointed long ago as the *maggid* of the [Liozna] community as I mentioned earlier.

If his majesty the Czar suspects that perhaps we have devised a new religion, Heaven forbid, I beseech him then to instruct with his great goodness and kindness to conduct an investigation of the many wise and

clever Jews who have heard my sermons, and primarily the members of the regional Jewish community council who have been appointed with the permission of his majesty the Czar to supervise all matters retaining to the Jewish religion. They will all testify that the topic of my sermons is exclusively about purifying one's heart to serve G-d and [to be just] to his fellow creations, about refraining from evil and doing good and about observing the statutes of G-d [written] in our Torah which we have long obtained the permission to study and observe them through the benevolence of his majesty the Czar.

### **15. The “new” text (“nusach”) of the prayers**

Included in G-d's statutes as they appear in the scriptures and in the Talmud is the necessity of praying with intent. We [the Chassidim] pray the same liturgy that all Jews do and these texts are the bulk of the prayers that we say, only according to *Kabbalah* we occasionally add words and psalms and verses from *Tehillim* [to the chief text of the prayers]. This [in no way] could constitute devising a new religion, since in many countries these add-ons are said by *all* the Jews therein.

Since these addendums are not the core of the prayer, therefore every respective country and town has differing customs in regard to them; at times even within the same city some synagogues will add several psalms that other synagogues in the same city will not! Examples [of these varying customs of inclusions and omissions] are psalm 30 and 86, the portion regarding the offering of the incense and many others known to many Jews.

Why must I elaborate and inconvenience the honored ministers, while such prayer books [with the] addendum's taught by *Kabbalah* were printed twice in Amsterdam with approbations by the rabbis of Germany and Holland; twice in Zalakvo and once in Lemberg, approved for study and prayer by the rabbis of the Roman<sup>4</sup> empire.

But [to reiterate:] to us Jews these addendums are not the core of the prayers. What is of core importance

“Since these addendums are not the core of the prayer, therefore every respective country and town has differing customs in regard to them; at times even within the same city some synagogues will add several psalms that other synagogues in the same city will not”!

is the intent of the heart, for “the merciful one wishes to have the heart;” the foundation [to attain what is] man's purpose [in life] is to have a wholesome and truthful heart.

### **16. What is *Kabbalah*?**

Many books have been authored in every generation on the wisdom of the *Kabbalah*, since we have amongst us in every generation Kabbalists of the caliber worthy of writing and publishing such works. These texts are available to all Jews and I own them as well. However, it is famously known [concerning the pursuit of *Kabbalah*] that despite the fact that all this information is written in the books, a person must nonetheless begin his pursuit of this wisdom by studying under a designated teacher and then he can study the texts alone.

This same happened with me.

When I was approximately twenty years old --while residing in Vitebsk -- I traveled to Mezerich and I began to study *Kabbalah* under the tutelage of my master Rabbi [Dov]Ber, may his remembrance be for a blessing in the afterlife, (he has been departed for over twenty-five years now). Ever since [that period] I study alone from many great works authored by early and late Kabbalists as my intellect and understanding allows me. However, the vast majority of my sermons delivered to the common-folk are in simple style, developing [not esoteric-Kabbalistic ideas, rather themes] from the “revealed” [sections of the Torah] so all can understand them well.

It does occur from time to time however, that I will teach a light Kabbalistic idea which can be easily explained to and understood by someone who is somewhat versed in the more commonly-available Kabbalistic texts. I.e., ideas from the *Kabbalah* which can benefit the quest to love G-d, fear Him, observe His statues and pray intently from the depth of the heart.

Now while I don't know if it is of any relevance to the honored ministers, but I must say the truth as it is and reply to what the ministers have asked of me, [namely] ‘from who did I study [the content of] my sermons?’ – To that I answer: the bulk of my sermons are culled from what I have come to understand from various works, even the few Kabbalistic ideas which I teach coincidentally are those which appear in printed Kabbalistic works, but my initial training in *Kabbala*-study was from the said rabbi.

4. - A reference to the Astro-Hungarian government which saw itself as an heir to the “holy Roman empire of the Germanic nation.”





Cathedral of Peter-and-Paul in Petersburg. The Rebbe was held in a fortress in this complex.

## 17.

The wisdom of *Kabbalah* which I began to study under the said rabbi and thereafter myself directly from the texts consists of attaining knowledge of the ten *sefirot* and their names and how the Holy One, blessed is he, uses them to govern and generate life to the upper and lower worlds.

The texts associated to this study are: *Sha'are Orah*,<sup>5</sup> *Pardes Rimomim*,<sup>6</sup> *Shefa Tal*,<sup>7</sup> *Etz Chayim*<sup>8</sup> and many others related to these which I cannot carry all their details in my memory, besides for the famed book of *Zohar* which preceded all the work of the Kabbalists.

There is another thing which people mistaken for *Kabbala* and that is to make holy or unholy angles swear into performing some sort

5. R' Yosef Gikatilia; first printing: Rio De'Taranto, Italy 5359 (1559)

6. R' Moshe Kordevero; first printing: Saloniki, Greece 5344 (1584)

7. R' Shabtai Sheftil Horowitz; first printing: Hanau, Germany 5372 (1572)

8. R' Chayim Vital; first printing; Koretz, Poland 5542 (1782)

“The vast majority of my sermons delivered to the common-folk are in simple style, developing [not esoteric-Kabbalistic ideas, rather themes] from the “revealed” [sections of the Torah] so all can understand them well”.

of miracle. I have never seen any book on this and have never seen anyone preform this; all I have heard is that in the early generation this was performed and also the said rabbi knew nothing of this. Also, there is nothing in knowledge that can benefit Divine service.

## 18-19. Sources of income

*In these articles of the testimony, the alter Rebbe rejects the ludicrous claims that the Chassidic Rebbes enrich themselves by collecting “membership dues” from their followers, often stealing these funds from their fathers, wives or in-laws.*

*He refutes this by describing his sources of income (some taxed trade, a store*

*ran by his wife and a stipend by the Liozna community of a few Rubles weekly for his services as a maggid and rabbi) which account to a modest lifestyle at the very best, also as evident to his integrators by his simple style of clothing.*

*He declares that while sometimes in times of need private individuals send him funds voluntarily -- in accordance with the Jewish practice to support Torah scholars -- he never solicits them and gets “not even a stolen penny” from the young men supported by their fathers or in-laws, “if I truly wanted monies, I would have obtained great*

sums without the youngsters.”

He also explains that none of his out-of-town followers who come to hear his sermons are allowed to see him in private and must leave immediately after Shabbat. Only those with complicated Halachic questions or in need of settling a financial dispute are allowed in, and he accepts no money or gifts from them. Sometimes those who he helped with settlements send from their home unsolicited payment.

He ends that he has made a public announcement, that anyone who claims that their son, son-in-law or husband has stolen from them, shall receive double reimbursement if they declare that claim under oath in front of a Beth-Din (=Rabbinic court).

## **20-22. The funds for Jews in Israel**

In these articles the Alter Rebbe refutes yet another ridiculous claim of the informers: that he collects funds to send to the Turkish sultan who was at war at the time with the Russian Czar, a reference to the money collected and sent to support Jews living in Israel which happened to be under Ottoman rule then:

“There are for large Jewish communities in the land of Israel: Jerusalem, Teveria, Tzefat and Chevron, as well as several small Jewish villages. They all come from different lands and have no work or business dealings, they just pray and study. Their sole livelihood comes from contributions solicited by messengers from generous people. These messengers travel to many countries carrying letters of approbation signed from the great and famed rabbis of Israel who are known in the countries from which they relocated to Israel.”

The Rebbe explains why the support is given: “this has always been our custom and this is befitting us to support the needy of the land of Israel so they will pray there [in the Holy land] for the sake of all their brethren.”

ren.”

The Rebbe goes on to describe the common practice, in which the messenger comes to any given country and obtains a “letter of appeal” from the greatest, most respected local rabbi, after presenting the approbation by the rabbi from Israel. In this letter the local rabbi uses the best of his writing skills and knowledge of Torah to implore his fellow Jews to generously support their brethren in Israel by exalting this specific cause, since “all Jews, wherever they reside, pray and prostrate themselves to the direction of the land of Israel which is “the gate to Heaven.”

The Rebbe goes on to explain that this is a practice of all Jewish communities, as far as Germany and Holland,

“There are for large Jewish communities in the land of Israel ... They all come from different lands and have no work or business dealings, they just pray and study”.

and “therefore, also I haven’t refrained from writing an occasional appeal letter for the messenger from Israel who solicits in our country and its vicinity. [In the letter] I rouse mercy, favor and kindness for our brethren in Israel in the hearts of merciful generous individuals of our people. I don’t decree it upon them Heaven forbid, I just bequest and implore and he who wishes to heed will heed and he who wishes not to will not. I just make it known that our Torah commands us to do this and not to separate oneself from the community [by not contributing to this noble cause] especially since



A Peter and Paul fortress prison cell. In one of such the Alter Rebbe spent 53 days until he was miraculously released.



View of the Neva and Peter and Paul fortress. The Rebbe was transported over this river to his interrogations at the HQ of the Taine-Soviet ("the secret service")

many of us here in Belorussia and the surrounding areas have relatives in Israel<sup>9</sup> . . . which makes it an all but greater obligation to support them, as written is Isaiah "do not ignore your own flesh."

*The Rebbe ends with implying that this isn't a new practice instituted by the Chassidim:* "Even the people of Vilna send contributions to Israel like all their fellow Jews! ...I do not know in what way I have sinned and transgressed more than the other Jews who have done so from times of old, and still do so while resting assured on the kindness of his majesty the benevolent Czar ... if however this [practice] negates the will of the his majesty the Czar, I will surely and indefinitely never lift up my hand to write even a single iota of appeal from today onwards! As for the past, my trust in the kindness of his majesty the Czar is great for he is a forgiving man."

### 23.

*This last paragraph of the testimony addresses a tragic individual (called the Rabbi of Wolpe) who was formerly a student of the Maggid of Mezerich and was a man of great knowledge and great orating skills, but it seems he had a weakness for honor and money. When he didn't receive enough of it as he expected from Chassidic communities, he had a change of heart and assisted the Misnagdim in Vilna in their war on Chassidus, but there also he was disappointed for not getting ample reward for his services and ceased traveling there.*

9. - A reference the great Aliya of the Chassidim in ??? led by R' Mendel of Horodok and R' Avraham of Kalisk, primarily from the said regions.

*It also discusses ties of the alter Rebbe with the two great Rebbes of Karlin, R' Aharon and R' Shlomo<sup>10</sup>. The Rebbe responds to this inquiry by writing that "R' Aharon passed on more than twenty five years ago and so has R' Shlomo passed on a long time ago. I don't know why they are mentioned to me, I never spent time by them [i.e., I am not a disciple of theirs].*

*The Rebbe ends his testimony:*

The rest of the matters can be discussed in speech.  
Signed: **Zalman ben Baruch**

### Post Script

A short plea and request is presented before the ministers, may their honor grow higher and higher, that they conduct themselves with me with the attribute of kindness and mercy and instruct the translator [of this testimony] into the Russian language that before he submits the translation, the draft should be sent and read before me [for my approval], since slight grammatical changes may heaven forbid alter the meaning. I double my bequest.

10. Perhaps since the radical *Misnagdim* in all of their letters of to the government referred to the Chassidim *Karliniers*. The Chasidic center at Karlin was also one in the "Lithuanian" area which was the seat of the *Misnagdim's* leadership.

# The Spy in Vilna

As the end of the deposition suggests, the Rebbe requested that the translation be approved by him prior to being submitted to the royal commission investigating the case “since slight grammatical changes may heaven forbid alter the meaning.” The Rebbe has much reason to suspect this as his experience with the forged copies of the Tanya has shown to him. These forged manuscripts were a tactic employed by the radical *Misnagdim* to deplore the young Chasidic movement in the eyes of their fellow Jews by changing words and sentences to imply concepts negating the foundations of Judaism. In fact, this was the main reason the Rebbe agreed to have his work printed, so the handwritten forgeries can be disproven by an official printed version.

As the Rebbe rightfully suspected, such a scandalous attempt has in fact been made, and miraculously his foresight has prevented it from coming to fruition. The following tale, from *The Arrest and Liberation of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady* tells us the fascinating events surrounding the whereabouts of this dissertation:

A special man had been sent to Vilna by request of the Alter Rebbe [immediately following the arrest.] Arriving at his destination this man pretended to be a *Misnaged*, dwelt in the *Beis Hamidrash*, learning and listening to all that was spoken. He thus found out about the Rebbe’s writing that had been sent to Vilna for translation and now well understood the purpose of his mission.

Immediately he went to the translator’s home, and implored him to consider the lives of the Rebbe and his followers and to translate the writing properly, without adding, changing, or subtracting anything whatsoever. The governmental censor, whose task it was to translate the Rebbe’s writing, replied that the request not to change the translation from the original was rather

superfluous.

He explained that it was his duty and obligation to do his work honestly, regardless of any intervention, for he is under oath to the government to refrain from any falsehood. Furthermore, he contin-



“The synagogue yard” in Vilna

ued, the same papers were sent to another censor as well, and thus both translations have to coincide, which is possible only when both translators are honest. Also, the Rebbe’s words are so clear and self-explicit, that one couldn’t possibly feign misunderstanding of the original meaning.

“The rabbi is a holy man,” replied the emissary, “and as he sent me to you, I am sure that it was not in vain. Therefore I cannot leave you until you promise me by word of honor, that you will translate exactly as the rabbi wrote. Then, and only then, can I be satisfied and I will know that I carried out my mission.”

“That the rabbi is a holy man,” said the censor, “that I can note from these papers. To explain in Russian just one word of his, needs extensive elaboration. I give you my word of honor that my translation will be a faithful and correct one. Incidentally, it may interest you to know, that the rabbi’s enemies were here and urged me to translate according to their dictation, thus to assure his condemnation. I refused categorically, because truth is dearer to me than anything else. I told them to return tomorrow at noon. Come to me an hour earlier. I shall hide you in another room and you can hear what they wish to tell me.”

The emissary left and the next day, at eleven o’clock sharp, he returned to the censor’s house. For an hour he discussed the Reb-

be's greatness, piety, and nobility. About noon his host looked out of the window and said:

"Hurry into the adjacent room. The betrayers are coming."

He entered the other room and the censor locked the door. Shortly thereafter the emissary heard the betrayers entering. They informed the censor that they had brought with them a reward of three-thousand rubles, for the favor which he was to perform, in helping to eradicate "the evil from our midst." They explained that this money is but the fruit of such a good deed, while the principal reward would be secured for him in the world to come. "By removing from this world such a vicious enemy of Israel as that Chassidic rabbi is, you will surely acquire a great portion in the World-to-Come. Therefore," they argued, "you should alter the translation as we will direct you."

"How could I do such a thing?" asked the censor. "A copy of these writings was sent to another censor. When it will be revealed that I changed the meaning of the original, I will come to shame."

"Don't worry," they answered, "Hebrew is a very flexible language. Since you are the chief censor you

will be trusted more than the other one, and you can claim that you understood it better. Therefore, again, we ask you to take these 3,000 rubles and make the translation now. We will wait here so that we can see it with our own eyes." "I shall not take any money from you," the censor replied, "and I shall make a translation as you request. Tomorrow when it shall be completed you can send one of you to see that the translation will be as you requested, and even more severe.

"The betrayers left satisfied. The censor opened the door and the fearful emissary of the Chassidim entered crying and begging mercy for the Rebbe, his family and followers, asking nothing more than a faithful translation.

The censor reassured him that he will carry out his promise of yesterday: "If I had any other intentions I would not have invited you to come and hear that treacherous talk. As regards the World-to-Come, I believe that the reward for truth is surely greater.

"To rid himself of the *Misnagdim* he decided to make two translations: a true one to be sent to Petersburg, and a false one to show his would-be tempters, but not to

be sent. He promised to submit the true translation to his servant in the Chassid's presence, and he, the Chassid, could personally supervise the actual mailing of the document to Petersburg.

The next morning the censor showed him the exact translation. He had added his own notes expressing his opinion that not only is the Rebbe innocent but he is indeed a patriot deserving of honor from the government for teaching his Chassidim loyalty to Czar and country.

This document was sealed in an envelope and the Rebbe's messenger went along to the post and witnessed how the servant sent it away. He returned to the censor and thanked him profusely. He remained in Vilna for an additional short time. Whatever he heard and observed he reported back to R. Mordecai Liepler, until he heard rumors that the Rebbe was to be freed shortly. He hired a carriage and hurried to Petersburg to inform the Chassidim of the good news, and to relate how the Almighty had helped him carry out his mission in Vilna most successfully.



# What Are YOUR Principles?

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