

אוצרות יקרו

THE REBBE'S LIBRARY AND THE STORY OF HEI TEVES

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Jewish Educational Media
Kehot Publication Society
Kfar Chabad Magazine
Library of Agudas Chassidei Chabad
Vaad Hanachos B'Lahak

Special thanks to:
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Rabbi Michoel Seligson
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Published by **Vaad Talmidei Hatmimim Haolami**

784 Eastern Parkway Suite 400
Brooklyn, NY 11213 | 347-770-4275

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Over three years before Hei Teves, the Rebbe read a letter from the newly-printed volume of the Frierdiker Rebbe's Igros Kodesh, declaring that the seforim belong to Agudas Chassidei Chabad. These are the details behind that event and the letter the Rebbe read.

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After the Rebbe spoke about the theft of the seforim for the first time, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Levine wrote an article about the importance of the library in the Kfar Chabad Magazine, with the Rebbe's approval. It has been translated to English here for the first time.

Dear Bochurim,

In honor of the fortieth anniversary of Hei Teves, we are pleased to present **אוצרות יקרו**, the first in a new magazine series on the Rebbe's library and the story of Hei Teves.

On the second Shabbos following Hei Teves 5747, Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, the Rebbe addressed the recent trials.

> The entire emphasis must be placed on the elevation that results from the challenge, rather than on the challenge itself.
>
> Since a challenge has no real substance, nothing is gained by talking about it. On the contrary, by discussing it and treating it as something real, a person confuses himself and stimulates his Yetzer Hara.
>
> The true intent of the challenge is the elevation that it brings; in this case—the greater ability we now have to spread Torah and Yiddishkeit and to bring the wellsprings of Chassidus outward.

In light of the above, we have decided not to focus on the story of the trials and tribulations prior to Hei Teves. (Some details were included in the Background section of the Kovtzei Limmud that were distributed in connection to the Mivtza.) Instead, we have chosen to highlight some of the less familiar aspects of the story of Hei Teves, beginning with the library itself. In this issue, we revisit the years in which the Frierdiker Rebbe built the library and the efforts he made to preserve it.

May the joy of Hei Teves lead us to add in our study of the Torah of our Rebbeim and in Hafotzas Hamaayanos, bringing the teachings of Chassidus to wherever they have yet to reach. May we soon see merit to see the ultimate Didan Notzach, with the coming of Moshiach.

Vaad Talmidei Hatmimim Haolami

Foreword

The First Letter

On the night of Erev Rosh Hashanah, the Rebbe often held a farbrengen. Erev Rosh Hashanah 5744 was no different, but what was unusual was that the Rebbe came to the farbrengen with two new seforim in addition to his siddur. One was the Tzemach Tzedek's Ohr HaTorah on Maamarei Razal and Inyanim. The other was Chelek Hei of the Frierdiker Rebbe's Igros Kodesh. Both had just come from the bookbinder.

In the fourth sicha, the Rebbe pointed to the Hashgachah Pratis of the two seforim arriving that evening. Erev Rosh Hashanah is the Tzemach Tzedek's birthday, and the Rebbe began with Ohr HaTorah. The first perek of Tehillim opens with Ashrei Ha'ish and the second closes with Ashrei Kol Chosei Vo. The Gemara counts the two as one perek.

The Rebbe then opened the Igros Kodesh and read from the first entry.

The Frierdiker Rebbe wrote: "At the present time I have no place to live, and I am staying with friends — the entire family together in one room. Therefore, I have no place for the books which Agudas Chabad lent me... I would be happy if Agudas Chabad would take them back."

As the Rebbe began reading this letter, the lights in 770 went out, and for several moments the Shul was plunged into darkness.

When Germany invaded Poland in Elul 5699, the Frierdiker Rebbe, his family and his secretaries left Otwock for Warsaw. They took boxes of Kisvei Yad with them, and the library stayed in Otwock. A fire in Warsaw destroyed many of the belongings they had brought. The Rebbe, who was then in France, wrote to R. Yisrael Jacobson of Agudas Chassidei Chabad in New York that the Kisvei Yad had been saved from the fire and the library was still in Otwock.

R. Chaim Lieberman, the Frierdiker Rebbe's secretary and librarian, left Warsaw for Riga on Ches Tishrei 5700. In one of his first letters from there, he told R. Yisrael that it would take considerable effort to get permission to take the seforim out of Otwock. The immediate concern, he wrote, was saving the lives of the Frierdiker Rebbe and his family who were still in Warsaw.

On 15 Kislev, R. Chaim wrote again. The previous day, a letter had reached him directly from



Erev Rosh Hashanah 5744. The newly printed Ohr HaTorah and Igros Kodesh can be seen beneath the Rebbe's siddur.

the Frierdiker Rebbe in Warsaw. R. Chaim copied a few lines from the German. It is this letter that the Rebbe quoted.

At the farbrengen, the Rebbe explained why the Frierdiker Rebbe had written this way. The letter had to pass the Nazi censor, so he wrote in German and phrased his appeal as a request to return borrowed seforim. He was asking Agudas Chabad to rescue the seforim and Kisvei Yad along with him and his family.

R. Yisrael forwarded R. Chaim's letter to Yekusiel (Sam) Kramer, a Lubavitch activist and attorney, explaining that the Frierdiker Rebbe wanted the library taken out of Poland "as the property of Agudas Chabad." Kramer, who was already working on the Frierdiker Rebbe's escape, joined Washington lawyer Max Rhoade in asking the State Department to help ship the seforim from Otwock. The State Department asked for an affidavit showing that the books were American property and explaining how they had been acquired.

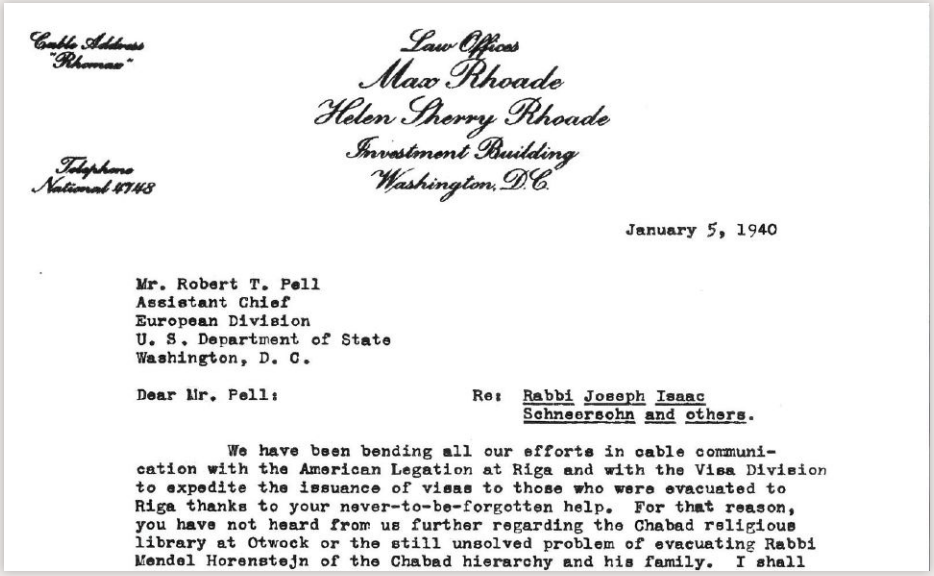
After reaching Riga in Teves, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote to R. Yisrael with more details. There were about 120 crates of seforim and three crates of the Rebbeim's Kisvei Yad. Most of the

collection was in Otwock, with a smaller part in Warsaw. He urged R. Yisrael to send a telegram to the American consul in Berlin, who could ask the consul in Warsaw to arrange for the crates to be sent directly to New York.

Much of the library was still in Poland when the Frierdiker Rebbe arrived in New York on Tes Adar Sheni 5700. The following year, his son-in-law R. Mendel Horenstein HYD arranged for part of the collection to be shipped from Otwock.

The Rebbe drew a lesson in achdus from the letter. He pointed to the whole family together in one room and to the name Agudas Chabad. An "agudah" is formed when people join together. Chabad points to the achdus a Yid can have with Hashem when he learns Chassidus until it enters his own intellect and becomes part of him.

It is fascinating to note that almost a full year and a half before the seforim began going missing, the Rebbe already publicly read this letter of the Frierdiker Rebbe – that was later used in court – declaring that the seforim belonged to Agudas Chassidei Chabad.



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January 5, 1940

Mr. Robert T. Pell
Assistant Chief
European Division
U. S. Department of State
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Pell: Re: Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneersohn and others.

We have been bending all our efforts in cable communication with the American Legation at Riga and with the Visa Division to expedite the issuance of visas to those who were evacuated to Riga thanks to your never-to-be-forgotten help. For that reason, you have not heard from us further regarding the Chabad religious library at Otwock or the still unsolved problem of evacuating Rabbi Mendel Horenstejn of the Chabad hierarchy and his family. I shall

In a letter dated January 5, 1940 (24 Teves 5700), attorney Max Rhoade writes to Robert T. Pell of the U.S. State Department about efforts to rescue the "Chabad Religious Library," which was still in Otwock.

A Library Worth Saving

After the Rebbe spoke about the library at the Farbrengens of Yud-Beis and Tes-Vov Tammuz and the Yechidus on Tes-Vov Tammuz, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Levine, the librarian of the Rebbe's library, wrote an article for the Kfar Chabad Magazine about how precious the library was to the Frierdiker Rebbe, to help give the public more of an understanding of the Rebbe's words.

On Chof Beis Tammuz, he submitted the article to the Rebbe, writing:

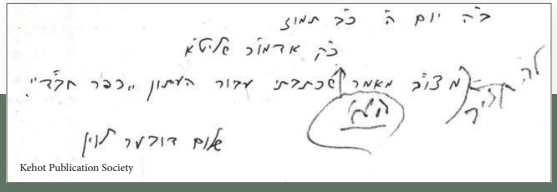
מצו"ב מאמר שכתבתי עבור העתון "כפר חב"ד".

"Enclosed is an article I wrote for the Kfar Chabad Magazine."

After the word "מאמר – article," the Rebbe added "'הא – the first," indicating that he should continue writing.

Rabbi Levine began preparing a second article, but the lawyers advised that he not publish anything further while the matter was in court.

The following is a translation of Rabbi Levine's article, originally printed in the 200th issue of the Kfar Chabad Magazine.



Kehot Publication Society

The Library of the Frierdiker Rebbe

We've recently heard the Rebbe speak several times about how precious the library was to the Frierdiker Rebbe. Some of his letters give us a sense of what it meant to him. That comes through even more clearly in material that hasn't yet been published.

I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but when I began to see how much the he treasured the library and how deeply he was attached to it, a shiver ran through me.

It was the summer of 5693. The Frierdiker Rebbe had spent several months that winter under doctors' care in Berlin, and his health was getting worse. His doctors insisted that he go to Marienbad, a health resort. The cost of doctors, medicine, and stays at health resorts was immense, and the Rebbe's household was already strained.

With a heavy heart, his secretary wrote to several members of Anash in America. "Money is so tight that we could hardly consider the trip. Still, the Rebbe had to follow his doctors' instructions. The few members of Anash and young Temimim here barely managed to raise enough to cover the trip." The economic crisis had reached America too, and less money was



The Rebbe walking to 770 from the library.

coming in from there.

Most of Anash were still in Russia, where a terrible famine had set in. Bread was scarce, and some days even potatoes were hard to come by. Many Chassidim were starving to death. The Frierdiker Rebbe took their suffering to heart and wrote to Anash in Russia again and again. In one letter, he told them how hard it was to get help.

> *You have no idea how hard it is to find any help or support, or how much effort goes into it, writing letters and so on. The economic crisis has cut off even the smallest sources of help. Even now I am doing all I can, because each of you is as dear to me as the apple of my eye. All I think about is how to get you some help. Every day I long to hear how you and your families are doing.*

In another letter that summer, the Frierdiker Rebbe wrote about the pain he felt at what they were going through.

> *It pains me deeply to see the hardships Anash and G-d-fearing Jews are facing, both materially and spiritually. They are getting so little help, and those who could help have responded so coldly. My dear friends, you have no idea how much physical pain and heartache I have suffered over these five and a half years, or how much I still have to bear.*

While those letters were going out to Russia, the Frierdiker Rebbe was also writing from Marienbad to his secretary, R. Chaim Lieberman, about buying seforim for the library. In one long letter, he asked, "I'd like to know if there's anything of interest in them and if they're worth the price. How much did they cost, and how much money is left to buy more?"

In another letter to R. Chaim Lieberman, he wrote, "I've decided that we'll move to Poland. We'll need to repack the library in wooden crates."

There were crates and bookcases to build, and the library still had to be shipped from Riga to Poland. Where would the money come from? The Frierdiker Rebbe had to turn to Anash in Russia for help. On 14 Menachem Av, he wrote to R. Yehudah Eber HYD. His brother-in-law, R. Zalman Schneerson, was still in Russia and was in charge of the maamad funds.

> *I'm sending a note for our dear Anash and another for my relative, your brother-in-law R. Shneur Zalman. I'm sure you'll get both notes to him as soon as possible. With Hashem's help, your plan to visit several places, together with the rest of your work, will accomplish a great deal. Given how tight things are right now, we also need to try to arrange an interest-free loan. Large payments are coming due, and we still have no idea where the money will come from. We need to do everything we can to hurry things along.*

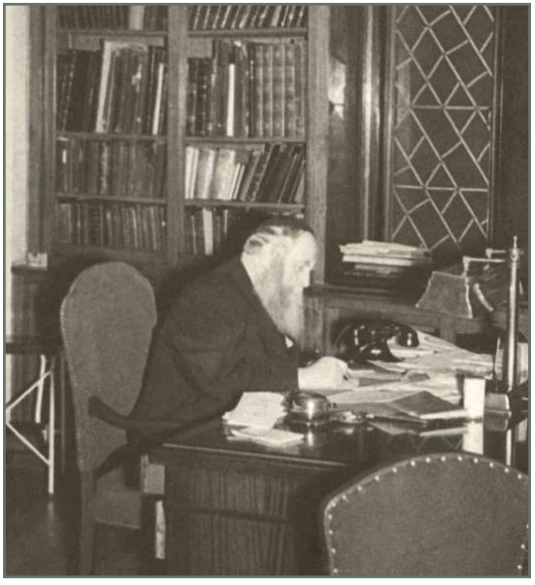
This was the Frierdiker Rebbe's final appeal for help with the move. He had already turned to Anash in Russia before Yud-Beis Tammuz. My father recalls the farbrengen in his memoirs ("Zichronosai").

> *On Yud-Beis Tammuz, the Chag HaGeulah, Anash held a large farbrengen, and the temimim said plenty of l'chaim. In honor of the Yom Tov,*

> *the Rebbe sent the maamor Nasata Lire'echa Neis Lehisnoses [printed in Sefer HaMaamarim 5711, p. 289]. A letter from the Rebbe came as well. It began, "Hashem Elokim Tzevakos, Who created, formed, and made nature..." The maamor explained the idea the Rebbe had written about in the letter. They learned the maamor, read the letter, and said l'chaim... There was also a letter from R. Yehudah Eber... saying that the Rebbe planned to move from Riga to Warsaw and would need $1,500. The Rebbe wanted Anash here to cover the cost of the move. It seems they did as he asked.*

My grandfather notes in his memoirs that he sent the Rebbe money for the move. Letters he wrote from Russia to R. Yisrael Jacobson that year tell us more about how he sent it.

Why turn to the Jews of Russia for help with the move when they could barely find bread themselves? And how could the Frierdiker Rebbe keep buying seforim in such a difficult year?



But the money Chassidim give as maamad isn't just physical support. R. Yechezkel Feigin, the Frierdiker Rebbe's secretary, wrote to R. Yisrael Jacobson about something the Rebbe had said about maamad in a recent conversation.

> "איך דארף וויסן ווער זיינען דיא נותנים מיט
> וועמען בין איך זיך מתקשר"
> *"I need to know who is giving, who I am forming a bond with."*

I've shared this story because it gives a clear sense of the Frierdiker Rebbe's deep connection to his Chassidim and his seforim. I saw that connection again and again as I edited his Igros Kodesh. Near the end of the latest volume is a letter written in or around that difficult year of 5693. In it, the Frierdiker Rebbe speaks from the heart. "You know how much money and effort I put into collecting seforim, especially Sephardic seforim. I have no way to buy them right now, though I very much want to."

The introduction to volume 5 of Igros Kodesh (pp. 15–20) gives us a further sense of how much of himself the Frierdiker Rebbe put into the library. It describes the siege of Warsaw, when the lives of the Frierdiker Rebbe, his family, secretaries, talmidim, and Chassidim were all in danger. Even then, he was determined to save the library, whatever the cost, effort, or risk.

The Frierdiker Rebbe managed to smuggle a single letter out of Warsaw to his secretary in Riga. His only request was to save the library. In the letter, he wrote that it belonged to Agudas Chabad in America, which would make it easier to get permission to take the seforim out of the



The picture that accompanied the original article. It was captioned: "The Frierdiker Rebbe next to his seforim. The Rebbe stands to his right."

occupied city.

How can we explain this in purely practical terms? Every sefer was part of his very soul. When a sefer was taken from him, a part of his soul went with it. When a sefer came back to him, so did that part of his soul.

Reading between the lines of his letters, I could see how much he hoped to build up the library, so that it would always be a source of pride for Chabad.

Time and again, I heard it said plainly that his deepest wish was to develop the collection so it could serve the public as Chabad's library.

I asked R. Chaim Lieberman, the librarian, why he had never made this known publicly. "I really should have," he told me. "It's a pity."

This was the Frierdiker Rebbe's wish. His Chassidim sacrificed for it, right down to their last penny. And so it will be. *Amein, Kein Yehi Ratzon*. ■



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