

# The Endless Dimensions of the Siddur

by Rabbi Aharon Lopiansky

**T**his article has its roots in a rather quixotic quest I undertook in the mid-eighties to publish *The Siddur Hameduyak*, or, The Completely Accurate Siddur. I do not remember what had sparked that quest; it simply may have been that I had noticed several Siddur with varying renditions and vocalizations. In my mind at the time, putting out The Completely Accurate Siddur required the same approach as publishing a completely accurate edition of anything else. This meant that first of all, one must locate all available editions and manuscripts, giving preference to the earlier versions, using common sense to surmise the obvious mistakes that had crept in, and presto, out would come a fairly accurate rendition of what had been the original version.

After many years of work invested into preparing a Siddur as accurate as I could make it, (the first edition was called *Ma'adane Asher*; subsequent editions were called *Aliyos Eliyahu*), I realized that The Completely Accurate Siddur was a chimera. The Siddur possessed so many overwhelmingly different dimensions that it was only possible to approach complete accuracy; never to reach it. The makeup of the Siddur has had innumerable contributions by every segment of Torah giants throughout the generations in every area of Jewish thought. Halacha, *massores* (tradition), kaballah, *piyot* (poetry), grammar theories, numerology, customs and interpretations—all these have left their impact

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## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDTUR

on the Jewish prayer book. Not only is the Jewish people's collective heart incorporated in its prayers, but its collective mind as well. It is impossible to determine which among all of these contributions leads to the most accurate rendition of the Siddur.

As I was working on a new edition, ironing out the inaccuracies (!) which crept into the earlier one (the new edition may already be out at the time of the publication of this article), I felt a desire to share some of this breathtaking panorama with others. This article will attempt to give an introduction to the many areas that comprise the Siddur. I will try to be as precise as possible, but I have favored readability over letter perfect accuracy and detail. I simply felt that a detailed and academic approach to the subject would inhibit, rather than provoke, interest, the latter of which is the real intent of this article. Thus, there will be a dearth of footnotes, some oversimplification, and some distortion in terms of focus.<sup>1</sup> Hopefully the reader will walk away with a heightened awareness of how much Torah and weighted opinion has gone into the *Siddur Hbatefilla* of Klal Yisroel (the Jewish People), appreciate it so much more, and study it further on his own. One will also appreciate the weightiness of the *Tefillah*, and an understanding that it is not to be tampered with lightly.

When a young boy asks "Who made the Siddur"? he will be answered with, "the Anshey Kenesses Hagedolah, of course!" In his young imagination, he somehow thinks that from *Modeh ani* to *Pirkei Shira* every little bit had been established by Anshey Kenesses Hagedola, leaving the publisher only with the discretion to decide the color of the cover and the names on the dedication page.

But let us begin the true story.

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The first two times the word *tefilla*, prayer, is called as such in the Torah, is when Avrohom was prayed for Avimelech.<sup>2</sup> Chazal tell us that the Forefathers established the routine of the daily prayer, but this is not explicit in the Torah.

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1. I.e. there is almost no mention of Nusach Sefarad-Eydos Hamizrach and none of the Yemenite Siddur

2. The *Sifrei* to *Va'eschanan*, 1, lists ten different synonyms for *tefilla* used in *Tanach*. It is extremely significant to explore the different nuance and shades of meaning that each one of these terms imply (R. Shimshon Pinkus has attempted this in his *Shaarey Tefilla* ). Also fascinating to note is that the word *tefilla* itself is of uncertain etymology.

Chumash and Navi explicitly mention only occasional prayer. There is no explicit mention of consistent prayer except in *Daniel* (6, 11), and it is not clear if the reference is to a personal routine devotion or something that had already been institutionalized and was universally obligatory.<sup>3</sup> The only exception to consistent prayer is the obligation to make a blessing after a meal (*Birkas Hamazon*),<sup>4</sup> which can be considered to be a form of prayer.<sup>5</sup>

We do have a twice daily obligation to recite the *Shema*.<sup>6</sup> But, strictly speaking, this is not a prayer. While prayer is a mixture of praise, gratitude, and supplication, *Shema* is a proclamation of faith. The Rabbis later wove the recital of *Shema* into the very fabric of prayer by adding blessings before and after it and positioning it adjacent to the Amidah (the standing prayer known as *shemoneh esrey*), but in itself, it is not in any way a form of prayer.

Was there, in fact, an obligation in pre-rabbinic days to pray? The Rambam and others state that there is a Torah obligation to pray daily, in a format of “praise, request and thanks” and to face the Temple mount when praying. There is no set prayer format *per se*, nor an obligation to pray more than once a day. This was the state of affairs from Moshe’s times until Ezra, according to the Rambam.<sup>7</sup>

The Ramban (and others) believed that even that level of prayer obligation did not exist, and the Torah commands prayer only in the times of great distress.<sup>8</sup> Any other requirements and/or custom to pray were rabbinic in nature.

The beginning of formalized and obligatory prayer was instituted by the Anshey Knesses Hagedola.<sup>9</sup> This was an extraordinary assemblage of all the

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3. Tosefta to *Berachos* 3, 4, points out that this had been Daniel’s custom even before the exile. However, in *Shemos Rabbah*, 15, 6, it seems that this was done because it was a time of distress.

4. *Devarim* 8, 10.

5. The Rashba [*Berachos* 48b- cited in *Bais Yosef*] says that the Torah did not mandate a specific *nusach*, that Moshe, Yehoshua, and Dovid made the first version of the blessings, and that these changed with time, i.e. before the conquest of Eretz Yisroel, after the conquest, and finally after the *galus* and the *churban*.

6. *Devarim* 6.

7. Rambam, *Hilchos tefilla* 1,1; *Sefer Hamitzvos mitzvah* 5.

8. *Sefer Hamitzvos ibid.*

9. There is a responsa from an unknown Gaon in the collection *Zichron Larishonim* [258] that says that during the First Temple era prayer consisted of, a *beracha* (*yotzer ohr*), *asseress hadibros*, *krias shema* etc. (the same as in the Temple during the Second Temple era, listed in *Tamid* 5, 1.)

leading Rabbanim in Eretz Yisroel that roughly spanned the era between the Temples, with overlaps at both ends. It started with Ezra and ended with Shimon Hatzadik (roughly 350-250 b.c.e.). They enacted many of the rabbinic laws with which we are familiar, and established the framework necessary to preserve Klal Yisroel through its millennia of *galus*. Although a Second Temple would be established, with a limited return of some of the national institutions (a quasi-monarchy, a debased high priesthood, no prophecy, and a weakened Sanhedrin), it was a pale version of the same institutions in the first temple. And a few centuries after, the millennia of Dispersion would start.

Our first institution of formal prayer is thus described by Rambam based on the Talmud: “One hundred and twenty elders, amongst them prophets, instituted the eighteen blessings in their order.”<sup>10</sup> “The one hundred and twenty elders” that included prophets refers up the Anshey Kenesses Hagedolah in its early years. Thus the Rambam attributes this to Ezra and his Court. But some questions arise: Did they create only the Amidah or more of the *tefilla*? Even as regards the Amidah, did they create only the format, i.e. the theme and order of the Blessings, and left the content up to each individual or community, or did they create the text as well?

The Rambam’s interpretation of the Talmud is that they enacted “all the blessings and prayers that the Jewish nation possesses.” Regarding the second question, the Rambam states that the reason for enacting the order of the *tefilla* was due to the inability of the people to articulate on their own precise and elegant prayers. This would seem to indicate that the text as well as the structure was authored by the Anshey Kenesses Hagedola.

Similarly, the Rambam in his Commentary to the Mishna states that the reason that the various *tefillos* are not fully mentioned in the Talmud is because they were so well known that they did not need to be written.<sup>11</sup> This would also seem to indicate that there was a standard *nusach* (version, pl. *nuschaos*), as well.<sup>12</sup> However in many places in the Talmud it seems as if one is allowed to add or change words in the prayer so long as the theme and the beginning and

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10. *Megilla*, 17b

11. *Menachos* 4, 1

12. The Rabbeinu Bachya (*Devarim* 11,13) seems to imply that the Sages made a simple and full *nusach* for the entire *tefilla*, but that there are deep and hidden meanings in the structure and the order of the Blessings of the Amidah.

end are kept intact. Thus the implication is that although there is a problem with adding passages with variant implications, the addition of passages *per se*, is not a problem.<sup>13</sup> Also, there are many discussions in the Talmud regarding the correct *nusach* and organization of various Blessings, indicating that there was not yet a firm and final *nusach* in their times.

We do not have real rabbinic texts from that era, and most of our knowledge about the *tefilla* of that era remains in the realm of conjecture. However, the Mishna and Talmud give us our first meaningful insight into the text of *tefillah*. Included in the Mishna and the Talmud we find the full text of almost every Blessing, as well as discussions of other parts of the *tefilla*. Thus, we have nearly all the *Birchos Hashachar* (the Morning Blessings), except for the blessings, *hanosein layaef koach* and *lolam yehey odom* and the *korbonos*;, we have the general concept of *pesukei dezimra* although without their Blessings and details and details; we have the concept of *birchos krias shema*; the concept of the Amidah; the concept of *tachanun*, the various additions made to the Amidah on holidays, and the *nusach* of almost every Blessing. We also have the listing of the various Readings of the Torah for holidays and other special days.

What arouses some wonder are the numerous differences of opinion in the Talmud concerning various prayers, such as the correct version of *Birchas Hatorah* or where to insert *Havdalah* in the Amida, and so forth. Since these were constantly repeated events, how could disagreements over their recital have arisen?

There are a few possibilities: 1) the actual version of these *Berachos* had not been fixed by the Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah but were, rather, set by the Sages of the Mishna and the Talmud ; 2) There was a the gradual corruption of the original version, understandable since there was no written Siddur); 3) one of the versions was the standard, but individual Tannaim or Amoraim felt that it was incorrect and attempted to correct it.

Of the Talmudic tractates, the one that has a comparably large amount of *tefilla* and order of *tefilla* is the Tractate *Soferim*. It begins with the laws of the Sefer Torah; moves to the Reading of the *Shema*; followed by various blessing and prayers said in conjunction with the Reading of the Torah; various such Readings; the daily Psalm (*shir shel yom*); and the Sanctification of the New

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13. I.e. *Berachos* 5, 3; *Megillah* 4, 9. The Rashba in response [I: 473], the *Bach* [Responsum 65], and the *Yaavetz* in his glosses on that Talmud.

## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDTUR

Moon (*Kiddush Levana*). What is interesting about this Tractate is that for the first time we find the reciting of various verses and Psalms outside the framework of a Blessing. Many Rishonim believe this Tractate to be a Baraisa, one of the small Tractates composed of Baraisos. The Rosh, however, states that this Tractate was compiled by the Geonim in much later era. Tractate *Soferim* has the additional problem of having many variant readings; in fact the Gra has enough textual emendations to make the original text almost unrecognizable.<sup>14</sup>

The fragments of text found the Talmudic literature is the subject of various critical variant readings discussed by the Rishonim. A highly important work, *Dikdukey Soferim*,<sup>15</sup> compares the various editions of the Talmud for variant readings, especially the Munich Talmud manuscript. It also notes whatever significant textual changes the early commentators mention. While this is very important in any halachic context, it is of paramount significance in determining the exact *nusach*. Many times the differences between two *nuschaos* can be found as variant versions noted by *Dikdukey Soferim*. By the end of the Talmudic era, a fairly substantial outline and text of our davening formula was established. But on the other hand, there were still significant disagreements between the various texts and Rishonim on some important points.

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The next phase of the development of the Siddur is that of the introduction of *Piyutim*, taken from the Greek word for poetry. *Piyut* as an individual's personal composition is already mentioned in the Midrash,<sup>16</sup> where find that R. Elazar ben Shimon was a *payton* (composer of *piyut*) and an orator.<sup>17</sup> Similarly the Midrash to *Koheles* (1, 13) refers to a *payton* who composed rhymes in alphabetical order.<sup>18</sup> It is unclear what halachic justification allowed

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14. As a matter of fact, in 2001 someone published a *Maseches Soferim* whose primary text incorporates all of the Gra's emendations.

15. Authored by R. Rafael Nossou Nota Rabinowitz; published over the course of many years from 1862 onwards. Also includes a masterful overview of the various editions of the Talmud

16. *Vayikrah Rabbah* 30.

17. However, it is not clear whether these were inserted into the *tefilla*, like our *piyutim*, or merely sung in "*zemiro*" fashion.

18. In the davening itself the only alphabetized passages are *Kel baruch gdol deah* etc., *Kel adon* etc., and *Tikanta Shabbos* backwards. In *Tehillim*, of course, there is "Ashrei" (*Tehillim* 145).

for the insertion of these poetic liturgies into the prayers at the Blessing of the *Shema* and in the Amida, especially when they were almost always connected to the theme of the festival when they were recited and not the prayer in which they were said. These *piyutim* display an extraordinary virtuoso brilliance in their adaptations of midrashic works through intricate patterns, rhymes and metric syllables.

Almost all of the *paytanim* stem from the geonic period, with a smattering of *piyutim* stemming from early Rishonim such as the Ibn Ezra, R. Yehudah Halevi, Rashi and Maharam Mi-Rottenberg. The most prolific and famous of the *paytanim* was R. Eliezer Hakalir.<sup>19</sup> Most of the insertions into the *tefilah* of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are his, as well as many of the *kinnos* said on Tisha B'AV. While he seemed to indicate in one of his *kinnos* that he lived nine hundred years from the Churban<sup>20</sup> (700-800 c.e), one opinion in Tosafos dates him to the times of the Tannaim<sup>21</sup>.

Be it as it may, many of the *paytanim* were highly regarded as *talmidei chachamim*. Rashi and Tosafos in many places refers to the *piyut* as a source for their aggadic interpretation. Most extraordinary is the *piyut* for *Shabbos Hagadol*, which reviews the entire Laws of Pesach in verse. This magnificent *piyut* was composed by R. Yosef Tov Elem one of the *Baalei Tosafos*, and is quoted by Rishonim as an halachic source. It is never assumed that poetic license was allowed to affect the halachic integrity of the *piyut*.<sup>22</sup>

The most comprehensive collection of nearly the entirety of Jewish *piyut* is a monumental work, *Otzar Hashirah Vehapiyut* by Yisroel Davidson, published in 1925-1933, consisting of four massive volumes of thousands of *kinos*, *selichos*, *zemiros*, etc.

The attitude of the great Torah authorities to *piyutim* was mixed; some were critical of them. The Ibn Ezra, in an uncharacteristically lengthy polemic (*Koheles* 1, 1) vigorously attacks the *piyutim*. He decries their enigmatic nature their inclusion of foreign words, their ungrammatical constructions, and the

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19. The earliest *paytan* is assumed to be Yannai.

20. Shadal (Shmuel Dovid Luzzato) argues strongly that the reference is not to the present date, but rather to the span of both Temples, as in the context of the *kina*

21. *Tosafos to Chagiga* 13a. He identifies him with R. Eliezer b. R. Shimon, whom the Midrash describes as a *paytan*

22. See Rashi to *Yoma* (67a), and Tosafos to, *Eyruvin* (21a) and *Menachos* (35b), who derive halachic principles from R. Eliezer Hakalir's *piyutim*.

anthropomorphic terms they use in describing God.<sup>23</sup> He sarcastically offers us a mock *piyut* of his own, containing the worst of these characteristics. He points out how different this is from the prayer format that the Anshei Kenesses Hagedola established. The Maharal, however, defends the *paytonim* against the Ibn Ezra's attacks.<sup>24</sup> Other Rishonim (*Tur*, Rashba, Rema) felt that it was halachically unacceptable to interrupt in middle of davening with *piyutim*.

Others felt that the *piyutim* are a “turn-off” for those in Shul, who do not understand or have patience for them. On the other hand, many great Rishonim and Achronim (Rabbeynu Tam, Raavad, Maharal) staunchly defend the practice.

Some communities (such as the German communities) say an extraordinary amount of *piyut* while some barely say any at all.

One interesting collateral effect of *piyut* are the “breaks” that we have in all our present-day Siddurim. Many of these breaks seem to be without rhyme or reason. For instance, the first Blessing of *Shema*, *Yotzer ohr uvoreh choshech* until its end, *Yotzer hameoros*, is one continuous blessing; similarly *Emes veyatziv* until *Go'al yisroel* is also one unit. Yet they have breaks within them. These are there because *piyutim* were inserted at these points.

With the introduction of *piyutim*, the Siddur now had the additions of *selichos*, *kinnos*, *hoshanos*, and *yotzeros*, all of them *piyutim*. We are now ready to discuss the first actual Siddur.

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In the 8th century as the Jewish presence in Spain was becoming more and more established, the communities sent a letter to R. Amram Gaon of Babylonia, which asked for an accurate version of the prayers. He replied based on the Minhag of the “two Yeshivos” (Sura and Pumpidisa). This reply is the first comprehensive Siddur that we have. It is structurally close to our Siddur but there are some places where the *nusach* is quite different (i.e. the Amidah for the Mincha of Shabbos has a *nusach* that is radically different from ours). Similarly, *Tachnun* is extremely different as well as other *tefillos* as well.

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23. See also *Kuzari* 2, 72-3 who decries rhymes and meter as alien to Hebrew, the *loshon hakodesh*, and that they are the product of foreign influence.

24. Maharal, *Nesivos Olam*, *Nesiv Hatefilla*.



There was one serious problem which developed as a result of R. Amram's Siddur, namely, its popularity. It became so popular that many communities copied it and adapted it to their local custom. As a result, a plethora of manuscripts of "R. Amram's Siddur" exists which have serious variations among them, and there is no way to tell what was the original *nusach*.<sup>25</sup>

About one hundred years later R. Saadya Gaon would write a Siddur as well, with the halachos of davening in Arabic. Unfortunately, we are missing many fragments, but it, too, is similar to our Siddur except for a few differences.<sup>26</sup> These Siddurim together with the later *nusach of tefilla* of the Rambam,<sup>27</sup> and the commentary of the Avudraham<sup>28</sup> are seen as the forbearers of the *nusach* of the Sefaradi communities.

The first Siddur to appear that is similar to our *nusach* is the *Machzor Vitri*, written by a disciple of Rashi named R. Simcha of Vitri.<sup>29</sup> It is a comprehensive work, including *tefillos*, *halachos*, *perushim* and sundry addenda.<sup>30</sup> It is the first Siddur whose *nusach* is reasonably close to ours. In a recent edition of *Machzor Vitri*,<sup>31</sup> the editor ponders whether the liturgical parts of the *Machzor Vitri* were not tampered with by the individual communities who used it, in an attempt to have the communities custom easier to use (similar to the Siddur of

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25. A particularly noteworthy edition was Daniel Goldschmidt's edition of 1971 [subsequently reprinted by Mossad Harav Kook in 2004]. The edition compares many of the manuscripts and tries to sort out the original *nusach*.

26. While R. Amram's Siddur was first printed in 1865, R. Saadya's Siddur was not published until 1940.

27. *Mishneh Torah*, at the end of *Hilchos Tefillah*.

28. R. Dovid Avrohom was a disciple of the *Tur*. The Avudraham is meant to be a commentary on *tefilla*. Avudraham and Ri bar Yakar are the two important and comprehensive commentaries on *tefilla*.

29. The word *Machzor* in this context means "a Siddur used all year." There is another *Machzor* called *Machzor Roma* that is seen by many as the origin of all Ashkenazi Siddurim, since Jews emigrated northwards and westwards from Italy to France and Germany. This *Machzor* has the distinction of being the first printed Siddur (1485), and being the first Hebrew book printed with vowels. Another important early European *nusach of tefilla* is found in the *Sefer Etz Chaim*, a compendium of *Halachos* authored by R Yaakov Chazzan of London, sometime in the middle of the thirteenth century. It was published by the Chief Rabbi of England Rabbi Brodie in 1964.

30. It is paralleled by some other Siddurim that emanated from Rashi's disciples, such as Siddur Rashi and others.

31. Published by *Otzar Haposhim*, edited by Rav Aryeh Goldschmidt.

R. Amram Gaon above). Considering that manuscript writing was an expensive enterprise, a community might order a copy for the Chazan's use, and ask the scribe to make the necessary changes.<sup>32</sup>

This early division of the two *nuschaos* of Ashkenaz and Sfarad is seen as the outgrowth of the customs of Babylonian (Sefaradi) Jewry versus Eretz Yisroel (Ashkenazi) Jewry.

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The next interesting phenomenon took place in the early days of the Rishonim. An extraordinary group of pious people lived in Germany/France known as *Chasidei Ashkenaz*. They were a group of Ashkenazi Kabbalists and Tzaddikim, whose piety included asceticism and self-mortification. Most famous of these tzaddikim were R. Yehudah Hachasid and R. Eliezer of Germiza (Worms) (960-1237). R. Eliezer wrote a work called *Roke'ach*, which points out various kabbalistic interpretations of prayer. But most important, it gives the number of letters in each prayer and the kabbalistic significance of those numbers. He states in his commentary on the *shira* (Song of the Sea), that he received this as a direct tradition from the Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah, and woe onto anyone who adds or subtracts even one letter from the *nusach*.<sup>33</sup>

In line with the *Rokeach*, the Siddur *Chasidey Ashkenaz*<sup>34</sup> admonishes the people of France not to add words to the blessings since each and every word has reason for its inclusion.

Without the kabbalistic significance of this count of words, it would serve to preserve the integrity of the text. Indeed, the *Tur* cites the *Rokeach's* count to ascertain the correct text for the Amida. However, many Poskim, including the *Bais Yoseph*, disagree that the word count is authoritative. The Avudraham writes that although at one time he also counted the words and letters of *tefilla*, he ultimately concluded that this is futile because there are no two Siddurim that are alike, and found no source for the significance in

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32. Another source for geonic input is the *Shibbalei Haleket* by from R. Tzidkiah b. R. Avrohom Harofeh from the early fourteenth century, who includes many *Teshuvos* of Geonim, with an emphasis on *tefilla*.

33. This would obviously indicate that in his opinion the exact words of each prayer were formulated by the Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah.

34. Edited by R. Moshe Hershler, 5732.

the numbers of letters in the *tefilla*.<sup>35</sup> It appears that he is not questioning the *Rokeach's* tradition, but since he had before him so many versions, he concluded that the true version must have been hopelessly corrupted, or, alternatively, that where there are different versions one must follow the majority opinion and disregard the word count.<sup>36</sup>

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From the mid-fourteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century and further there was an era that produced a remarkable amount of compilations of *minagim* (customs) produced mainly in Germany (and parts of today's France). They include R. Avrohom Klausner, R. Isaach Tirna, R. Zalman Bing and, most famously, the Maharil. These works list all the *minhagim* current in Germany at the time, with a heavy focus on the *minhagim* of *tefilla* and some recordings of the appropriate *nusach*. There is no substantive discussion in those works as to the origins of these *minhagim*, or how they relate to Halacha. Many of these *minhagim* were incorporated into the Rema's glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch* and are the basis of Askenazi practice, even though they sometimes seem to fly into the face of the simple meaning of the Talmud. Much of the Ashkenazi *minhagim* of "what to say when" has its source in these works.<sup>37</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Gra in his commentary to the *Shulchan Aruch* often seems to favor the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling as against the Rema when he cites *minhagim* when this is more supported by the Talmud. *Maaseh Rav*,<sup>38</sup> a record of the Gra's rulings, cites a testimony that the Gra desired to move to Eretz Yisroel in order leave behind the Polish *minhagim*; why he

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35. See *Nefesh Hachaim* 2, 10 where he states that the Anshei Kenesses Hagedolah established the Amida down to every last letter. In spite of this he does not determine which version of the Amida is the definitive version.

36. See *Maseches Soferim* 6, 4.

37. Another fascinating source of *minhagim* has been the *pinkasei kehillos* that were found and published in recent years. These are official communal journals that amongst other things record the customs of each community. While this is of obviously minor relevance in establishing the general Halacha or *minhag*, many times it sheds light on the origin of general *minhagim*.

38. Yerushalaim, 5656 edition.

## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDTUR

wanted to do this is unexplained. In truth, the Gra's disciples who settled in Eretz Yisroel adapted quite a few of the Sefaradi practices.

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If Ashkenazim at this stage added *minhagim*, it was the Sefaradi scholars who made the next contribution to the Siddur, namely, those parts based on Kabbalah. Jews always had a tradition of *sisrei torah* (the hidden wisdom of Kabbala), but this wisdom blossomed and entered the public arena only in Tzefas in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The leading kabbalist was the Ari-zal, whose main teachings were compiled by his student R. Chaim Vital.<sup>39</sup> His various teachings include two works concerning prayer, *Pri Etz Chaim* and *Shaar Hakavonos*. These works explain the kabbalistic meaning behind the prayers; the appropriate *kavonos* (thoughts) to be had during davening; and various unique customs that the Ari-zal kept while he davened. Besides these works, some of his disciples and, in turn, their disciples also composed prayers, based on various understandings of the kabbalistic significance of certain days and events. Thus, the *Kabbalos Shabbos* prayers were first formulated by R. Moshe Cordevera (an older colleague of the Ari-zal), and *Tikunei Shabbos* by R. Yaakov Beruchim, author of *Shalom Aleichem*, and the *Ribbon Haolomim* and originator of the reciting of *Eishes Chayil* on Friday night. The *Leshem Yichud* recited before every mitzvah, *Yod Gimel Middos* when opening the Ark on Yom Tov, *Askinu Sedusa*, and *Tikun Chatzos* were all introduced or authored by the *mekubalim* (those learned in Kaballa). The most prominent work containing most of the Kabbala based prayers is the *Shaarei Tzion*, written by 15-16 century author R. Nossan Notta Hanover.<sup>40</sup> This work was immensely popular and went through many dozens of printings. Similarly, a work known as *Chemdas Hayamim* lists kabbalistic songs and practices for Shabbos and Yom Tov. Its author is unknown.<sup>41</sup>

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39. Another leading kabbalist who lived at that time and put out a kabbalistic commentary on the Siddur was R. Moshe Kordevero whose Siddur is called *Tefilla Lemoshe*.

40. Some other important kabbalistic Siddurim are the *Shelah's* Siddur, and the *Kitzur Shelah* [by R. Yechiel Epstein, 1693] which is not merely an abbreviated version but has additions as well. It must be noted that although the *Shelah* had only minimal input into the Siddur text, this it is only the commentary which he wrote himself.

41. Binyomin Yaari in *Taalumas Sefer* attempts to identify the author.

These kabbalistic additions were eagerly snapped up by some, but eyed with suspicion by others. Of the Poskim the most noted integrator of kabbalistic *minhagim* into Halacha is probably the *Magen Avrohom*, R. Avrohom Gumbiner, the primary commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim*. He quotes the *Zohar* over eighty times, and similarly quotes the works of the Ari-zal over eighty times.

Most of the early Chassidim readily took to these additions and incorporated them eagerly into their prayer books. The German Jews on the other hand, refused to do so. Their felt that 1) the Siddur cannot be tampered with by later authors; 2) Kabbalah is not meant to be employed by the common folk;<sup>42</sup> 3) the “enlightened” Germans eyed all of Kabbalah with deep suspicion.

Even the Gra who was a great kabbalist, did not believe in adding prayers that were composed much later than the Talmudic era. Thus, the Gra did not recite *Mizmor shir chanukas habayis* at the beginning of davening and *Ledavid Hashem ori*, which originated with the kabbalists. Regarding the *Leshem Yichud* before performing a mitzvah, it seems that he did not agree that it should be said.<sup>43</sup> The *Noda Biyehudah*<sup>44</sup> also had some cynical remarks to make regarding the recital of the various *Leshem Yichud* before mitzvos. One noted non-Chassidic *tzaddik*, who introduced many practices based in Kabbala into the non-Chassidic world was R. Alexander Ziskind of Horodna, whose deeply inspiring *Yesod Veshoresh Haavoda* on prayer,<sup>45</sup> used many passages of *Zohar* to illuminate the meaning of the various prayers.

Many of these prayers have become part and parcel of our davening and many have not. It is very hard to decide when tefilla has “made it” and is now an official *tefilla* and when is it still only for extremely pious individuals. For instance, when I was growing up perhaps one in a hundred people may have even heard of *Yom Kippur Katan*. Today it is recited constantly at various times by almost everyone.

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42. See the *Chok Yaakov* [489, 11].

43. The Gra was recorded as saying [*Maaseh Rav*, Cincinnati, 37] that there is no need to say *leshem yichud*, but R. Mendel Mishklov, one of the Gaon’s great disciples, does print the *Leshem Yichud* in his *Hagaddas Hagra* [Grodno 1804].

44. By Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, rabbi of Prague, *Yoreh Deah*, 93.

45. Published in 1782.

## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDTUR

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About four hundred years ago an incredible work took shape under the aegis of the Vaad Gimmel Aratzos, which for three centuries was the central rabbinic organization of Europe. The Rabbanim felt that the status of the Siddur published until then was not acceptable. No two Siddurim were alike; spellings and vocalizations were incorrect and many aspects of proper reading (*dagesh*, *sheva-na* and others) were totally neglected. They commissioned a remarkable *talmid chacham*, R. Shabsai Sofer, and charged him with producing a Siddur that would be as correct as possible. This would then become the golden standard by which other Siddurim would then be corrected. Approbations for this Siddur were given by the *Bach's* teacher, R. Shmuel Feivish, the *Megaleh Amukos*, the *Shela*, the Maharsha, the *Kli Yakor*, the *Tevuas Shor* and many others. This is probably the most impressive array of approbations ever attained by any work in history. This Siddur became a standard by which others would measure their Siddurim.

Subsequently, R. Shabsai wrote a larger work with explanations for all his decisions regarding the *nusach* and *dikduk* (grammar) of the prayers. (Many times he cites the "Maharshal's Siddur" which we do not have). Unfortunately, this Siddur was not published for hundreds of years. Only in the late eighties and early nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was this incredible work published by R. David Yitzchaki (one of the most prominent grammarians of our generation) and R. Yitzchak Satz (one of the great researchers of *tefilla* in our time). It is an extraordinary work and ranks amongst the most important Siddur ever produced. R Shabsai Sofer had many important manuscripts and editions of the Siddur in front of him, was a master of *dikduk* with deep knowledge of Kabbalah. (He was blind while he worked on the Siddur!).

One would say that we finally have The Completely Accurate Siddur that we were searching for. However, four hundred years have elapsed since then, and *minhagim* have added and changed matters so that this is not true. No one nowadays who would use the Siddur of R. Shabsai today would feel completely comfortable with it.

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Beginning with the 18<sup>th</sup> century or so, a new class of works on Siddur began appearing which can be termed, the Siddurim of the *baaley dikduk* (grammarians). To the layman, *dikduk* (Hebrew grammar) is an absolute term. Words are conjugated, formatted and pronounced in a very specific way. One imagines that there exists a set laws of *dikduk* which came down to us from Sinai, from which all later *dikduk* works were redacted.

This, however, is not the case. The basis of *dikduk* is the Tanach from which, on our own, we derive the rules of language and use of the words. The rules for words that are frequently mentioned, and words forms that occur regularly are easy to decipher. However, rare words or word forms are open to guesswork. Rashi points out that words that are used only once and its meaning must be guessed from local context.<sup>46</sup> Rishonim such as Rashi, Ibin Ezra, Radak, and others formulated systems that they felt were the rules that described correctly the individual usages in the Torah. Needless to say, there are countless controversies in this area, as anyone who works through the “*dikduk* Rashis” or the “*dikduk* Rambans” knows. For a long time between the early Rishonim and the eighteenth-century, *dikduk* was put on a back burner. But from the eighteenth century onwards a large number of works dealing with the *dikduk* of the Siddur appeared. Also published were many methodical analyses of the proper *nuschaos* of the Siddur.

It is important to note something about the people who were heavily involved in *dikduk* and *nusach*. Since this was a field that had not been studied in the study halls for centuries, it was oftentimes the domain of the non-rabbinic and sometimes even the non-observant. It also often dove-tailed well with the secular academic paradigm of literary research. This raises sometimes thorny questions about the credence to give to their conclusions. Should their personal lifestyle affect the acceptability of their work? Do we trust them, or do we feel that their desire for fame may have slanted their decisions, to favor the more sensational outcomes? These people also tended to be loners. There was no *beis medrash* where they all sat and worked through issues together. Each one studied and wrote in isolation, and did not care much for anyone else’s opinion.

The first of that group, were R. Azriel and R. Eliyahu of Vilna, who published a Siddur that was researched and annotated, both with respect to all aspects of

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46. See for instance, *Rashi, Bereyshit* 50, 15, for a unique word and *Rashi, Shemos* 15, 5 for a unique vocalization

*dikduk* and to the variant *nuschaos*. This Siddur was well received, except by a *baal dikduk* named R. Zalman Henna who wrote the work *Shaarey Tefilla* to attack it, and then followed this with a Siddur of his own called *Beis Tefilla*. R. Zalman Henna was a brilliant man who had great insights into *dikduk* but had serious flaws of character. He sometimes fudged sources in an eager attempt to buttress real or imaginary rules of *dikduk*. He was eager to discover (or invent) new rules of *dikduk* and his imagination was undisciplined. He was also arrogant and caustic. In time many Gedolim wrote against him, such as the *Noda Biyehudah* and R. Yakov Emden, and such *baaley dikduk* as R. Wolf Heidenheim and R. Zeiligman Baer. They all pointed out his absolute unreliability and unwarranted innovations. R. Yaakov Emden wrote a very sharp critique called *Luach Erez*<sup>47</sup> attacking his work.<sup>48</sup>

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a work named *Vayeetar Yitzchak* appeared. This was written by a brilliant man of no small notoriety known as Yitzchak Satanov. Yitzchak Satanov was a Galician Jew, who wore the traditional long cloak but was a member of the Haskala movement. Even his own colleagues amongst the *maskillim* had great distaste for him, and decried his hypocrisy. He was described as being “from waist up a believer (*maamin*), and from waist down a sinner (*min*).”<sup>49</sup> He was a very bright and a daring prankster. He forged a new *navi* (Book of the Prophets) that he “discovered” and included in it a running commentary of his own (called *Divrei Assaf*, a play on his name). Together with this he also forged an endorsement of the *Pri Migadim* lauding him for his “discovery.” Similarly he forged a *Zohar* that he “discovered” (which begins with the words, “*Posach R. Yitzchak*” also a play on his name). His work *Vayeetar Yitzchak* is daring because its author not only claims to seek out the correct *nusach*, but he also rewrites the *nusach* of the davening so that it is “nicer” and more grammatically correct. He claims that

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47. This is now available in a remarkable edition published by R. Dovid Yitzchaki. He includes all of the works involved in the controversy [i.e. R Zalman Henna’s works, and R. Yaakov Emden’s refutation] together with a masterful overview of the entire controversy, and the sources who find fault with R. Zalman Henna

48. Interestingly enough the Gra used R Zalman Henna’s work on *trop*. It is recorded in the Maaseh Rav [Yerushalaim 5656] that the Gra relied on R Eliyahu Bochor and somewhat on the Radak for *dikduk* decisions, and for R Zalman Henna’s as regards cantillation.

49. R Yitzchak Issac Chaver, the noted disciple of a disciple of the Gra, describes him as a “wicked *apikores*” [*Magen Vetzinab* 90b].



after finishing his work he found an old manuscript that validated all of his corrections. This is widely believed to have been a fable.

One of his consistent corrections to the Siddur is based on his preference of the style of Tanach over that of the Talmud [e.g., *anachnu*” rather than *anu*]. Although the *tefillos* were instituted by the *Anshei Kenesess Hagedolah* and later, who most probably employed the Talmudic style, still he felt that Hebrew of Tanaach was preferable, and that the Talmudic usages should be “corrected”!<sup>50</sup> In effect he was correcting the Tannaim and the Amoraim, no less. Despite the fact that his notoriety was well-known, and the *Pri Megadim* knew him personally as well, he does quote the *Vayeetar Yitzchak* in his *Peri Migadim*, obviously agreeing with that many of his *dikduk* points, regardless of his personal flaws.

Perhaps the most famous *medakdek* and was R. Wolf Heidenheim who spent a lifetime researching the appropriate nusach of the *tefilla* of the Ashkenazim. He relied mostly on manuscripts and was not wont to insert his own innovations, although he many times adopted the *Vayeetaar Yitzchak’s* points when he felt that they were correct. He did not write a consistent notation explaining his choice of versions, but left hundreds of notations handwritten on his own editions of the Siddur, *machzor* and Chumash. His various notations were collected by Rav Yitzchak Satz, who published them as an appendix to R Shabsai’s Siddur. .

R. Heidenheim’s work was seen as extraordinary in its integrity and quality. The *Chasam Sofer* and the *Haflaah* both had nothing less for him than full praise and held him to be the paradigm of a publisher of *seforim*. His Siddur went through fifteen editions in his lifetime and became the authoritative Siddur for German Jewry. It is fondly known as the Roedelheim Siddur [after the town where it was published], and posthumous editions were called *Sefas Emess*, with gothic German language insertions.

A later German Scholar R. Seligman Baer, published a Siddur called *Avodas Yisroel*, with extensive notations. While more innovative than R. Wolf Heidenheim, he is still considered a very serious authority.<sup>51</sup>

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50. He coined a phrase *lishna dekra adif*, which appears as if it is a widespread rule. In fact the only mention of this is a Tosafos in *Berachos* 52b who explain why the Talmud chose a word form used in the Torah, rather than a more accurate one. In any case, it is a determining factor for the Talmud in deciding which of two phrases to use. See also *Shaarei Teshuva* O.C. 668, 1, about the use of *shavuos* rather than *chag habikkurim* in *tefilla* .

51. Some other great researchers were: R. Aryeh Leib Gordon who wrote *Iyun Tefilla* and *Tikkun Tefilla*, which were incorporated into the Siddur *Otzar Hatefillos*; R. Avrohom Berliner

## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDDIR

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While German Jewry was busy with *dikduk*, an entire new input into *tefilla* was developing in Eastern Europe, as Chassidus attempted to incorporate the kabbalistic *kavanos* of the Ari-zal into their prayers. Many of the early Chassidim actually used Siddurim written by disciples of the Ari-zal. The first rationale for this change was already given by the Mezritcher Maggid<sup>52</sup> who was the leading disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. The first Siddur to be produced by Chassidim was the Siddur of the R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi.<sup>53</sup> This was accepted only by the Chabad Chassidim, and referred to itself as the *Nusach HaAri*. Many other Chassidim published a variety of Siddurim of various *nusach* variations which became collectively known as *Nusach Sefarad*. The difficulty with these Siddurim is that

- A. the Ari-zal's true intent is not always clear;
- B. his disciples disagree about what he meant;
- C. he himself davened from a Sefaradi Siddur and his *kavanos* followed those words. It is not clear how does one "patch" his thought into an Ashkenazi Siddur;
- D. the Chassidic Siddur were published usually without any annotations making it almost impossible to distinguish a mistake from an intentional change, and makes debate almost impossible.<sup>54 55</sup>

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52. R. Avrohom Dovber, premiere disciple of the Baal Shem Tov.

53. This Siddur only contains his discourses with no explanation of *nusach* or *dikduk* choices. However, a later work *Shaar Hakollel* by R. Avrohom Dov Lavat discusses the reasons for the choice of *nusach* and *dikduk*.

54. One notable exception is the *Tzilusa Davraham* of Tshechenov which has both the *Vayaas Avrohom* and the *Sheirusa Ditzlusa* that explain the textual decisions at great length. Also the Munkatcher Rov in his *Chamisha Maamorim* has some extensive research into the correct *nusach*.

55. A number of years ago I had the privilege to work alongside the Novominsker Rebbe Shlit" a on a *Nusach Sefarad Meduyak* Siddur parallel to the *Aliyos Eliyahu* Siddur. It was dedicated *lilui nishemas* his late Rebbetzin, and was called *Karnei Hod*. The Siddur tried to identify the most common *nuschaos*, their origins in the Ari-zal, and compared them to the five most significant Sefarad Siddurim ever published. It was an extraordinarily difficult task.

The radical change of *nusach* was also a great cause of contention between Chassidim and Misnagdim, with many response were for and against them, which leaves their accuracy uncertain.<sup>56</sup>

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As the Chassidic *nusach* was developing, the so called *Nusach Hagra* was developing as well. The Gra (the Gaon R. Eliyahu of Vilna) was recognized as the master of all facets of Torah, and it was thought, who could be better equipped than he to give us a true *nusach*, grammatically correct, in absolute adherence to halacha, and consistent with Kabbala?

This would have solved all problems had the Gra himself published a Siddur. But he did not. Instead, we have a patchwork of ambiguous notes on the *Shulchan Aruch*, records of his customs which are sometimes disputed by disciples who claimed to have seen with their own eyes differently, and various kabbalistic on the Siddur.<sup>57</sup>

We have no way of knowing definitely:

- A. Which Siddur did the Gra use himself?
- B. Did he make more changes that were not recorded?
- C. When disciples disagree over his intent, who is correct?
- D. Which of his *minhagim* were a *middos chassidus* (for pious individuals beyond the call of duty) and which are meant to be used by the general public?
- E. Was one allowed to change from an established *minhag* to the Gra's usage, or would one have to wait for a new community to be established (ie., Eretz Yisroel) and only then to implement any new customs?

All of these questions become more relevant as the disciples of the Gra made their way to Eretz Yisroel and established communities following their master's customs. With the proliferation of Yeshivos and inhabitants in Eretz Yisroel this has become a widely discussed issue.

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56. See *Hilchos Vehalichos Bachasidus* by Rabbi Dr. Aharon Wertheim for a listing of all the differences in *nusach* between Chassidim and Misnagdim. He also touches on the main differences in all other areas.

57. There are a few versions of the *Maaseh Rav*; Siddur *Ishai Yisroel* [R Yitzchak Maltzan]; Siddur Hanigleh Vehanistar [Rav Naftali Hertz, Rabbi of Jaffa]; *Diyukei Tefilla* in the *Shulchan Aruch*; anecdotal material of various reliability; and some clues in his kabbalistic writings

## THE ENDLESS DIMENSIONS OF THE SIDTUR

Generally speaking, the Gra prefers the Talmudic usage over later *minhagim*, and is opposed to newly introduced *mizmorim* etc. into public davening (ie., as above, *Mizmor shir chanukas habayis*).

One Siddur which has recently been published in many editions attempting to reconstruct the Gra's *nusach* with copious notes is *Eizor Eliyahu*.<sup>58</sup> It was begun by R. Yehoshua Cohen and continued by R. Dovid Cohen (no relation), and is a very thorough work. It has gone through very many editions, each with changes.

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All of this leads us back to our quixotic search for the *Siddur Hameduyak*. After much research into the issue, it appears that in order to produce this Siddur one would first have to resolve the following questions, which really appear unsolvable.

1. Was there ever a “perfect *nusach*” and if yes, where is it?
2. Was the vocalization (*nikud*) ever set, and if not, by what rules do we set them?
3. At what point does a general *minhag* become part and parcel of the Siddur?
4. If Halacha and Kabbalah conflict, what do we do?
5. Who is the final authority or *Posek Acharon*, (i.e., on a par with the *Mishna Berura* in Halacha) of the Siddur?
6. Changes made by people whose credentials and intentions are suspect, but whose changes have become entrenched—did they become part of the true tradition?

Regarding the last questions, there is a difference of opinion between R. Elyashav z”l and other Poskim. R. Elyashiv told me very clearly that “*mesora*

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58. The first attempt at this was done by R. Sraya Devlitzki who whited out and inserted by hand from a regular Siddur that which he felt was the Gra's *nusach* and then printed photocopies of the result.

is what your *rebbe* taught you in *cheder*, regardless of its source!”<sup>59</sup> Other Poskim disagree.

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It seems quite clear that there is no such thing as “the” *Siddur Hameduyak*. We may have “a” *Siddur Hameduyak*, which means that someone had put in great effort into making some decisions about what he published. When one comes across a Siddur that advertises itself as “*meduyak*,” one needs to ask three questions:

1. What was the base Siddur used?
2. Which alternatives were considered?
3. Who made the decision for the final choice?<sup>60</sup>

May we merit soon the day when the issues dealing with prayer be decided by those who established them.

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59. In *Peniney Tefilla*, a collection of rulings by R. Elyashiv by his disciple Rav Shlomo Kook, p. 87, R. Elyashiv is quoted as saying that any *nusach* which has become accepted, as long as it is halachically acceptable, should be preferred and that even if it is wrong, “כבר קידשו הטעות” The Bologna manuscript of the *Sefer Chasidim* (Mekitzey Nirdamim Edition) similarly says that one should follow the prevalent *nusach*.

60. Regarding the *Aliyas Eliyahu* Siddur, my decision was to have footnotes called *Mesores Hatefilla* which gives the source for each *tefilla*, and the most important variant *nuschaos*, and allow each person to ask their own Posek to determine which is correct. There is simply no definitive way of determining *the* nusach..