

= Kvitel =

This article refers to the prayer note ; for the card game see Kvitlech .

Kvitel (Yiddish : קְבִיטֶל , " little note " ; plural קְבִיטֶלֶךְ , Kvitelach) refers to a practice developed by Hasidic Judaism in which a Hasid (a follower of Hasidic Judaism) writes a note with a petitionary prayer and gives it to a Rebbe (Hasidic Jewish leader) in order to receive the latter 's blessing . This prayer may be a general request for health , livelihood , or success , or a specific request such as recovery from illness , the ability to bear children , a wedding match , etc .

The writing , giving and reading of a kvitel is treated very seriously by Hasid and Rebbe alike , and is executed according to specific protocols . Because of their inherent sanctity , kvitelach may not be thrown away after use ; they are either burned or buried .

The practice of giving kvitelach continues today in all the Hasidic courts . Kvitelach are also placed on the graves of Rebbes and tzadikim (plural of " tzadik , " or Jewish holy man) with the hope that the soul of the deceased will intercede for the petitioner in Heaven .

It is a centuries @-@ old custom for Jews to place kvitelach containing personal prayers to God between the stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem . This practice has been also adopted by Christian pilgrims and foreign dignitaries as well . More than a million prayer notes are placed in the Western Wall each year .

= = Origin = =

It is unclear when the practice of writing and giving kvitelach began . This practice is not mentioned in the writings of the early kabbalists , nor in the works of the school of Isaac Luria (1534 ? 1572) , the father of modern Kabbalah . The first time it is mentioned is during the time of the Baal Shem Tov (1698 ? 1762) , founder of Hasidism .

Some scholars have suggested that the practice is based on Biblical commentator Nahmanides 's (1194 ? 1270) interpretation of the scriptural verse " And all those that were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers ' houses , from twenty years old and upward , all that were able to go forth to war in Israel " (Numbers 1 : 45) . In his commentary on the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) , Nahmanides contends that Moses asked each Jew to come before him to be counted . This personal appearance of the Jew before Moses , the tzadik (Jewish holy man) , foreshadowed the ceremony of the giving of a kvitel by the Hasid to his Rebbe .

Once the practice of giving kvitelach was established in Hasidic courts , it was treated very seriously . There were cases where Hasidic Jews hired a non @-@ Jew to ride or travel to the Rebbe on Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) to deliver a kvitel for a Jew who was ill , a clear violation of the Shabbat laws . Rabbi Sholom Mordechai Schwadron (1835 ? 1911) once responded to a questioner who asked whether a Jew could send a telegram on behalf of a sick person on Shabbat : " In my hometown of Zlatshv , there was a desperately sick person . When the Belzer Rebbe (the Rebbe of the Belz Hasidic dynasty , Rabbi Sholom Rokeach) was in Brod for Shabbat , the local rabbi allowed the Jews to have a gentile write the name of the sick person and his mother 's name and send this kvitel to Brod . " This action was vehemently protested by Rabbi Shlomo Kluger as well as by the Belzer Rebbe , and the rabbi was removed from his post .

= = Procedure = =

= = = Writing the kvitel = = =

In Hasidic courts , the kvitel is inscribed with the names of the petitioner and his family members , along with their specific requests . The form of the name is the person 's full Hebrew name and his mother 's Hebrew name (e.g. Shmuel ben Chana , " Shmuel the son of Chana ") , even if the Rebbe already knows who he is . It is customary to write the kvitel on a blank , unlined piece of paper .

Customs differ as to who writes the kvitel . In some courts , the Rebbe 's attendant writes the kvitel on behalf of the petitioner ; in others , a specific person is paid to write the kvitelach . Alternately , the petitioner himself writes the kvitel .

Various customs arose around the writing of a kvitel . It is considered a bad omen if a kvitel falls on the ground , or if sand is placed on it . (Sand was commonly used as a drying agent for ink on paper .) Care is taken to write the kvitel without any mistakes , as Hasidic Jews believe that kvitelach contain deep secrets .

= = = Giving the kvitel = = =

The kvitel is either sent to the Rebbe by messenger or mail , or given personally by the Hasid during his private audience with the Rebbe . The kvitel is usually given together with a sum of money known as a pidyon (redemption) , which is used by the Rebbe for the upkeep of his court or for distribution to charity . Some Rebbes requested from the Hasid a sum of money equal to twice the numerical value of the Hebrew word Chai (life) , which equals 18 . Others took an amount of money equal to the numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew names of the Hasid or his wife .

Women are also welcome to visit a Rebbe and present their kvitelach to him . However , the Rebbe does not look at the woman directly while giving his blessing .

The giving of the first kvitel cements the status of a newly appointed Hasidic Rebbe . In Belz tradition , the first kvitel to a new Rebbe is proffered by a follower of the Ropshitz Hasidic dynasty . Thus , when Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach assumed the mantle of leadership in 1894 after the death of his father , Rabbi Yehoshua Rokeach , he was given his first kvitel by Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Bisk , a follower of the Ropshitz dynasty . Thirty @-@ three years later , following the funeral of Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach , Rokeach 's son and successor , Rabbi Aharon Rokeach , received his first kvitelach from Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Bisk and two other followers of the Ropshitz dynasty .

The followers of the Ger Hasidic dynasty have in their possession the Kotzer Kvitel , a long note written by an elderly Hasid who had attended the courts of Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (the Sefas Emes) , Rabbi Chanoch Henoah of Alexander , Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (the Chiddushei Harim) and Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk . This Hasid presented the kvitel , containing his memories of these former Rebbes of the Ger dynasty , to Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter (the Imrei Emes) upon the latter 's appointment as Rebbe of the Ger dynasty .

= = = Reading the kvitel = = =

If the kvitel is delivered by mail or messenger , the Rebbe 's attendant reads it to the Rebbe . If the Hasid is present , the Rebbe reads the kvitel during their audience . Afterwards , the Rebbe blesses the petitioner .

Rebbes traditionally devote their utmost attention to reading kvitelach . It was said of the Bohusher Rebbe , Rabbi Yitzchok Friedman , that when he read a kvitel , he put his whole being into the piece of paper before bestowing his blessing . The Satmar Rebbe , Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum , was known to scrutinize each kvitel and point out errors in the writing of names of people he had never met .

Stories are told about Rebbes who were able to read into a kvitel the situations of those who were named in it . Once a bride @-@ to @-@ be and her mother visited the Bohusher Rebbe , Rabbi Yitzchok Friedman , for a blessing . The Rebbe 's attendant wrote the kvitel hastily , noting next to the mother 's name that she was about to marry . The Rebbe glanced at the kvitel and said , " She is already married . "

When Rabbi Aharon Rokeach , the Belzer Rebbe , was hiding from the Nazis in the Kraków Ghetto in 1942 , he accepted a kvitel from one of the men who was assigned to protect him . As the names of the man 's children were read aloud , the Rebbe continually stopped the reader when he reached a certain child 's name and asked him to begin reading the kvitel again . This happened several times . Later the man learned that this son had died suddenly during the war , but the rest of his family survived .

It was said of " great Rebbes " that in their presence , petitioners would be struck with awe and would accidentally hand over a blank piece of paper instead of the kvitel . The Rebbe would read the blank page and understand exactly what the person wanted .

In the court of Vizhnitz , it was known that if the Rebbe asked for a cigarette to smoke in the middle of reading a kvitel , it was a sign that the petitioner 's request had been accepted . Rabbi Eliezer Dovid Friedman , a follower of the fourth Vizhnitzer Rebbe , Rabbi Chaim Meir Hager , witnessed this in 1965 when he delivered a kvitel to the Rebbe on behalf of a Melbourne Jew stricken with cancer and the Rebbe asked for a cigarette while reading the kvitel . The man recovered completely . However , in 1972 , immediately after the death of the Rebbe , the Melbourne Jew fell ill with the same disease and succumbed to it .

= = At a grave = =

It is a common practice for Hasidic Jews to place kvitelach on the gravesite of a Rebbe or tzadik with the belief that the soul of the deceased will pray for them in Heaven . The visitor usually sits beside the grave to write his kvitel and meditate on his request , and then tears the kvitel and throws it on top of the grave . Many graves of Jewish holy men are constructed with special apertures for the insertion of kvitelach .

= = At the Western Wall = =

The kvitelach placed in the Western Wall differ from the kvitelach given in Hasidic courts , as they contain prayers , requests or messages written directly to God . These prayer notes are folded and wedged into the cracks and crevices of the Wall . The rationale for this practice has been traced to the Midrashic teaching that the Divine Presence has never moved from the Western Wall , and the Kabbalistic teaching that all prayers ascend to Heaven through the Temple Mount , which the Western Wall abuts . More than a million prayer notes are placed in the Western Wall each year .

The practice of placing prayer notes in the Western Wall has also been adopted by Christian pilgrims and people of other faiths . Foreign dignitaries who have publicly placed a kvitel in the Western Wall include Pope John Paul II in 2000 , U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2005 , Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 , U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama in 2008 , and U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney and his wife Ann in 2012 . Pope Francis inserted a handwritten Spanish language text of the Lord 's Prayer in the Wall during his visit in 2014 .

Based on the 11th century French rabbi Rabbeinu Gershom 's ban against reading another person 's mail , Jewish law forbids the reading of notes that have been inserted in the Western Wall .

= = Disposal of kvitelach = =

Kvitelach may not be thrown away ; there is a difference of opinion as to whether they should be burned or buried . According to Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch , Rabbi of the Western Wall and author of Minhagei HaKotel , a book of laws regarding the Western Wall , burning is a " pure " way to deal with the notes , but burying them is more honorable . Twice a year , Rabbi Rabinovitch and his assistants collect the hundreds of thousands of kvitelach left in the Wall and bury them in the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives .

Kvitelach left at gravesites are traditionally burned . The gravesite of the sixth and seventh Lubavitcher Rebbes , Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson , includes a fax machine which receives over 700 faxes a day , and a computer which receives 400 emails daily . These kvitelach are all printed and then taken to the graves , where they are torn into shreds and placed atop the graves . When the pile grows too high , the shredded notes are burned .

= = Electronic kvitelach = =

In today 's electronic age , many online services offer petitioners the chance to send their kvitel to the Western Wall via email , fax , text messaging and Internet ; the kvitel is then printed out and inserted in the cracks of the Wall . The " Send a Kvitel Service " of kevarim.com receives kvitelach via Internet and then dispatches them to the gravesites of tzadikim in North America with people who travel to these gravesites . The Nikolsburger Rebbe himself accepts kvitelach and pidyonos via Internet .

Sending kvitelach to the grave of a Rebbe or tzadik has also become a fund @-@ raising tool . Mosdos Kever Rachel (Kever Rachel Foundation) encourages donors to send messages and prayers which will be read out at Rachel 's Tomb . Similarly , the Breslov Research Institute website offers donors the opportunity to send a " digital kvitel " to be read by the grave of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in Uman , Ukraine .