

# Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer זצ"ל



Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer was born in the city of Mir in 5630/1870. Even as a young *talmid* in Yeshivas Volozhin, Rav Chaim Brisker already noted his brilliant mind. He became *rosh yeshivah* of the Slutzk Yeshivah when he was only 27 years old. Before long, he was viewed as one of the most prized *roshei yeshivah* of that time and Slutzk became one of the most respected yeshivos in the world.

In 1925, Rav Isser Zalman moved to Eretz Yisrael and was appointed *rosh*

*yeshivah* of Yeshivas Eitz Chaim. He eventually became the head of the Mo'etzes Gedolei Torah (a group of *gedolim* who worked together to deal with major issues in Klal Yisrael) there.

Rav Isser Zalman taught thousands of *talmidim* throughout his life, mainly in the cities of Slabodka, Slutzk (where he was also the *rav*), Kletzk, and Yerushalayim. He was the only person to whom the Chazon

Ish gave the title "*maran*," meaning one who is a *rav* for other *rabbanim*.

Rav Isser Zalman was also well known for his kindness. Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach (who lived with Rav Isser Zalman for a number of years) said, "Besides his great genius, he was a man of outstanding *middos tovos*." He praised and showed concern for his *talmidim* in a way that encouraged them to continue learning and growing. He was *niftar* on 10 Kislev, 5714 (1953).

## SOME OF RAV ISSER ZALMAN'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:



Rav Isser Zalman was the *rosh yeshivah* in Slutzk at a time when communist Russia wanted to put a stop to religion. Although the government did not allow teaching Torah, he continued to run his yeshivah and was even thrown in jail several times. Eventually, he was forced to flee to Poland and from there he went to Eretz Yisrael.



Along with other *gedolim* of his time, he fought to stop the Sheirut Leumi (national service) law, where girls in Eretz Yisrael would have to do work for the government for two years.

He wrote *Even Ha'azel*, a *peirush* on the Rambam. Rav Isser Zalman said that most of his *chiddushim* for his *sefer* came later in life, adding that this should inspire others that they too can become great even if they are already older.



He was one of the founders of the Vaad Hayeshivos in Eretz Yisrael that helped support the yeshivos there.

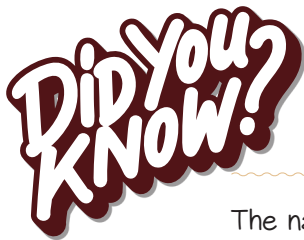


## Family Tree

Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer was born to Rav Baruch Peretz and Rebbetzin Morka Raizel Meltzer. Rav Baruch Peretz was great in both Torah and *yiras Shamayim*. Rav Isser Zalman's older sister Fruma Rivka was married to Rav Benzion Gilmovsky. Their daughter Guttel (Rav Isser Zalman's niece) married Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach. Rav Isser Zalman married Rebbetzin Baila Hinda, the daughter of Reb Chaim Shraga Feivel and Rebbetzin Golda Frank. (Reb Chaim Shraga Feivel wanted his daughters to only marry great *talmidei chachamim*. His other daughter married Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, who would become *rosh yeshivah* of Slabodka, so Rav Isser Zalman and Rav Moshe Mordechai were brothers-in-law.) Rav Isser Zalman



and Rebbetzin Baila Hinda's children were Chana Perel, Chaim Feivel, Tzvi Yehuda, and Sarah. Chana Perel, the oldest of the four, married Rav Aharon Kotler. Their children were Rav Shneur and Sarah. Rav Shneur's son is Rav Malkiel Kotler, the present *rosh yeshivah* of Beis Medrash Govoha.



Even though he was the youngest *talmid* there, he was allowed to learn at the Yeshivah of Volozhin because he did so well on the entrance test.

Rav Isser Zalman originally wanted to open a yeshivah in Kletzk, but it didn't work out. Years later, his yeshivah in Slutsk was forced to move — and Kletzk was chosen as the new location!

The name of his *sefer* can be said in two different ways. Some call it *Even "Ha'azel"* because that is the way these words are written at the end of the *pasuk* in *Shmuel Aleph* (20:19). Others say *Even "Ha'ezel"* because it is only pronounced "*Ha'azel*" when the word is at the end of a *pasuk* and not when one is saying it as a phrase on its own.

At his daughter and son-in-law's last *sheva brachos seudah*, his new son-in-law, Rav Aharon Kotler, said a somewhat long and complex *dvar Torah*. Right afterward, Rav Isser Zalman repeated the whole *dvar Torah* — in rhyme!



## EXTRAORDINARY CARING

Rav Isser Zalman was a tremendous *ba'al middos*. Among his many *middos tovos*, he was especially careful never to

make another person feel bad.

Just before one of his *sefarim* was to be printed, he went to visit a nephew in the middle of the night. Rav Isser Zalman asked this nephew a question in learning and after hearing his answer, he left. When the new *sefer* came out, that answer from his nephew was included. At the time, people wondered why it had been so important for Rav Isser Zalman to include that in his *sefer*. Eventually, they found out that Rav Isser Zalman had included a *dvar Torah* from a different nephew in the *sefer*, and he was concerned that perhaps this nephew would feel left out if the *sefer* was printed without a *dvar Torah* from him as well. Therefore, he went out in the middle of the night to hear something from him that could be included.

Another time, a neighbor watched as Rav Isser Zalman went home, got close to his door, and then turned around and left. A little while later, this happened again. After seeing this occur several times, the neighbor went over and asked if there was something he could do to help. Rav Isser Zalman explained that there was a

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woman cleaning his house, a widow, who was singing as she worked. He knew that if he were to go inside, the woman would stop singing, but he figured that singing helped her feel better for a moment. If so, Rav Isser Zalman did not want to go inside and cause her to stop singing, so he was waiting for her to stop on her own.

Similarly, Rav Isser Zalman was careful to think about how what he did would affect others. During the War of Independence (1948) in Eretz Yisrael, he was going down the stairs of his home when he was hurt by a nearby explosion. His family wanted to get him an emergency medical transport (like an ambulance) to take care of him right away. However, Rav Isser Zalman told them not to call for help. His family couldn't understand why, but then he explained, "Right now there is bombing going on and medical transports need to be ready to help those with very severe injuries. I can wait for things to calm down before getting help. [because my injuries are not that severe]."

### RAV ISSER ZALMAN'S DVAR TORAH

#### The "Fire" and "Water" of Torah

The Torah is compared to both fire (*Yirmiyahu* 23:29) and water (*Yeshayahu* 55:1). How is the Torah like two opposite elements?

There are *middos* that are like fire, because a person who has them gets "fired up" and excited in some way.

These fire-like *middos* can be used for bad and cause a person to do *aveiros*. However, when a person is busy with Torah, any bad part of these *middos* that's inside him disappears. For example, a person can have a *ta'avah* (strong desire) to do something that is *assur*, but if he learns Torah, it will remove that *ta'avah*.

These same fire-like *middos* can also be used for good. For example, one can have a *ta'avah* for mitzvos and feel like he has never done enough — like it says in the *midrash* (*Vayikra Rabbah*, *Acharei Mos* 22:2): *One who loves mitzvos is never satisfied with mitzvos* [instead, he always wants more]. This also happens through being busy with Torah.

Now we can understand why the Torah is compared to both fire and water. Torah allows a person to use the good parts of the fire-like *middos*, so it too is like fire. The Torah also "puts out" the bad parts of the fire-like *middos*, so it is like water.

The Torah's ability to put out the bad parts of the fire-like *middos* is so important because one with bad *middos* cannot grow in Torah! This is what *Chazal* mean when they say (*Maseches Derech Eretz* 7:1): *Just like water only flows to a lower area and not to a higher one, the Torah only stays with someone who looks at himself with lowliness* (i.e., with humility).

(Introduction to *Even Ha'azel*, *Sefer Avodah*, *aleph*)