

Rav Mordechai Gifter זצ"ל



Rav Mordechai Gifter was born in Portsmouth, Virginia, in 5676 (1915) and grew up in Baltimore. In those times, most Jewish day schools were located in New York, so he attended public school during the day and Hebrew school afterward. At age 13, he went to learn in yeshivah in New York where he demonstrated a real *ahavas haTorah* and advanced in his learning. When he was 17, a relative suggest-

ed that he go learn in Telshe, Lithuania. He went there and became one of the yeshivah's best *talmidim*. With a true *simchas haTorah*, he learned with much *hasmadah* and finished many *masechtos*. Years later, after the Telshe community was destroyed in the Holocaust, the yeshivah was reestablished in Cleveland, Ohio. Rav Gifter joined the new yeshivah, eventually becoming its *rosh yeshivah*.

Later in life, Rav Gifter would encourage others, saying that he was proof that even those with a weak background can accomplish in Torah. He wrote *chiddushei Torah* on many areas of *Shas* and published many *sefarim*. He was a member of the Moetzes Gedolei Torah of Agudas Yisroel and one of the head advisers to Torah Umesorah, an organization that supports Jewish schools. He was *niftar* on 23 Teves, 5761 (2001).

Did You Know?

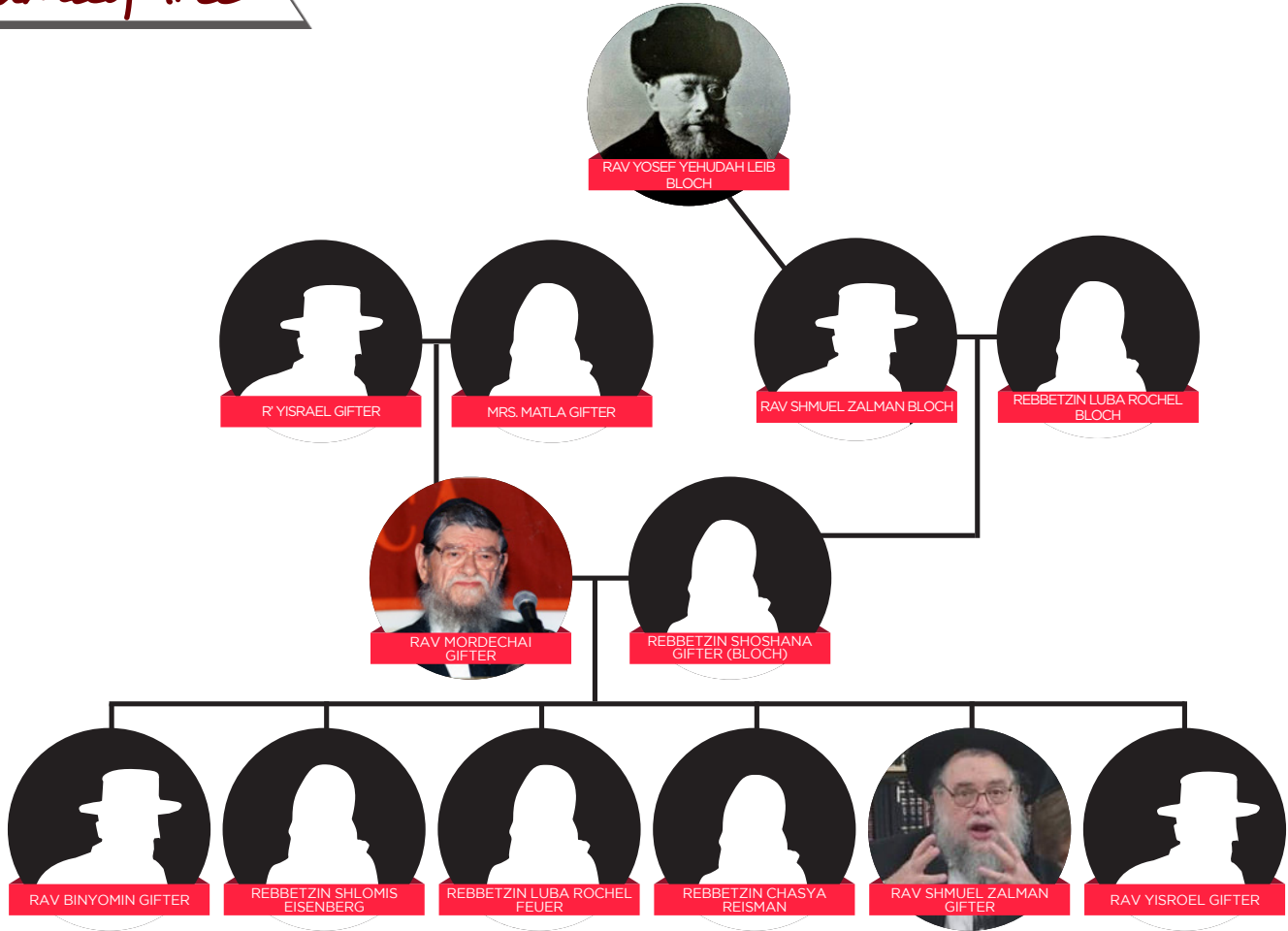
When he was a teenager, his dormitory wall was decorated with pictures of *gedolim*. In the middle, there was an empty picture frame with the words, "Why not you?"

When Rav Gifter was eight, Rav Shimon Shkop visited Baltimore and gave him a *brachah*: "You should always want to learn." Rav Gifter would later say that what he achieved in learning was due to that *brachah*.

The town of Telz-Stone in Eretz Yisrael was founded in the 1970s by Mr. Irving Stone, who gave the land to the Telshe yeshivah so they could open another branch there. Rav Gifter went there and established the yeshivah. Two years later, when he was needed to lead Telshe Cleveland, the Steipler Gaon instructed him to return to America.

Rav Gifter told those who needed to learn secular studies to do their best. "If you fool around during secular studies, you will end up wasting time during learning too."

Family Tree



Rav Mordechai was the son of Reb Yisrael and Mrs. Matla Gifter, *yirei Shamayim* who wanted the best for their children. (Rav Mordechai was named after Reb Yisrael's father.) Rav Mordechai married Shoshana, the daughter of Rav Shmuel Zalman and Rebbetzin Luba Rochel Bloch. Rav Shmuel Zalman was the *mashgiach ruchani* of the Telshe Yeshiva and *dayan* of the city. He was the son of Rav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch (the Telzer *rav* and *rosh yeshivah*), who was the son-in-law of Rav Eliezer Gordon (the Telzer *rav* and *rosh yeshivah* before him). Rav Shmuel Zalman's brother was Rav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, the *rosh yeshivah* of Telshe after their father. (Rav Avraham Yitzchak's sons-in-law, Rav Boruch Sorotzkin and Rav Aizik Ausband, were *roshei yeshivah* of Telshe in Cleveland. Rav Aizik's son Rav Avraham became the *rosh yeshivah* of Yeshiva of the Telshe Alumni in Riverdale.) Another brother of Rav Shmuel Zalman, Rav Eliyahu (Elya) Meir helped found the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland. Rav Mordechai and Rebbetzin Shoshana Gifter had six children: Rav Binyomin (married Sorah Shapiro), Shlomis (married Rav Efraim Eisenberg), Luba Rochel (married Rav Avraham Chaim Feuer), Chasya (married Rav Yaakov Reisman), Rav Shmuel Zalman (married Miriam Kaplinsky), and Rav Yisroel (married Rivkah Bookson).

SOME OF RAV GIFTER'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rav Gifter was an outstanding speaker who could at times have his audience completely focused on his words. As a result, he spoke at large conventions and at the *Siyum HaShas* where he inspired countless listeners.



When ArtScroll Publications was just getting started and *sefarim* in English (like translations of the Mishnah and Gemara) were not yet commonplace, Rav Gifter gave them his approval. He shared his opinion with other *gedolim* of the time, which helped ArtScroll become more established.



Rav Gifter voiced disapproval over the fact that yeshivos were learning only a number of *blatt* Gemara each year when they could have and should have been learning a lot more. In response, many yeshivos added *be-ki'us sedarim*, so *talmidim* would finish an entire *masechta* in a year.



RAV GIFTER'S *ahavas haTorah* was extraordinary and visible to all. A *talmid* at Telshe Cleveland was having problems in his personal life and was filled with self-doubt. As a result, he was not learning well. He had decided that it made sense for

him to leave yeshivah, but he first had to first tell Rav Gifter, the *rosh yeshivah*, about his decision. He knew the *rosh yeshivah* would be disappointed to hear the news, but he was not going to let that change his mind.

The *talmid* approached Rav Gifter at the end of second *sefer* to inform him of his decision. Rav Gifter was still learning and the *talmid* did not want to interrupt him, so he waited for the *rosh yeshivah* to finish. Soon after, Rav Gifter stopped learning — and then he did something that changed the *talmid's* life. He gave his Gemara a loud kiss, one that clearly came from his deep *ahavas haTorah*. Although the *talmid* had been ready to say he was leaving, he was overwhelmed by Rav Gifter's display of love for Torah. On the spot, he changed his mind and decided to stay!

Rav Gifter was totally devoted to learning and encouraged others to be as well. Once, the general studies principal in Telshe developed a medical problem. Although an operation was successfully performed, the principal remained in a coma. The yeshivah davened for him, but he was not improving. Days later, the doctors told Rav Gifter that though they had done everything they could, the principal was getting weaker and could not survive much longer.

Rav Gifter reacted by entering the *beis midrash* and banging on the *bimah*. "Why are we so calm? Our friend is struggling for his life and we are acting like it doesn't bother us! Yes, we said *Tehillim* for ten minutes, but then we moved on. I demand that everyone learn for one hour without wasting a second!" He then went into the office and told everyone, including those who worked in the kitchen, to join the learning for one hour. An hour later, the doctor called with good news: the principal had woken up and was on his way to getting better!

Later, a knock was heard on the door of the *talmid's* home. They opened the door and saw Rav Gifter standing there. He announced, "I'm here to take out the garbage!"

In a well-known story, a *talmid* once asked Rav Gifter if it was appropriate for him to take out the garbage. On the one hand, his wife would appreciate the help; on the other hand, he didn't feel that it was proper for someone who learned Torah to handle garbage. Rav Gifter replied that the *talmid* was making a good point and should not take out the trash. Later, a knock was heard on the door of the *talmid's* home. They opened the door and saw

Rav Gifter standing there. He announced, "I'm here to take out the garbage!" The message was clear: We have to have *kavod haTorah*, but we also have to help our families.

RAV GIFTER'S DVAR TORAH

Twelve Plus Twelve Does NOT Equal Twenty-Four

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 50a) relays that Rabi Akiva was away from home learning for 12 years. When he was coming back, he stopped outside the door to his home and overheard his wife, Rochel, saying to someone, "I would send him to learn for another 12 years!" Right away, he returned to the *beis midrash* and learned for another 12 years.

Rav Yosef Leib Bloch (the Telzer Rav after his father-in-law, Rav Eliezer Gordon) asked: Why didn't Rabi Akiva stop inside, even for just a few minutes? He explained that when it comes to learning Torah, 12 and 12 is not the same as 24. In other words, learning for 12 years, taking a break, and then learning for another 12 years is not the same as learning for 24 years straight. Learning Torah continuously, without a break, is much greater. When one learns every day for many years, it is not valued as a learning of days; it becomes a learning of years.

In *Birchos HaTorah*, we say *v'tzivanu la'wasok b'dvirei Sorah*—"and Who has commanded us to involve ourselves in words of Torah." The word *la'asok* means to be very involved, like someone who is very immersed in their job. This teaches us that the way to succeed in Torah is to put everything we have into it and learn as much as we can.

(From Rav Gifter's speech at the 8th Daf Yomi siyum; printed in *The Jewish Observer*, December 1982, volume 16, number 7.)