

Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler זצ"ל



Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, one of the greatest *mussar* leaders of his time, was born in Libau, Lithuania, on 16 Sivan, 5652 (1892). His father was close to the Alter of Kelm and so he sent young Elya Leizer to learn in the Yeshivah of Kelm when he was still a young boy.

In Kelm, Rav Eliyahu developed his *ahavas haTorah* and refined *middos*. He would have stayed there, but his father, a wealthy businessman, lost his fortune in the Russian Revolution,

and Rav Eliyahu traveled to London in 1929 to find a *parnassah* that would help his father repay his debts.

In England, Rav Dessler served as a shul rav, teacher and tutor for several years, until he was invited by Rabbi Dovid Dryan to start the Gateshead Kollel – the first *kollel* in England. People thought a *kollel* was a strange concept and wouldn't last, but Rav Dessler proved them wrong. He headed the Gateshead Kollel for seven years and many of his *talmidim* became famous

roshei yeshivah and *rabbanim*. He also helped establish Gateshead Seminary for girls and delivered *shiurim* there.

Rav Dessler was a pleasant person with a giving personality. His every action was thought out and in accordance with halachah. His *talmidim* felt so close to him that they cried when he left Gateshead in the late 1940s to move to Bnei Brak, where he became *mashgiach* in Ponevez Yeshivah, inspiring many until his *petirah* on 24 Teves, 5714 (1953).

Did You Know?

Rav Dessler went to study in the Talmud Torah of Kelm at age 14, making him the youngest student there!

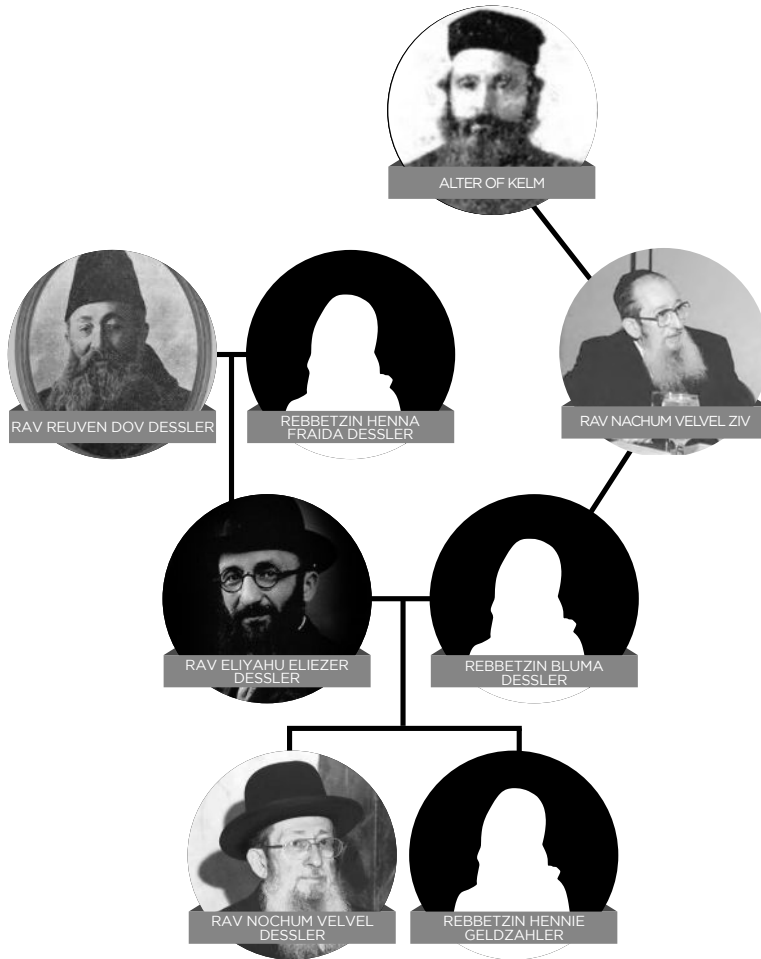
When he began the Gateshead Kollel, he refused to abandon his students in London. Instead, he took the overnight train from London to Gateshead at least twice a week, sleeping on a hard railway seat.

He spent so much time on the train between London and Gateshead that he invented a device for train crews to alert them if there were oncoming trains and British Railways patented it.

Once, a married *talmid* invited Rav Dessler to his Pesach Seder. Rav Dessler noticed that the *talmid's* wife was very tired from all the preparations, so he insisted on conducting the Seder quickly so she could go to sleep – and then he washed the dishes!

Rav Dessler was primarily known for his *hashkafah* and *mussar shmuessen*, but he was also a tremendous *talmid chacham*. He completed *Shas* four times before his marriage at the age of 26!

Family Tree



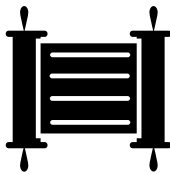
Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler was the son of Rav Reuven Dov and Rebbetzin Henna Fraida Dessler. Rav Reuven Dov, one of the closest *talmidim* of the Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, was a wealthy *talmid chacham* who supported many yeshivos. Through his mother, Rebbetzin Henna Fraida, Rav Dessler was a great-grandson of Rav Yisrael Salanter and a nephew of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski. Rav Dessler was an only child and his mother passed away soon after he was born. His father remarried Fruma Rochel Rabinowitz, daughter of R' Yaakov Rabinowitz, one of the *talmidei chachamim* of Telshe. She raised Eliyahu Eliezer like he was her own child.

Rav Eliyahu Eliezer married Bluma Ziv, the daughter of Rav Nachum Velvel Ziv, who was the son of the Alter of Kelm. She was a refined woman who supported her husband's Torah learning all her life and lived with serenity and *bitachon*, even when she was stranded with her daughter in remote Australia during WWII, far from her husband.

Rav Eliyahu and Rebbetzin Bluma Dessler had two children, Nochum Velvel and Hennie. Rav Nochum Velvel Dessler built the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, where he served as long-time dean. Many children received a true Torah *chinuch* thanks to him. Hennie married Rav Yehoshua Geldzahler, who established Yeshivas Ohr Yisrael of Queens and was *rosh yeshivah* there for over 40 years.

SOME OF RAV DESSLER'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Rav Dovid Dryan asked over 20 rabbanim to establish the Gateshead Kollel. Only Rav Dessler responded with an enthusiastic "Yes!" In Gateshead, he took on the huge roles of both *rosh kollel* and main fundraiser. Many of the members of the Kollel went on to open their own *yeshivos* and spread Torah. Indeed, Rav Yechezkel Abramsky said that Rav Dessler revolutionized Torah in England just as Rav Aharon Kotler did in America.



Rav Dessler wrote numerous letters to his family and *talmidim*. Sometimes he would stay up all Thursday night writing. His letters were extremely warm – he would tell his *talmidim* how much he loved them and how much potential they had before giving them *mussar*.



The *shmuessen* that Rav Dessler gave in the Ponevez Yeshivah were so fascinating that people came all the way from Tel Aviv and even Yerushalayim just to listen to him. He was able to explain basic concepts of Yiddishkeit, such as *hashgachah pratis* and *bechirah*, in a clear yet deep way. After Rav Dessler was *niftar*, his *talmidim* collected his *shmuessen* and published them in the multi-volume *sefer, Michtav M'Eliyahu*. It became so beloved that it was translated into four languages – English, Spanish, French and Russian.

Rav Dessler was at the forefront of the Peylim organization, which worked to rescue Yemenite immigrants from the clutches of the non-religious Israelis who sought to tear them away from Yiddishkeit. Rav Dessler was the rav that the Peylim activists came to with their *sh'eilos* and his stature helped the organization grow in legitimacy among other Torah organizations.





RAV DESSLER LIVED by the *mussar* that he taught. His self-control was legendary. One of his *talmidim* once passed by when a person was yelling at Rav Dessler. Rav Dessler did not respond and even kept a serene smile on his face the entire time. Amazed, the *talmid*

asked Rav Dessler how he was able to control himself. Rav Dessler answered, "I wasn't born this way. By nature, I'm angry and stubborn. But, *baruch Hashem*, I was able to train myself to treat every person pleasantly."

Indeed, Rav Dessler's son testified that he never saw his father get angry or heard him say anything bad about anyone. He would repeatedly thank anyone who did anything for him – even for a small act like giving him a cup of water.

When Rav Dessler lived in England, he developed cataracts in both eyes and needed eye surgery. The non-frum surgeon was so impressed when he met Rav Dessler that he offered him a private room for his hospital stay, but Rav Dessler refused any special treatment. The doctor recommended that Rav Dessler have both eyes operated on at once. That meant he wouldn't be able to learn from a *sefer* for six weeks. Rav Dessler was horrified at the thought and insisted that he only have the surgery done in one eye – so he wouldn't be parted from

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his beloved *sefarim*.

Rav Dessler was always careful not to cause anyone discomfort. When Rav and Rebbetzin Dessler married, they received a beautiful kiddush cup from Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski (Rav Dessler's uncle). This cup was very special, as Rav Chaim Ozer had gotten it as a present from *his* wife's grandfather, Rav Yisrael Salanter. Rav Dessler used it every Shabbos.

The first Shabbos after the Desslers moved to Bnei Brak, Rav Dessler made Kiddush from a different cup. His rebbetzin noticed and asked why. Rav Dessler explained that they were now living in Bnei Brak, where the chief *posek* was the Chazon Ish. Since the Chazon Ish held that a larger kiddush cup was required, Rav Dessler had used a bigger cup.

Rebbetzin Dessler respectfully disagreed. If their kiddush cup had been used by *gedolei hador* like Rav Yisrael Salanter and Rav Chaim Ozer, it should certainly be good enough for them.

Rav Dessler didn't argue. He went back to using their original kiddush cup. But the first Shabbos after Rebbetzin Dessler's passing, he switched to the larger cup. Only then did people realize that he had only used the smaller cup all those years so he wouldn't hurt his rebbetzin's feelings.

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Try This!

Do you have a pesky sibling or an annoying classmate? For the next few days, try doing that person a favor every day. It can be something big like inviting them to sit next to you, or something small like a sincere compliment. See if your feelings about that person change!

RAV DESSLER'S DVAR TORAH

Loving Is Giving

Do we love certain people – like our family members – because that's just how we feel? Do we then choose to give them things *because* we love them? The truth is that only after a person gives of himself to another does he begin to love him. It is giving that connects them and creates real love between them. This is because through giving time, energy, money, etc., a person feels that part of him was given over to the other person. Just like he loves himself, he now loves the other person. In other words, when you give, you don't lose anything. Rather, you are "transferring" that part of you into the other person, so you become one with the other person.

What an idea! Just by giving, and thereby feeling that part of you is now within someone else, you can turn anyone into a close friend. With this in mind, we can understand what the Torah means (*Vayikra* 19:18), *V'ahavta l'reiacha ka'mocha* – "You should love your fellow like yourself." How can we possibly love someone with as much love as we love ourselves? The answer is that if we give to others, we will see ourselves in them and feel that they are like us. Since they are like us, we will be able to love them, like the *Mesilas Yesharim* writes (*perek* 11), *Kamocha mamash* – "In the very same way that we love ourselves."

(*Michtav MeEliyahu, kerech alef, Kuntris Hachessed, chelek alef, perakim daled and hei*)