

הרב נחן אליהו גערצולין זצ"ל  
**Rav Nosson  
Eliyahu  
Gertzulin** זת"ל



**R**av Nosson Eliyahu entered the hallowed portals of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in 1931, at the mere age of 12, and became part of its very essence. From that time his neshama became inexplicably bound with the unique ruach of Torah and avodah there. It was there that he developed into a distinguished talmid chacham; it was there that he became an oved Hashem of stature; and it was there that he influenced generations of talmidim. Perhaps most of all, it was in Torah Vodaath where he spent almost every available moment of his days and nights, immersed in Torah.

Rav Nosson Eliyahu was born in 1919 in the city of Minsk. In 1924, he arrived with his family on American shores and settled in Philadelphia. At the time, there were no Jewish day schools in Philadelphia, and he therefore attended a local public school. His parents were *ehrliche* Yidden who wanted their son to continue on the path of Yiddishkeit. Thus, every morning, his father would awaken him at 3:00 a.m. so that they could learn together for several hours before he went to school. In the evenings they would learn once again.

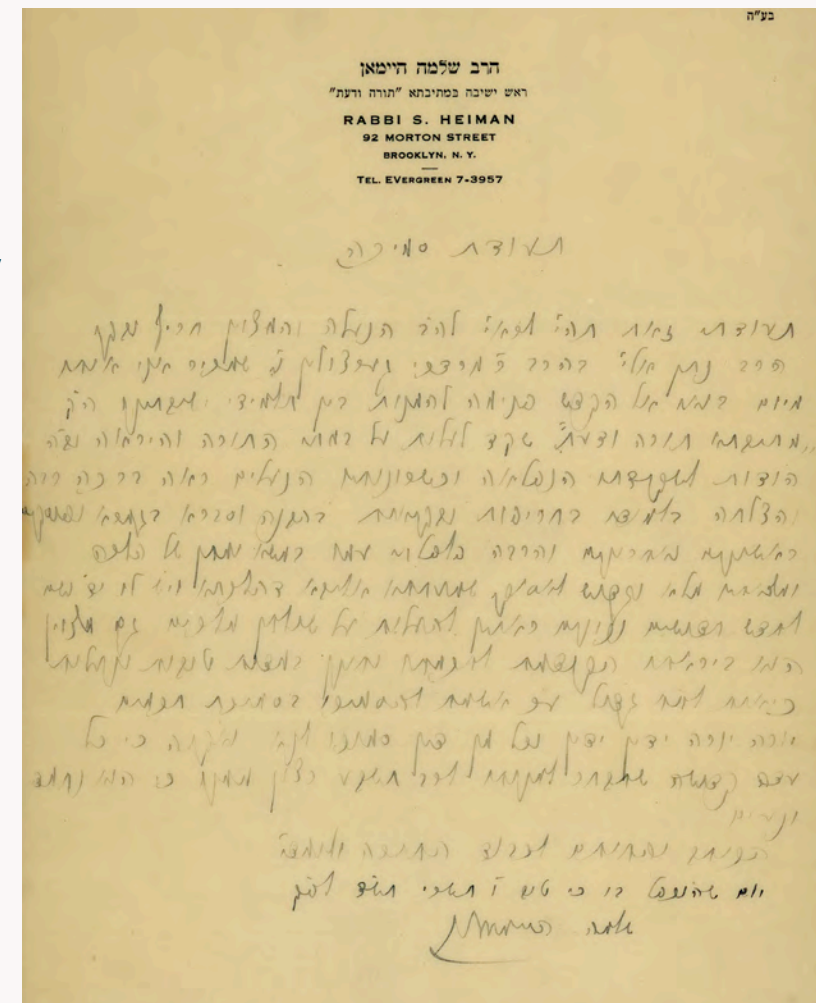
At that time, his father served as Rav in Philadelphia, and despite the fact that many adults learned in the shul, there were no children learning there other than young Nosson Eliyahu. One day, a member of the shul stood up and berated the Rav: “Why are you wasting your time learning with your son? This

*His very heart and soul became bound with that of Rav Shlomo, and Rav Shlomo reciprocated.*

is America! The young people don’t learn here!” Rav Nosson Eliyahu’s father was so shaken by this incident that he decided to send him away to yeshiva at the tender age of 12.

So in 1931, before he even reached his bar mitzva, young Nosson Eliyahu left his home and family for New York’s Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. Despite his having attended public school, Rav Nosson Eliyahu’s learning level was on par with that of his peers who had attended Torah Vodaath from childhood, largely due to his intensive learning at home.

In Torah Vodaath, he first entered the shiur of Rav Rivkin. When he was just 15 years old, he entered the shiur of Rav Shlomo Heiman. Entering Rav Shlomo’s shiur was a watershed in his life. Although the general custom was to stay in Rav Shlomo’s shiur for two years, Rav Nosson Eliyahu remained there for seven years! It was under Rav Shlomo’s tutelage that he became a *lamdan* of stature and a phenomenal masmid. His *hasmada* was so great that he would often still be awake at 3:00 a.m., immersed in his Gemara, learning by a small light. Later in life, he attributed his extensive eye problems to his earlier learning into the wee hours of the morning, whereby he unwittingly strained his eyes. His very heart and soul became bound with that of Rav Shlomo, and Rav Shlomo reciprocated. In fact, Rav Nosson Eliyahu is the only person upon whom Rav Shlomo, who had a general policy not to give *semicha*, bestowed *semicha* for both the Yoreh Yoreh and Yadin Yadin.

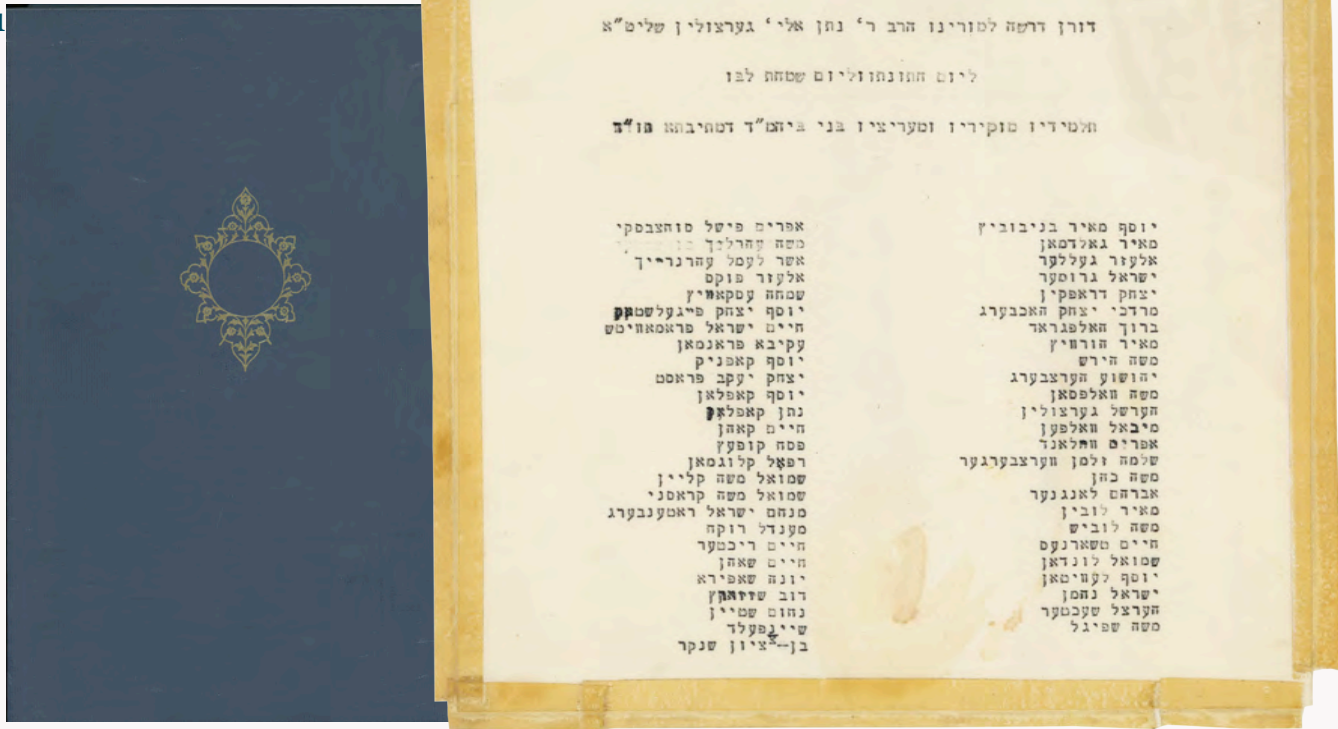


Rav Gertzulin was the only one to receive semicha in Yoreh Yoreh and Yadin Yadin from Rav Shlomo Heiman



Roshei Yeshiva at Rav Gertzulin's chasuna: (l-r) Rav Leibel Shenker, Rav Shmuel Kushelevitz, Rav Dov Ber Rivkin, Rav Reuven Grozovsky, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, unidentified





An inscription bearing the names of the bochurim who gave Rav Gertzulin a Shas Gemara as a wedding gift.

When, due to the yeshiva’s growth, the task of overseeing the bochurim became too difficult for Rav Shraga Feivel, *he chose to appoint Rav Nosson Eliyahu, still a bochur, as mashgiach.*

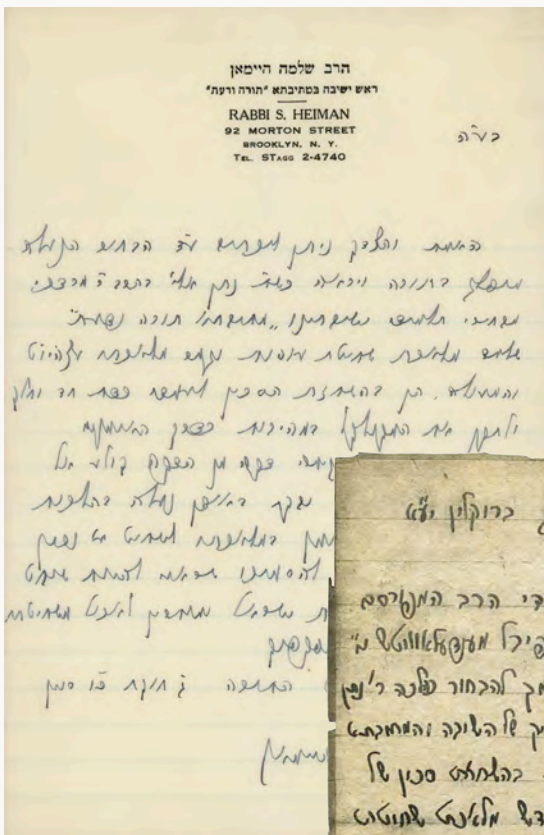
Rav Nosson Eliyahu was also one of the few talmidim that were with Rav Shlomo when he passed away. He would relate how in his last moments on earth, Rav Shlomo said, “Prepare two chairs — my Rebbe, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger have come to accompany me.”

After Rav Shlomo’s passing, his Rebbetzin would only entrust the Rosh Yeshiva’s kesavim to a talmid she felt she could trust. Rav Nosson Eliyahu was that talmid, and those kesavim became much of what the well-known sefer, Chiddushei Rav Shlomo, was based on.

After Rav Shlomo’s passing, Rav Nosson Eliyahu named his son Shlomo, after his revered Rosh Yeshiva.

Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz also had a profound influence on him. He held Rav Nosson Eliyahu in such high esteem that in 1942, when due to the yeshiva’s growth the task of overseeing the bochurim became too difficult for Rav Shraga Feivel, he chose to appoint Rav Nosson Eliyahu, still a bochur, as mashgiach. During that period, Rav Nosson Eliyahu also served as a *noseh v’nossen* in the bais medrash for all three sedarim and as the “*bochen*” who regularly tested the bochurim.

One summer, in advance of the yeshiva going to Camp Mesivta, Rav Shraga Feivel realized that they needed a shochet to provide the camp with meat. He encouraged Rav Nosson Eliyahu to learn shechita, and Rav Nosson Eliyahu then served as shochet that summer.



Left: Kabbalas Shechita from Rav Shlomo Heiman  
Below: Certification to perform shechita from a renowned shochet

## Mashgiach

One of Rav Nosson Eliyahu’s early talmidim explained his appointment as mashgiach: “When Rav Shraga Feivel appointed Rav Gedaliah Schorr to be menahel, he said that Rav Gedaliah had two advantages: He was American raised and understood the mindset of the bochurim and, at the same time, he understood what Rav Shraga Feivel’s hopes and aspirations were for the yeshiva. Rav Nosson Eliyahu, too, understood the mindset of the American bochur, and had a clear understanding of the mesorah of Torah Vodaath and how to inculcate it into the coming generations.”

*Shemiras hazman* — conforming to schedule — was one of the cornerstones upon which Rav Shraga Feivel built Torah Vodaath. Rav Nosson Eliyahu followed in his footsteps and felt that timeliness was critical in ensuring the proper respect for Torah. He would faithfully take attendance in the mornings and afternoons, keeping track of the progress of every single bochur. He was a mashgiach who was firm, while simultaneously being fair and open to understanding the individual circumstances and difficulties of each bochur. He didn’t see his job as just disciplining bochurim, but rather spent time with them, learning with them, talking to them. Even when he had to discipline and rebuke a bochur, he did it in a way that preserved the dignity of the talmid. One talmid recalled how Rav Nosson Eliyahu would never relate the boy’s misdeeds to his parents or the Rosh Yeshiva; rather, he would speak to him privately, helping him improve on his own.

One talmid of the 1940’s related that being a mashgiach then was, in a way, more complex than it is today. In today’s yeshivos, most bochurim come from similar backgrounds. In the Torah Vodaath of that era, there was such diversity — the bochurim came from such disparate backgrounds that understanding and educating them *al pi darkam* was not a simple task. Of

He encouraged Rav Nosson Eliyahu to learn shechita, and Rav Nosson Eliyahu then served as shochet that summer.





Rav Nosson Eliyahu Gertzulin  
with Rav Yosef Savitsky

Rav Nosson  
Eliyahu,  
with infinite  
patience and  
a firm hand,  
*was given  
the task of  
helping to  
steer the  
ship of Torah  
Vodaath,  
with its  
hundreds  
of diverse  
talmidim.*

course, there were American-born bochurim from across the country; then there were talmidim from Brazil, Mexico and Colombia; Holocaust survivors who had no parents and had experienced horrors throughout their youth that they could never shake; talmidim from non-Chassidic backgrounds and from Chassidic backgrounds; and even talmidim from Mizrachi backgrounds. Rav Nosson Eliyahu, with infinite patience and a firm hand, was given the task of helping to steer the ship of Torah Vodaath, with its hundreds of diverse talmidim, as they created the infrastructure for the unprecedented growth of Torah in America.

The Bostoner Rebbe, who was a chavrusa of Rav Nosson Eliyahu in their years in Torah Vodaath, related that he had always been amazed by the supreme *savlanus* possessed by Rav Nosson Eliyahu. He would review shiurim with weaker talmidim repeatedly without displaying any signs of impatience, until the talmid would finally understand the shiur.

Rav Nosson Eliyahu grew up in a generation when many of the things we take for granted today were not the norm. The poverty of that time was acute and many children left yeshiva to pursue economic opportunities. Not Rav Nosson Eliyahu. He remained in yeshiva, making do with virtually nothing. He once related that as a bochur in Torah Vodaath in the 1930's, he was given one glass of milk per day. He would drink half in the morning and would leave the other half on the windowsill until the evening, when he needed additional energy.

During that era, his familiarity with the difficult financial situations of many bochurim spurred him to greatly expand



Rav Nosson Eliyahu Gertzulin with Rav Nesanel Quinn

Kuntreisim  
published by Rav  
Nosson Eliyahu  
Gertzulin

the “Tat” — Tomchei Torah, which helped pay wedding expenses for needy chasanim.

Perhaps above all, his *hasmada* was the most exemplary. Day and night, during seder, before seder and after seder, he could be found in the bais medrash. In the 1940's and 1950's, he wished to impart upon the bochurim a special geshmak for Yom Tov. In advance of every Yom Tov he would compile a collection of divrei Torah from such luminaries as the Brisker Rav, the Marcheshes and others, and publish them to distribute among the bochurim. This was a trailblazing innovation 45 years ago that has been copied and expanded over the past five decades.

His position as mashgiach stretched from 1942 through the end of the 1960's. He then became a maggid shiur in the Bais Medrash, giving the shiur on Masechta Chullin in preparation for *semicha*. He also continued to administer regular tests to the bochurim.

At the end of his life, ill health and poor eyesight severely curtailed his public activities. Still, he continued learning with great *hasmada* for as long as he possibly could.



*Reprinted with permission from*  
Yeshiva Torah Vodaath  
**America's Yeshiva**  
Celebrating a Century  
of Torah Leadership in America  
*Published May 2019*