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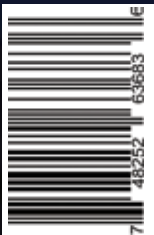
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A visit with the **BELZER REBBE** and **RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY**, as well as a conversation with



BROADCASTING

A mandate from gedolim to establish a television station in the United States to disseminate Yiddishkeit

AWAY

ASSIMILATION

with **RAV ZAMIR COHEN**, the founder of Hidabroot

Sometimes the most amazing stories—or even life-altering missions—just fall into your lap, or even walk into your office. Such was the case two weeks ago when Rav Zamir Cohen, the revered chairman and founder of Hidabroot, the *kiruv* television channel in Israel that is under the auspices of the country's leading *gedolim*—visited *Ami's* offices almost unannounced. Rav Zamir was accompanied by Rabbi Isaac Fried, Hidabroot's chairman of the board, and David Topik, its CEO, as well as an entourage of Belzer *chasidim*.

The mixture of *Sephardim* and *chasidim* is always invigorating but never surprising, certainly not for anyone familiar with Hidabroot and its astonishing accomplishments. On previous trips to Eretz Yisrael, I had the great privilege of visiting Hidabroot's offices in Kiryat Belz, as well as its previous studios in Bnei Brak and new multistory headquarters in Petach Tikvah. I was thus able to witness firsthand Hidabroot in action, including the filming of a popular puppet show for children and an interview with one of its star anchors: Rabbi Shimon Peretz, formerly a stand-up comic.

There are many thriving *kiruv* organizations that exist today. Hidabroot, however, is a standout not only because of its astonishing success, but due to the fact that its primary means of outreach is a TV channel that broadcasts a wide range of Torah-based shows, thereby reaching millions of secular Jews in their homes. At the end of every program a telephone number appears on the screen, inviting the calls of anyone who has a comment or question.

Thousands of viewers have accepted the offer, and Hidabroot's phones have been ringing off the hook ever since its inception in 2008. A dedicated staff of dozens of men and women return each call, offering advice and guidance on topics as diverse as the requirement to fast on Yom Kippur or the suitability of a prospective marriage partner. Hidabroot also directs people seeking complicated rabbinical advice to the proper authorities.

IF AMI WERE TO RECEIVE A MANDATE FROM LEADING GEDOLIM TO PUBLICIZE THE PLAN, HIDABROOT'S MISSION WOULD BECOME AMI'S.



David Topik, Rav Zamir, Rabbi Frankfurter, Rabbi Isaac Fried at *Ami's* offices

When Rav Zamir shares with me that Hidabroot intends to expand its reach with an English-language version of its programming in the United States as a counter to assimilation, I am immediately hooked. Such an enterprise would, of course, require a major investment and undertaking by philanthropists, activists and media-savvy types—all of whom have not yet been put in place or even located. But surely a partner in the media to publicize the cause would bring attention to its venerated mission.

Accordingly, I offer *Ami's* services as well as a cover feature in our expanded Sukkos issue—but with one caveat: I would first have to speak with the *gedolei Yisrael* about the organization. If *Ami* were to receive a mandate from leading *gedolim* to publicize the plan, Hidabroot's mission would become *Ami's*.

In truth, I threw this out rather nonchalantly and almost in passing, not believing it would ever transpire. This was not because I doubted the *gedolim's* endorsement of Hidabroot but because I'm aware of their demanding schedules during Elul and before the *Yomim Nora'im*—particularly the Belzer Rebbe, who has hardly enough time in the day to receive his own *chasidim*. Thousands of people come from afar to participate in the *tefillos* on the *Yomim Nora'im* in Belz, and there is a crunch, to put it mildly. But then the near miraculous happened.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Isaac Fried telephoned me excitedly that I should get on the next plane to Israel. He had spoken to the Belzer Rebbe, he elatedly shared, and the Rebbe had said he would receive me with regard to Hidabroot. However, the Rebbe requests that I go to other *gedolim* for a *brachah* as well. When one considers the Rebbe's oft-repeated statement that Hidabroot will facilitate the coming of Moshiach, it should really come as no shock that he set aside time from his demanding schedule. In fact, the Rebbe has conveyed many times that it is of vital importance that Hidabroot succeed in establishing a foothold in America.

I arrived in Eretz Yisrael on the Wednesday evening before the week of *Selichos*. Early Thursday afternoon, I merited to be warmly received by the Belzer Rebbe. Later that day I accompanied the distinguished people of Hidab-





root on a visit to Rav Chaim Kanievsky.
But perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself.

THE FOUNDER

Rabbi Zamir Cohen, who founded Hidabroot and is the channel's most celebrated anchor, is soft spoken and affable, but his refined demeanor doesn't stand in the way of his determination.

"When we first started," he tells me, "I spoke to a *rosh yeshivah* in Bnei Brak for *chozrim b'teshuvah*. He maintained that what we were doing was prohibited and that television may not be used as a tool for education

and outreach. He argued that Orthodox people who don't have televisions would now bring them into their houses because Hidabroot was giving it a *hechsher*. I countered that his argument might have been valid in the past, when television was the entry-way to secular culture, but today there are cell phones and other things. Someone who wants to deviate from *Yahadut* doesn't need a TV, so we should be able to use it to save people.

"I asked him who his *rav* was and he said, 'Rav Aryeh Leib Shteinman,' so I suggested that we go to him together. I already had *haskamos* from Sephardic *chachamim* and chasidic *rebbe*s but not from the *roshei yeshivos*. So I was actually looking forward to going to Rav Shteinman and obtaining his

endorsement.

"I explained to Rav Shteinman what I was doing and why I believed it was necessary, and also why the *rosh yeshivah* for *baalei teshuvah* had held that it's forbidden. Rav Shteinman thought for a minute and then picked up his head and said, '*Veshachanti itam besoch tumosam*—And I will dwell among them even in their *tumah*.' Rav Shteinman subsequently lent his full support to Hidabroot."

I ask him whether he realized right away that Hidabroot would be successful in reaching secular Jews.

"There was a lot of speculation at first as to whether people would really



Hidabroot headquarters in Petach Tikva

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Rav Zamir with Belzer Rebbe



Rav Zamir with Rav Elyashiv

give up their time to listen to a lecture for an hour. Most people are used to switching from one channel to another, and there was skepticism that they would have the patience to listen to a lengthy dissertation. We decided to perform a test run to see how people would react. We were surprised by how many were interested in sitting through our hour-long lectures.”

“How would you define the goal of these programs?”

“Most of the Israeli public is only familiar with *chareidim* from politics and from things they see and read in the general media. They don't know Judaism as it really is. The idea was to make a TV channel for them, so that people can see what Judaism is all about.

“There are two ultimate goals. The first and most important is to be *mekarev* Jews to be *shomer Torah* and *mitzvos*. Then there is another goal, in that even if some Jews won't become fully observant at least they'll understand that the Torah has depth and content, which will lower the antagonism towards the *chareidi* public.

“We were astounded when we saw the results of a survey on the number of Jews who have been strengthened in Torah and *mitzvos* in Israel and around the world by watching Hidabroot. It's seen all over via the Internet.

“Let me share with you one interesting story out of many. I was once giving a lecture in Holon. When I finished, a secular boy approached me and told me he had been studying medicine in China for the past seven years and had recently gotten engaged to a non-Jewish Chinese girl. He told me during our conversation that he's actually related to Rav Chaim Kanievsky, through his grandfather.

“Having been in China all that time he was already forgetting *Ivrit*, so he had asked someone to send him some tapes in Hebrew. His friend had also sent him a link to Hidabroot so he



Rav Zamir with Rav Shteinman



Rav Zamir with Rav Ovadia

could watch *shiurim* on its website. When he returned to Israel to visit his parents he saw an announcement that there was going to be

a *shiur* from the rabbi he knew from the Internet, and that's how he came to my lecture.

“He admitted that he understood that it wasn't right to be married to a *goya* and was very conflicted. I explained to him the meaning of the whole *shalsholet* from Avraham Avinu until our generation, and told him he would break the whole chain if he went ahead with his plans. Before we separated, I added that I thought he should think about joining a *yeshiva* for a short period of time in Eretz Yisrael.

“A year later I was in Yerushalayim in the *yeshiva* of Rav Yosef Tzvi Ben Porat. After my *shiur* the *bachurim* escorted me to my car. One boy asked me if I recognized him. I said no. Then he asked if the name Shmuel L. meant anything to me. I said, ‘Is that you?’

“‘I took your advice,’ he told me, ‘and came to *yeshiva* for a little while.’ He later opened a Chinese medical clinic in Yerushalayim and learns half a day. This is an example of how people can be reached through Hidabroot.

“But that's not our only target audience. There are many *chareidim* who are *shomrei Torah* and *mitzvos* but don't feel enough vitality in their *avodas Hashem*. We also produce *shiurim* on discs that have *mamash* changed lives.

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מיד וואונטשן פאר גאנץ כלל ישראל א שמחת יום טוב

“The Admor of Belz pushed us to make special *Shabbatonim* for the *chareidi* public. Some people came to spend Shabbos in a nice hotel. But others came to get answers to questions.”

“Do you consult with the Belzer Rebbe often?”

“Quite frequently, particularly on matters of *kiruv*, what to say and what not to discuss. The Admor is worried about each member of *klal Yisrael* to an exceptional degree. His vision is very broad. I can speak to him about anything, and I am always taken aback by his insight and knowledge. He has an expert’s familiarity with so many issues.

“We always consult with him on important *sh’eilos*. I was just by the Admor before coming to America to discuss our intent to have a channel in English. We’ve been considering it for a long time. He was very encouraging, and added that it’s *kedai* [worthwhile] to make *Shabbatonim* for American *mechanchim* to train them to answer questions.

“I asked him if it’s a problem in America because non-Jews might see our programming, and it would look bad if we say that Jews shouldn’t intermarry with them. He answered that we have to speak about it, but it should not be presented as anti-Christian or anti-Muslim. Instead, we should emphasize that it isn’t good for any people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds to intermarry.”

Though Hidabroot has been backed by virtually all of the *gedolim*, the Belzer Rebbe’s passionate determination to reach out to Jews who are estranged from *Yiddishkeit* has made him its de facto leader since it was established, and the reason that many Belzer *chasidim* are involved in running it, together with *Sephardim*. Still, the Rebbe has insisted that it not be officially affiliated with Belz or any other religious faction. “Hidabroot belongs to the *Eibershter*,” he often says.

Another *gadol* who was one of Hidabroot’s most avid supporters was the late Rav Ovadia Yosef, *zt”l*. I ask Rav Zamir about their interactions.

“We didn’t consult with him on details in the same way we



Rabbi Frankfurter at the filming of a puppet show



Rabbi Shimon Peretz with Rabbi Frankfurter

consult with the Belzer Rebbe. I would only pose to him the big *sh’eilos*. For example, I once asked him what we should do if people were so inspired by Hidabroot that they wanted to get rid of their TV sets but were reluctant to give up our

programs. Should we make a special device or gadget that would enable them to receive only Hidabroot and no other channels? He said yes. It’s interesting that Rav Shteinman came up with the same idea without any prompting from us. Then I brought the idea to the Belzer Rebbe and he also supported it.”

“You were a *talmid* of Rav Ovadia Yosef when you studied in Porat Yosef?”

“Yes. That’s where I got my *semichah*. Even after I left *yeshiva* I consulted with him frequently and attended his *shiurim*. My father also learned in Porat Yosef and then in Eitz Chaim under Rav Meltzer. My father’s parents came from Afghanistan. He was born in Yerushalayim and so was I. I grew up in Beit Yisrael [a neighborhood in Jerusalem].”

It is not an overstatement to say that it’s amazing that a television channel would receive such widespread support from *gedolim*. It’s almost an oxymoron.

“Were you surprised by the support you’ve gotten from leading *gedolim*?”

“Well, if you look at Hidabroot’s accomplishments it’s not that surprising. They all apparently foresaw what it would do.”

“Judging from its success in the Sephardic community it seems that it’s somewhat easier to reach the *Sephardim*. Do you agree?”

“Yes. I think it’s because the break from tradition was relatively recent and hasn’t gone on for too many generations. Even the grandchildren today who aren’t *shomer mitzvos* remember their grandfather who was and transmitted to them his *emunat halev*.

IT IS NOT AN OVERSTATEMENT TO SAY THAT IT’S AMAZING THAT A TELEVISION CHANNEL WOULD RECEIVE SUCH WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FROM GEDOLIM. IT’S ALMOST AN OXYMORON.

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Hidabroot studios



“As for the *Ashkenazim*, it’s a little harder because several generations have already passed since the *Haskalah*. On the other hand, many immigrants from Russia have become observant once they come to the realization that there’s a Creator. So it’s harder to be *mekarev* them, but once they’re reached there’s no middle ground.”

“What message do you have for readers who may harbor some doubts in *emunah*?”

“Two things: First, they should know that every question in Judaism has an answer. It says in *Gemara*, ‘*Im reik hu mikem*—if there’s a deficit, it’s coming from you.’

“I see this from experience. In seminars people ask me any question they want. I’ve been asked if I’m worried I’ll be asked something I can’t answer and then the whole seminar will fall apart. But there is no question that doesn’t have an answer. Anyway, the questions are usually easy. Some people come prepared with questions they’re sure will demolish the whole *shiur* and get an answer that’s much better than the question!

“Also, they should know that they can’t ask just anybody. Lots of people set themselves up as authorities without having the necessary expertise. You have to go to someone who’s involved in these types of questions, just as you need to go to a cardiologist for a heart issue and not to a podiatrist. We have lots of videos answering questions like this.”

“Do you feel that *kiruv* is your *shlichus*?”

“For my own personal *sippuk* [satisfaction] I have the *sefarim* I authored. I published the *sefer Nezer Cohen*, a compilation of *halachic* responsa, five years ago. I am now working on the second volume. Of course, when I see someone changing his ways from secular to Torah-oriented it’s also a big *sippuk*.”

“You have a *yeshivah* too?”

“Yes, there are two, one for *chareidim*, *Nezer Hatalmud*, with 60-70 students, and one for *baalei teshuvah* in *Beitar Illit*, where



I live. I also have a *cheder* with close to 1,000 students, *Netivot Shalom*.”

“How many *baalei teshuvah* would you say Hidabroot has made?”

“We don’t have a number but we reach everywhere, including *kibbutzim*. A boy from a kibbutz in the north once told me, ‘You succeeded in breaking through all the barriers and teaching me things I was never told.’”

“And you have an amazing call-in center,” I say.

“The people on staff answering queries do a phenomenal job. A lot of them are Belzers, people like Rav Reisman and Rav Ausch. It’s a terrific organization.”

“If I receive a mandate from *gedolei Yisrael* to spread the message about Hidabroot, *Ami* will become your media partner and will try to assist you in every regard,” I say before he departs.

OUTREACH IN BELZ

There are countless *baalei teshuvah* today as a result of Belzer outreach, but one would actually have to be intimately familiar with Belz or else read up on the movement in order to know this. It is certainly not obvious when paying a cursory visit to Belz, not because they’re trying to hide it but because outreach has been

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kept separated from its main institutions. Belz has insisted upon this strict separation in order to preserve the authentic character and norms of a traditional chasidic court and not dilute it with the cultural influences newcomers may bring along.

Belzer *chasidim* trace the Rebbe's interest in *kiruv*, or *teshuvah* as some refer to it, to the Yom Kippur War of 1973. One Shabbos afternoon shortly afterward, they relate, the then-25-year-old Rebbe announced during *shalosh seudos*, "I was thinking why all these troubles have befallen the Jewish people. Did this occur because we don't sit and learn Torah? In truth, the Jewish people do learn Torah. Is it because we don't study *lishmah*, with pure motives?

Who could possibly make a demand like that in the present day and age? Were we punished because we don't give charity and are not benevolent? This can't be so, since wherever one goes there are Jews assisting each other. I am thinking, rather, that it must be because of the generations of Jews who came to Israel and their children were torn away from Torah and *mitzvos*. Their grandfathers must be pleading in Heaven before the Heavenly throne and complaining why no one is doing anything to bring their offspring back! This tremendous *kitrug* [accusation] against the Jewish people has undoubtedly caused the recent calamities."

The Rebbe's directive to engage in outreach struck many of the more inward-looking *chasidim* as a bolt from the blue. But soon enough Belz opened a *yeshivah* for *baalei teshuvah*. Nonetheless, in order to insulate Belz from any foreign cultural influences they might introduce, they established separate educational facilities. The Rebbe would often visit those facilities and address the *talmidim*.

Several years later, in 1980, the Belzer Rebbe paid a visit to Crown Heights to meet with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l*, who was perhaps the forefather of contemporary *kiruv*, although he never referred to it as such. The hour-long conversation that ensued between the 78-year-old Lubavitcher Rebbe and the 33-year-old Rebbe of Belz is fascinating. Of particular interest is their give and take regarding outreach, as it sheds much light on their different perspectives.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe remarked that in light of the secular and even anti-religious education girls were getting in public schools there was a need for a higher-level religious education for girls than was once customary.

The Rebbe of Belz: "Do our children attend schools of that sort?"

The Lubavitcher Rebbe: "That depends what you mean by 'our' children! Please forgive me, but I think that when you say 'our' children it should have a far broader meaning. I know you don't believe in narrowness."



Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l*, and Belzer Rebbe



Belzer Rebbe addressing *baalei teshuvah*

The Rebbe of Belz: "Notwithstanding that [as the *passuk* states], 'Each person to his own camp, and each to his own flag,' We cannot mix pious girls with those we still need to draw closer to religion."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe: "I've been told that you established special *yeshivos* for *baalei teshuvah*."

The Rebbe of Belz: "Yes."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe: "When you separate a *baal teshuvah* from another *bachur*, you in effect pronounce that he was formerly a sinner, which is prohibited."

The Rebbe of Belz: "Would the Rebbe suggest integrating the *chasidim* who are standing here with those we still have to draw closer to Hashem?"

The Lubavitcher Rebbe: "I think it would have no negative effect, but rather to the contrary, they themselves would gain, glean additional insights and coming to a higher degree of worship."

As their conversation continued, the two chasidic leaders



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seemed to agree to disagree on this essential point of immediately integrating new adherents into the community's existing educational facilities. This divergence of approach is intriguing for anyone interested in the dynamics of outreach and in the history of these two movements, and perhaps even more important for understanding Hidabroot, my subject of interest today.

SEPARATE BUT TOGETHER

Right across the entrance from the Belzer complex in Kiryat Belz is a small sign in Hebrew with the word "Hidabroot," marking the organization's below ground-level offices. This morning they are bustling with activity in both the men's and ladies' sections.

I have come to meet my host, Isaac Fried, and he is as friendly and welcoming as ever. I met Reb Isaac for the first time just a few short days ago, but it feels as if I've known him forever. There are no airs about him, which I guess is what makes him such a people person.

He shares with me that he spent an hour and ten minutes speaking with the Rebbe upon his return to Yerushlayim, primarily about his visit to America, and that the Rebbe expressed great vexation about the length of time it is taking to establish an organization similar to Hidabroot in the United States. "What are we going to tell the *beis din shel maalah* when we are asked what we did to stem the plague of assimilation and intermarriage there?"

Anyone who is familiar with the recent Pew survey of Ameri-

can Jews testifying to their soaring intermarriage and assimilation rates can appreciate the Belzer Rebbe's sense of urgency. According to the study there are an estimated 6.8 million Jews in America. However, a growing segment is unlikely to raise its children Jewish or connect with Jewish institutions. The percentage who say they have no religion and are Jewish only on the basis of ancestry, ethnicity or culture is growing rapidly, and two-thirds of them aren't raising their children Jewish at all. Overall, the intermarriage rate stands at 58%, up from 43% in 1990 and 17% in 1970. Among non-Orthodox Jews, the intermarriage rate is a staggering 71%.

While some Orthodox Jews feel they have other issues to contend with, *gedolei Yisrael*, who care about each and every member of the Jewish nation, see things differently. Isaac tells me that the Rebbe agreed to see me despite his taxing schedule because of the importance he ascribes to this issue. As I already know, the Rebbe has stipulated that I speak to other *gedolei Yisrael* too, as he has always insisted that Hidabroot be an organization for all of *klal Yisrael*, whose mission is to draw people closer to G-d and G-dliness.

I share with Isaac that in addition to *Ami's* interest in being Hidabroot's media partner, various philanthropists have expressed an interest in helping to fight assimilation. These people might be interested, I proffer, in getting involved in founding an English version of Hidabroot. We agree to discuss these issues with the Rebbe.



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Isaac suggests that I return to my hotel and he will contact me later in the day to advise when we can have a private audience. As the hotel where I am staying is some distance away from Kiryat Belz, I ask him to double-check with the *gabbai* if the Rebbe might have time to see us soon. Isaac gives me a look strongly implying that I don't know how things work around here. But I insist, and from the anxious smile on his face when he returns, I know he's been successful.

We have been told to come over right away, as the Rebbe will see us after he finishes *Shacharis*.

WITH BOTH HANDS

On the floor below the Rebbe's residence, adjacent to the building that houses the mammoth Belzer *beis hamidrash* and its countless *shteiblach*, is a fairly large *shul* known as the *Beis Hatefillah*. The Rebbe's *minyán* for *Shacharis*, however, is in an adjacent room, next to the office where he receives people. The *Beis Hatefillah* and these other communal rooms are in a portion of the huge complex that appears from the exterior to be part of the Rebbe's residence. The Rebbe's public and private spaces, as I noticed during my first visit, merge almost seamlessly.

When we arrive a little after 1:00 p.m. the Rebbe is finishing

“IT'S HARD TO MAKE AN ORGANIZATION TO MAKE PEOPLE SHOMER SHABBOS WITH PEOPLE WHO AREN'T SHOMER SHABBOS. BUT WE NEED TO GARNER ALL THE HELP WE CAN.”



Belzer Rebbe

Shacharis, with a *minyán* that seems to consist of approximately 40-50 people. He blows the *shofar* himself upon finishing, then immediately starts *davening Minchah*, in which I participate.

Shortly afterward, a line starts to form outside the Rebbe's office consisting of bar mitzvah boys, who donned *tefillin* for the first time that day, and their families. Various people who arrive unannounced, including *rabbanim*, are turned away. Then the Rebbe receives the fish that will be eaten on Shabbos at the Rebbe's *tish*.

Chazal relate (*Shabbos* 119a-b) that the Sages went to great lengths to personally take part in the preparations for Shabbos, and recount that Rava salted a *shibuta* fish in honor of Shabbos. The fish brought to the Rebbe by a group of *yungeleit* to salt seems to be a whitefish. Shortly thereafter we are received by the Rebbe.

In addition to Reb Isaac Fried we are joined by Reb Yeshaya Wind of Hidabroot. I am also accompanied by my son Shloimy, a *talmid* of Rav Dovid Soloveitchik, and my photographer Ezra Landau. The Rebbe shows immense interest in each of us and asks what we do. He then hands us each a *luach* given out by Belz for the coming year. The Rebbe does this without offering any explanatory remarks, only a broad expressive smile. But that may be more important than anything else.

The Rebbe inquires about *Ami Magazine* and listens intently as I describe what we do. True leaders, as is known, are listeners more than they are speakers. Connecting to people on a personal level influences the people who come to them for advice as much as any guidance. The Rebbe is an inquisitive listener.

I tell the Rebbe about the visit of Rav Zamir Cohen, Isaac Fried and others to our offices at the beginning of the week and their

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expressed interest that we write an article about Hidabroot. I also tell the Rebbe that while an article is certainly important, I believe we need to do more than that. If we receive a direct mandate from the *gedolei Yisrael* and use our “*shofar*,” as I refer to the publication, to publicize the organization, we may be successful in “arousing those who slumber from their sleep.”

The Rebbe listens attentively and then says with a smile, “You say ‘arousing those who slumber from their sleep,’ but what we actually need here is *techiyas hameisim*.”

I tell the Rebbe that I understand the point and stand ready to help. I share that I have a friend in Los Angeles who has expressed an interest in combating assimilation and believes he can get major commitments toward that end from various philanthropists. In fact, a Shabbaton in the Canadian Rockies especially for millionaires was being planned in order to stimulate their interest in the issue, with *Ami* partnering up with them in this vital cause.

But we were facing a bit of a quandary. While everyone recognizes the problem, that in a few generations secular Jews will disappear into the abyss of assimilation, what’s the solution?

“I would like to propose a *shidduch*,” I continue, “between the

gedolei Yisrael and these *negidim*. If the Rebbe gives me his ‘*mazal u’brachah*’ for this, I’ll work on the philanthropists to get their ‘*mazal u’brachah*’ as well.”

The Rebbe answers readily with a broad smile: “*Farvoos nisht*—why not? The *Eibershter* should help that you have *siyata dishmaya* and *hatzlachah*.” He then tells me that I should certainly work on this when I return to the United States.

Next I ask the Rebbe if he will send emissaries to the convention for philanthropists if we are successful in organizing one. I wanted to ask if he would personally take part, but I know how difficult it is for the Rebbe to travel these days. “In Canada there are very nice mountains. And if it works out, it could be an impetus for future generations. People would turn to Hidabroot for all matters relating to assimilation and outreach.”

“We usually make such *Shabbosim* for *baalei teshuvah* or people we are trying to be *mekarev*,” the Rebbe replies, “not for *nadvanim*. But it is something that can be arranged.”

“Should we also reach out to *mechallelei Shabbos* who have an interest in combating assimilation?” I ask. “There are philanthropists who give millions to promote Jewish identity.”

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Adir

The Rebbe thinks about the question for a minute and then answers in the affirmative. “It’s hard to make an organization to make people *shomer Shabbos* with people who aren’t *shomer Shabbos*. But we need to garner all the help we can.”

The Rebbe next tells me that in order to stimulate the interest of this type of people they must see Hidabroot as promoting their values. The Rebbe asks me what I think those values are.

I suggest that some people are cultural Jews even if they aren’t religious and are interested in promoting cultural Judaism. They may want to eat honey cake on Rosh Hashanah even if they hardly have an interest in anything else about *Yahadus*.

“America is a mix,” the Rebbe responds. “There are a lot of *voileh Yidden* in America, a lot of *ehrlische Yidden*, and a lot of *nebach*... Some people, even if they’re *mechallel Shabbos* don’t want their children to marry *goyim*. That itself is a *madreigah*. At least they appreciate some degree of *Yiddishkeit*. These kinds of people can get involved.

“The *Eibershter* should help that you have *siyata dishmaya* and *brachah*. We have to *chap* them and entice them towards *Yiddishkeit*. It’s easier to do *kiruv* in Eretz Yisrael because they’re culturally Jewish. It’s much harder in America.”

The Rebbe then suggests that Hidabroot’s American counterpart be given a suitable name in English.

Isaac Fried interjects that the Rebbe once suggested a certain name but he doesn’t express any preference, indicating that it is something to be determined by the *askanim*.

I share with the Rebbe that I visited the offices of Hidabroot and was amazed by some of the questions people pose. “One girl asked whether she should marry a certain boy, something that one would ask a *rebbe*.”

The Rebbe says that this function of Hidabroot has independent importance.

When Isaac shares that someone sent an email asking when to break the fast on Yom Kippur when traveling on a plane the Rebbe smiles at the incongruity. “There are a lot of people with questions like that in Eretz Yisrael. It’s probably the same in America.”

Taking note of the Rebbe’s warmth, I solicit his approval to have the honor of being his direct emissary in publicizing the importance of countering American assimilation. I share that a year and a half ago my *rosh yeshivah*, Rav Dovid Soloveitchik, summoned me to Eretz Yisrael to ask me to publicize the issue of *giyus bnei hayeshivos*, as he believes that the Israeli government will only acquiesce if there is pressure from America. I told him I was willing to become his *shaliach* in this regard.

My *rosh yeshivah* then asked if I recalled the fervor with which he used to discuss matters like these. If I could undertake the mission with the same passion, he stated, then I could be his *shaliach*. “Similarly, I’d like to leave this room being able to say that I’m the Belzer Rebbe’s *shaliach* with regard to combating assimilation.”

The Rebbe responds again with a broad smile. Then he says something I didn’t initially understand. He asks me if I know



when Rav Dovid left Brisk, but then answers his own question. “He must have been a youngster. There must certainly have been *mechallelei Shabbos* in Brisk at that time.”

I don’t grasp the Rebbe’s point, and Rabbis Fried and Wind later tell me they also didn’t understand what the Rebbe was trying to say.

Then it occurs to me that Rav Dovid would frequently say the following in his Chumash *shiurim*:

“A hundred years ago, no Jew could have dreamt that there would be such public *chillul Shabbos* in Israel as there is today. Even 50 or 60 years ago, in my younger days, we didn’t believe it could happen. Yes, there were some individuals who threw off the yoke and violated Shabbos, but the way countless people violate Shabbos today could never have happened.

“I recall that Jabotinsky once came to Brisk, planning to deliver an address on a Sunday. Some of the young men were near the train station and saw that Jabotinsky’s train arrived on Shabbos, but, when asked, his entourage denied it and none of the people in Brisk believed the young men’s report; that’s how serious *chillul Shabbos* was considered by *klal Yisrael* in those days. But today? Public *chillul Shabbos* is everywhere and doesn’t bother anyone.”

I frequently wondered about my *rosh yeshivah*’s description of the lack of *chillul Shabbos* in the Brisk of his youth. Was Rav Dovid engaging in rhetorical flourish in order to drive home a point?

I now wonder whether the Belzer Rebbe was somehow alluding to that, particularly after I mentioned that my *rosh yeshivah* wanted me to address issues with the same fervor he does. Is the Rebbe familiar with my *rosh yeshivah*’s *shiurim*, or is he connected to a spiritual reality beyond our physical world and was thus able to read my mind?

Whichever way one chooses to interpret his statement, what he does next is clear and unequivocal. As I am talking, he reaches out and takes my hand with both of his while wishing me *brachah* and *hatzlachah* in my undertakings one more time.

Before departing I mention that I’m no stranger to Belz and actually grew up in a Belzer *shtiebel* that was headed by my cousin, the late Naroler Rav, *zt”l*. The Rebbe then speaks about him for a

הלכות ישיבת סוכה

TESTING SITES



Dirshu congratulates the thousands of bochurim nationwide, who are taking part in Dirshu's Daf HaYomi B'Halacha L'Bochurim program. Endorsed by Gedolei Yisroel, the program was introduced to afford bochurim the opportunity to learn the important *halachos* of סוכה – ישיבת סוכה – the laws of sitting in the Sukkah – while simultaneously giving structure to their daily learning during *bein hazmanim*.

Below is the complete listing and dates for all Daf HaYomi B'Halacha L'Bochurim bechina locations nationwide.

TEST FOR MESIVTA BOCHURIM:
Sunday, October 19
 כ"ה תשרי
5:30 PM

TEST FOR BAIS MEDRASH BOCHURIM:
Thursday, October 23
 כ"ט תשרי
7:00 PM

BALTIMORE
 Agudas Israel of Greenspring
 6107 Greenspring Ave.
 (Downstairs in the social hall)

BORO PARK
 Kollel Tiferes Yaakov Yosef
 D'Spinka , 1466 56th St.

BOSTON
 Please call 908-910-5733

CHICAGO
 Please call 312-613-2267

CINCINNATI
 Please call 513-884-6482

CLEVELAND
 Cleveland Heights
 Mosdos Ohr Hatorah
 1700 S. Taylor Rd.
 Wickliffe
 Please call 440-668-8276

DETROIT
 Bais Haknesses Hagra
 14561 Lincoln Dr.

EDISON
 Agudah building
 1131 Raritan Ave.

FIVE TOWNS
 Yeshiva Sh'or Yoshuv
 1 Cedar Lawn Ave.
 (In upstairs Bais Medrash)

FLATBUSH
 Mirrer Yeshiva H.S.
 1795 Ocean Parkway
 Kollel B'nei Torah
 2925 Ave. K
 (Corner of K & Nostrand)

KIAMESHE
 Please call 845-423-0164

LAKELWOOD
 Yeshiva K'tana
 120 Second St.
 (Bais Medrash)

LOS ANGELES
 Kollel Yechiel Yehuda
 444 North La Brea Ave.

MANHATTAN – WEST SIDE
 Please call 212-787-7772

MIAMI BEACH
Thursday 8:00 pm
 Miami Beach Community Kollel
 3767 Chase Ave.
 (contact phone 213-458-9886)

MONROE
 6 Mezabish PL. - Unit 101

MONSEY
 Yeshiva Bais Dovid
 20 West Maple Ave.

MONTREAL
 Meor Hagolah
 2800 Bates Rd

NEW SQUARE
 Bais Hamedrash Hagadol
 Truman Ave.

PASSAIC
 Tiferes Isreal
 180 Passaic Ave.
 (downstairs)

PHILADELPHIA
 Please call 267-977-1004

PHOENIX
 Please call 602-368-4043

PITTSBURGH
 Please call 412-521-4637

PROVIDENCE
 Please call 908-910-5733

QUEENS
 Ohr Hachaim
 141-61 71st

ROCHESTER
 Please call 718-530-4543

SCRANTON
 Please call 570-815-0012

SEATTLE, WA
 Please call 732-690-5961

SKOKIE
 Please call 773-575-7785

SOUTH FALLSBURG
 Yeshiva Gedolah of South
 Fallsburg
 84 Laurel Park Rd
 (Mesivta Bais Medrash)

STATEN ISLAND
 YSI Campus
 Please call 347-609-5072

TEANECK
 Please call 201-384-0046

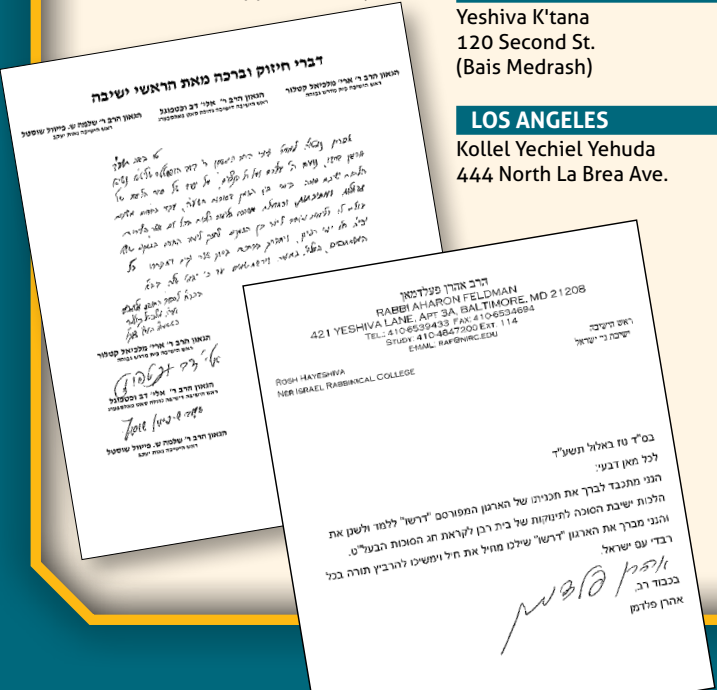
TORONTO
 Please call 416-222-3010 x236

UNION CITY
 Mesivta Sanz
 3400 New York Ave.

WATERBURY
 Please call 203-233-3228

WILLIAMSBURG
 Bnos Yaakov D' Vishnitz
 12 Franklin Ave
 (Dining Room)

For more information on this program, please contact Dirshu at 888-5-DIRSHU x.147





Rabbi Yeshaya Wind (far left), Rabbi Fried (second from right) and Rabbi Frankfurter with Rav Chaim Kanievsky

bit and his relationship with Belz.

I had been hoping to receive a mandate from *gedolei Yisrael* to publicize the menace of assimilation. To receive it with two hands was invigorating.

"I feel it's a *zechus* before Rosh Hashanah that the Rebbe made me his *shaliach*," I say as I get up.

The Rebbe responds with another smile.

OFF TO BNEI BRAK

Having made arrangements to see Rav Chaim Kanievsky after meeting the Belzer Rebbe, my hosts and I head there next. It's quieter than usual at his residence in Bnei Brak, although some locals are marveling at the recently built iron bridge connecting Rav Chaim's home to the nearby *shul*.

After being seated, I tell Rav Chaim that I earlier received the Belzer Rebbe's blessing to help bring Hidabroot to America, and that I now seek his.

Rav Chaim seems fully familiar with Hidabroot and needs



no introduction. He warmly added his blessings to those of the Belzer Rebbe.

As we leave, I tell my hosts that I'm ready to head back home. Our work has been cut out for us, and has only just begun. ●