

EYTAN KOBRE

What if technology isn't the problem,
but a panacea for the emptiness within?

A FEW MINUTES WITH

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on why Benghazi still matters

LIFELINES

I did my best to reject G-d
but He refused to abandon me

RABBI RON EISENMAN

The Mets, the menahel
and my memories

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Mishpacha

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The simple truth

40 years later, Ohr Somayach founder
Rabbi Nota Schiller
still wields the same winning method



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the SIMPLE TRUTH

Rabbi Nota Schiller has been in the business of *kiruv* for the last 40 years, the founder of Ohr Somayach, and a charter member of the *baal teshuvah* yeshivah movement. While the times have changed, his method has not: give students the truth and everything else follows

BY *Yisroel Besser*
PHOTOS *Ohr Somayach Archives*



THE WALK-UP OFFICE ON FLATBUSH'S CONEY ISLAND AVENUE HAS BEEN HERE FOREVER,

manner,” Rabbi Nota Schiller says, offering his mission statement with an unapologetic air, exuding the easy confidence born of experience and success.

More than 40 years ago, he was among the founders of the first yeshivah specifically geared to *baalei teshuvah*. Ohr Somayach went from being a pie-in-the-sky idea to a reality, a very real yeshivah. What would come to be known as the Baal Teshuvah Movement would grow around it. Ohr Somayach graduates would define the evolution of the wider Jewish community, the yeshivah a key setting in the story of the masses returning. The familiar *baal teshuvah* story line that started on campus or at a club or a shul in Winnipeg or Wichita, London or Los Angeles, often happily ended with “... and today he’s learning in Ohr Somayach.”

Seated in a creaky captain’s chair, Rabbi Schiller waits a second too long before continuing. “*The truth*... it sounds like a cliché, right? Like the coach who instructs the hitter to ‘hit a home run.’ It’s easier said than done. We have a yeshivah. We learn Gemara. *B’iyun*. That’s truth, and if you start with that, you work backward. The product is in place, and then you just need the right means of transmission, articulate lecturers to predigest enough of what’s to come to motivate the novice to enter the arena.”

Last year, an article in this magazine addressed the closing window on the *kiruv* industry, maintaining that the flood of spiritual seekers has dried up. Like someone whose kid brother had been picked on in a schoolyard fight, Rabbi Schiller strode over with his fists clenched. *Kiruv*, he wrote in a published response to that article, is alive and well to anyone who cares to look. He opened his essay by quoting Mark Twain, who awoke one morning to find a headline in a local newspaper proclaiming his death. To which Twain responded: “The report of my death was an exaggeration.” Then Reb Nota supplied the statistics to support his argument about the growth of *kiruv* in recent years.

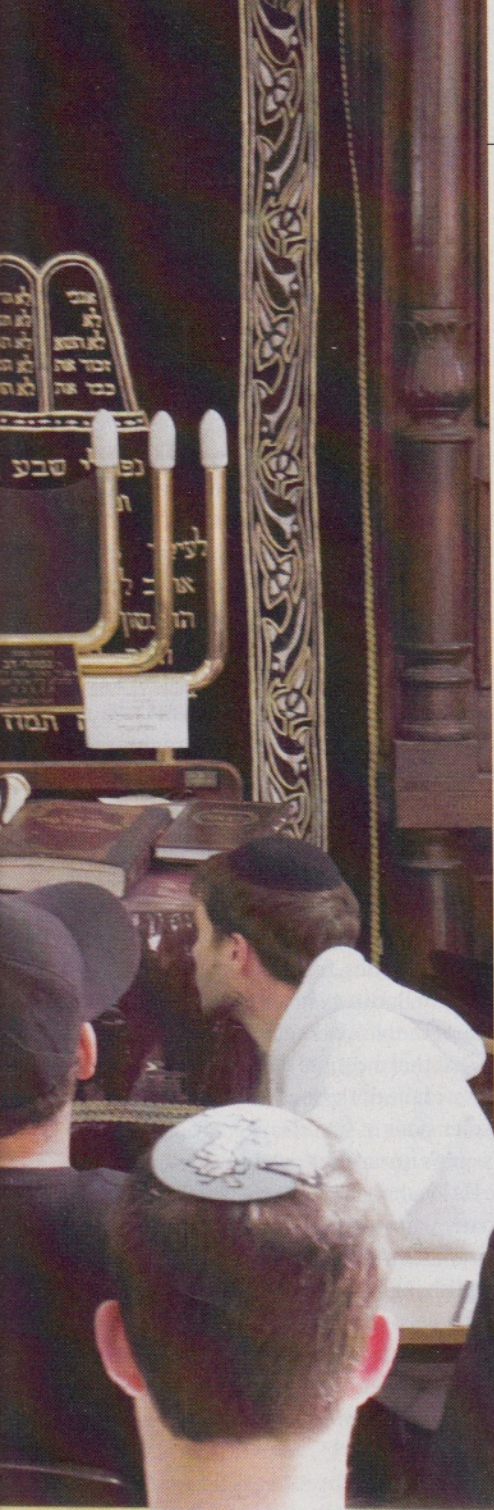
The retort reverberated long and loud. We’re here to continue the conversation.

First-Class Citizens At times professorial, other times entertaining, the white-bearded rabbi with the youthful demeanor shares a seminal moment on his journey. It was when he established the yeshivah and his own *rosh yeshivah*, Rav Yitzchok Hutner, gave him a single piece of advice. “If, when they leave yeshivah, your graduates will easily be identified as *baalei teshuvah*,” the Rosh Yeshivah said, “then you will have failed.”

but the stores lining the avenue have evolved with the Brooklyn palate, from matzah balls to pizza to sushi to — at the time of this writing — skinny lattes. Upstairs, at the American office of Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, the decor appears not to have changed much over the years. Everything is faded. The product, while vibrant, is fixed: the truth.

“The challenge has always been to serve up truth in a noncondescending and aesthetically provocative





“Now,” Rabbi Schiller expounds on his *rosh yeshivah*’s comment, “that isn’t discriminatory against *baalei teshuvah*, that’s not what the Rosh Yeshivah meant. He was saying that *baalei teshuvah* are first-class citizens, ultimately entitled and required to be educated the same way, held to the same standards. In fact, they need and deserve a smooth transition to the Torah world, which means that they need immersion in *Torah shebe’al peh*.”

Since that initial instruction, thousands of university-aged students have walked through the doors of Ohr Somayach, whose sprawling campus in Maalot Dafna has welcomed students from every corner of the world. Satellite campuses also exist on five continents, from Sydney to Johannesburg to Detroit. With its yeshivah and branches around the world, Ohr Somayach has had a significant influence on the *hashkafah* of *baalei teshuvah* near and far.

A child of the 1940s and an ardent baseball fan, Nota Schiller faced a dilemma decades before Sandy Koufax chose Yom Kippur over the 1965 World Series. “Long before Koufax, I resolved the existential tension between being committed to playing left field for the Brooklyn Dodgers and keeping Shabbos, by deciding to become a pitcher, which allows a player several days off between starts. Many of my friends say I am still ‘pitching’ on a daily basis.”

Irrepressible Force Rabbi Schiller is an outstanding public orator; he addresses me, an audience of one, with the dignity and poise he displays at the podium. “I was always a student of history, but once I joined Chaim Berlin and got exposed to Rav Hutner and his extraordinary *talmidim*, Rav Shlomo Freifeld, Rav Yaakov Weinberg, and others in Chaim Berlin, my eyes were really opened to the cosmic significance of world events, the challenges and opportunities unique to each time, from a Torah perspective. When I was a child, the big thing was ‘melting-potism.’ Everyone just wanted so badly to fit in.”

“The Rosh Yeshivah,” he recalls, “told me

about a banker, a secular European Jew, whose son was a lawyer in Westchester. ‘When my son started his practice,’ the elderly banker confided to the Rosh Yeshivah, ‘I sent him every client until he succeeded. Now, he won’t invite me to his home because he’s embarrassed by my accent.’”

With obvious frustration, the financier asked the Rosh Yeshivah, “How can it be? I arrived in America with two rubles and a phone number of a third cousin. How did we fail?”

Rav Hutner shared the story and said, “Nota, think of the creativity of that generation, the power of Jewish imagination. They were forced to produce, but they misdirected that strength, working for cultural acceptance instead of eternal meaning.”

Nota heard the implicit charge in his *rebbe*’s words. “Jewish creativity is an irrepressible force. It inspired me.”

About to Happen From Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, Nota Schiller continued on to Baltimore’s Ner Israel, and was deeply impacted by its *rebbeim*, particularly Rav Yaakov Weinberg. “I have a lifelong weakness for trying to interpret the workings of Hashgachah, and I knew that I wanted to be across the world, in Eretz Yisrael. You saw what was going on there, and had a sense that big things were beginning.”

In 1961, Nota Schiller, still a *bochur*, joined Rav Mordechai Elefant’s *kollel* in Romema, learning with accomplished *talmidei chachamim*. Reb Nota’s *chavrusa* from that era — one of the *yakirei Yerushalayim*, a *tzaddik* and *gaon* named Reb Yossel Zehnwirth — would basically continue as his *chavrusa* for over 40 years and eventually join the faculty of Ohr Somayach as a *meishiv* and deliver *shmuessen*.

Reb Nota returned to America and married Rebbetzin Sima in 1963; the young couple headed to Eretz Yisrael, settling in Yerushalayim.

The Holy Land of the mid-1960s was alive with promise. A country less than two decades old drew youth from across the globe; they came with backpacks, torn jeans, and questions. And they wanted answers. In English.

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The Simple Truth

Nota Schiller and another young American — like him, a graduate of Chaim Berlin and Ner Israel — anticipated what was coming. “Rav Noah Weinberg and I shared a similar vision of creating a program to meet that inevitable demand. Few people used the word *‘kiruv’* back then, but it was obvious what the next frontier was. It was clear that merely being in Israel for the secular student allowed for a deeper sensitivity to his root Jewishness.”

Lots of Sympathy In 1966, a group of American *avreichim*, including Rav Noah Weinberg, Rav Mendel Weinbach, and *yblcht*’a Rav Yisroel Rokowsky, Rav Aharon Feldman, and Reb Nota attempted to establish the first such yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael. It was called Mevasseret Yerushalayim because the government had earmarked land in the Jerusalem suburb of that name: The winds of history were blowing their way, but a yeshivah needs more than a friendly gale.

“After a few months Rav Noah and I traveled to America to try to raise the funds. With rare exceptions, the *frum* community was more skeptical of the possibility and need to establish a *‘baal teshuvah yeshivah.’* Some of the secular Jews with whom we spoke still had sentimental ties and a concern about intermarriage, but when the Six Day War broke out they informed us they had directed their philanthropy to the war effort.”

With no choice, Reb Nota accepted a job as a principal in Ner Israel of Toronto. While the position had no fundraising responsibility, creating new programming did bring that need. He became executive dean, organizing the first North American *mesivta* program for young men without a day-school background; busy as he was, one eye was always facing east, looking back home.

With his growing family settling in, and his becoming successful in his position — how, I wonder, was he able to hold on to the dream and remain committed?

“I couldn’t let go. My wife wouldn’t let go. Somewhere in her *neshamah* she anticipated hosting thousands of Ohr Somayach *talmidim*. I remain convinced that her gefilte fish and cholent generated more *baalei teshuvah* than any



Shared vision: Reb Nota with Rav Scheinberg and Rav Weinbach (top); in conversation with Rav Elyashiv (middle); and bringing words of inspiration to his *talmidim* from Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel

shiur that I gave. She found it hard being away from Yerushalayim after having experienced it. It was clear that Eretz Yisrael was center stage and the rest of the world was the wings, that whatever happened there would impact all of world Jewry.”

Reb Nota had experienced the depth of connection as well. On a visit to Rav Hutner, he explained that though he’d lived in New York, Baltimore, and Toronto, he’d never felt an *essential* relationship to those places.

“Familiarity has its charm — *chein hamakom al yoshvav* — but the lack of a *necessary* relationship between myself and that place lent a certain arbitrariness to the business of day-to-day life. Whereas in Eretz Yisrael, since *our* past was there and *our* future will be there, the present moment attained to a necessary sense of urgency and import. That rendered the mundane historic.” Reb Nota switches speaking styles, from the sophistication of a Chaim Berlin *maamar* to the self-effacing ease of the bleachers at a Brooklyn ballpark. “What that means is that suddenly, buying a *leben* at the dinky local *makolet* had mythic dimensions of significance, my piece of our People’s unraveling destiny.”

He laughs heartily. “I spent too much time in my younger years on literature and on baseball. *Middah k’negged middah*, today, English is a second language to my children and most of my grandchildren don’t speak it. When I throw a ball at them, they respond with their feet.”

A pause, then: “It’s eminently worth the trade-off.”

It took a full three years for the Schiller family to make it back home to Yerushalayim. They finally achieved their goal in 1970, and Reb Nota reacclimated himself with the Land by returning to full-time learning in Yeshivas Beis Hatalmud, under Rav Berel Schwartzman. Rav Berel would eventually join his *talmid*, serving as a *rosh yeshivah* at Ohr Somayach.

Rav Noah Weinberg, Rav Yaakov Rosenberg, Rav Mendel Weinbach, and Reb Nota all had the same idea: launching a yeshivah called Shma Yisroel. It took a while

to refine the concept, and by the time the dust of that fiery beginning settled, a few new institutions had formed. Rav Noah founded Aish HaTorah, Reb Yaakov founded Machon Shlomo, and Reb Mendel and *yblcht*’a Reb Nota established Ohr Somayach.

“We all agreed that there was a crisis, that Klal Yisrael was losing precious *neshamos* and we had to get to work, but we differed in approach.”

Map in Your Mind History would prove the importance of each institution: at Ohr Somayach, the *roshei yeshivah* would create a traditional yeshivah, with no apologies or compromises. “Klal Yisrael is composed of Yissachar and Zevulun. Conventional yeshivos have found that living through a period of reaching for Yissachar-hood produces a higher level of Zevulun. While an all-star team of lecturers at Ohr Somayach regularly prepare future professionals and *balabatin* for Torah life, one must taste that sense of the transcendence of Torah to maintain a quality life as a Zevulun. Our answer to assimilation has always been to encourage [*talmidim* to] stretch to develop as genuine *talmidei chachamim*. It takes time and effort, but it’s worth that investment.”

In a *shmuess* to his *talmidim*, Reb Nota challenges them. “Ideally one should stay here long enough so that on the day you leave, if you end up on a ship that gets hit by lightning and you’re marooned on a desert island with only a Gemara, you wouldn’t be bored.”

What kind of Gemara? Reb Nota doesn’t mince words. “A GPS (Gemara Pirush Schottenstein) is a great invention and has revolutionized the world of learning; it’s highly recommended for reference and review. It tells you where to go, but it doesn’t come to actually seeing the map in your mind, grasping the bigger picture. A translated Gemara is a good thing, like GPS or Waze, but the Vilna Shas is having the map in your mind.”

You’ll Never Lose The yeshivah’s name reflects that attitude as well.

“We once asked Rav Shach about the

propriety of making a particular compromise to help recruitment. He told us, ‘Ohr Somayach is a *makom Torah*, and you’ll never lose out by keeping to the *mesorah*.’”

So in honoring a *gadol* of the prewar yeshivah world, Rav Meir Simchah HaKohein, author of *Ohr Somayach*, the yeshivah was announcing that what would come would reflect that continuity of tradition.

“There were other meanings as well. There is a subliminal message in the name: However burdensome it may seem to the spectator from without, for the participant from within it is joyous to be a *frum Jew*.”

A third reason addresses a historic breakdown. “The Haskalah came about because there was a collapse and confusion of authority, people who were illiterate in halachah were voicing opinions about *deios*, *hashkafah*. Though *gedolei Yisrael* were always able to address *lomdus* and philosophy, history, current events, Reb Meir Simchah embodies this in his seamless transition between *drush*, *machshavah*, halachah, *aggadah*, and *lomdus*. Our yeshivah is trying to bring back those *neshamos* that the Haskalah robbed.”

And finally – and perhaps most fundamentally – because it speaks to Ohr Somayach’s operating system. “Rav Shach told me how someone had come in and found Rav Meir Simchah and his *rebbeztin* sitting with another couple, talking and laughing. It turns out that they’d come to the Rav’s home for a divorce several months earlier, and on that day, they’d finally agreed to work things out. Then he called in his own *rebbeztin* and said, ‘Look, we have a new *chassan* and *kallah* here, let’s be *mesamei’ach* them.’

“The point is that he was a *gadol*, a world leader, a prolific *mechaber*, but he never lost sight of the *yechidim*, the individuals. Others have it as ‘Don’t lose the forest for the trees.’ Our *gedolim* teach, ‘Don’t lose the *trees* for the *forest*.’”

It started as a trickle, but soon became a flood. The *baal teshuvah* movement had begun.

For the Fences Rabbi Schiller offers metaphors with the ease of a shul candy man emptying his pockets.

“Challenges in life from anti-Semitism and assimilatory trends and pressures are like high-speed fastballs that you can hit much farther than a slow pitch. But you’ve got to connect. These young men came tearing in, eager, desperate to learn, and we were able to connect.”

“We swung for the fences.”

He assembled a staff of high-caliber teachers like Rav Berel Schwartzman, Rav Yossel Zehnwirth, Rav Avraham Ravitz, Rav Nachman Bulman, Rav Uziel Milevsky, and *yblcht*’a people like Rav Moshe Shapiro, Rav Moshe Carlebach, Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb, and Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz – many of whom would be drawing cards in any mainstream yeshivah.

“Neither Reb Mendel or I were such *anavim* that we were threatened by gifted people,” he chuckles.

He explains why the breadth of talent was necessary. “You have to understand what it’s like for a student coming from a wide-open academic world, with diverse subjects and instructors, to a one-subject yeshivah. There had to be as much diversity *within* agreement as possible, not just one articulate Orthodox rabbi with one voice. The range and multiplicity translates to the Torah speaking. Thus, we tried to include different personalities and elements, *lomdus* and *bekius*, philosophy and history, bringing together the most eclectic and brilliant teachers. It works, baruch Hashem. Every *talmid* finds his *rebbe*.”

California or Yeshivah Though the original plan had been to nourish starving English-speaking souls from abroad, the first Hebrew-language division was soon opened for Israeli students. Through the years French, Spanish, and Russian programs were established as well. Ohr Somayach had become an international force.

Reb Nota recalls a particularly poignant moment on one of the many trans-Atlantic flights that would become part of his commute. “I was seated next to an older gentleman, a secular Israeli. He mentioned which kibbutz he was from, and I had a sudden memory.”

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Rav Hutner had once stopped in that very kibbutz, a stronghold of Polish Jews who'd come to Israel and left religion, and he'd debated with its inhabitants about the choices they'd made. At one point, he remarked that, despite their heady idealism, their grandchildren wouldn't choose the kibbutz. "Either they will live in California or in yeshivah," the Rosh Yeshivah promised.

Rabbi Schiller recalled the story as his seatmate continued the conversation, asking what Rabbi Schiller did. "I told him I worked at a yeshivah, Ohr Somayach, and he listed off several children from the kibbutz who learned by us. Then he told me that he was headed to Los Angeles, to visit his own grandchildren. I was overcome by the prescience and insight of the Rosh Yeshivah and I could barely speak."

Rabbi Schiller stood up, still marveling at his seatmate's words, and as he looked back, he saw familiar faces. "It was Rav Yonasan David and his *rebbetzin*, the son-in-law and daughter of [Rav Hutner]. Surely the Ribbono shel Olam has a cosmic sense of humor."

The Visionary Aside from the general difficulties faced by all *roshei yeshivah*, he had the added obstacle of getting people to believe in the cause of *kiruv*; with his mix of passion and wit, Reb Nota was up to the fundraising task.

(At a dinner in those early years, Reb Nota faced a crowd of donors from behind the microphone. He opened his speech with a long sigh and said, "I think that in a previous lifetime, I must have been a wealthy industrialist who didn't give enough *tzedakah*.")

Then he met Joe Tanenbaum, a traditional Jew and successful businessman. The two men were acquainted from Reb Nota's years in Toronto; fond of the young *talmid chacham*, the magnate had offered him a job. Reb Nota turned him down. "I responded, 'I have a counteroffer, Mr. Tanenbaum. I'd like to take you into my business.'"

Reb Nota painted a picture of what he hoped to accomplish and told Joe that people said it was *impossible*. "That was the magic word. Joe's eyes lit up. He was a builder of bridges who loved a challenge. The more impossible



It started as a trickle but soon became a flood. Reb Nota was getting the message across

"You have to understand what it's like for a student coming from a wide-open academic world to a one-subject yeshivah"

something appeared, the keener he was. He loved the concept of a traditional yeshivah for *baalei teshuvah*."

Joe Tanenbaum became a partner, investing himself in the yeshivah that would come to be called Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum Educational Center and deriving paternal pride from the accomplishments of its students.

"Mr. Tanenbaum lived bigger, saw bigger, and when we affixed his name to our building, he had a message. He envisioned a possibility. 'Maybe,' he told me, 'one day one of my *eineklach* will visit Yerushalayim and see my name on the building and be intrigued. Maybe he'll stop in and ask what they're learning, and maybe he'll see what Torah is all about.'

"That," Rabbi Schiller says solemnly, "is chapter one of the story."

Joe's grandson Yaakov Kaplan, president of the students society at McGill University and a student of philosophy, met Rabbi Schiller at his grandfather's Toronto office. He accepted

an invitation to come check out the yeshivah firsthand and never really left. Today, this *einikel* is a most accomplished *ben Torah* and *askan* for Ohr Somayach and the Torah community — and he delivers an early morning *dafyomi shiur* at the Ohr Somayach Toronto branch. Together with Danny Lemberg of Lakewood, he has captured the talent, commitment, and learning of working *bonei Torah* for the *kiruv* cause, through the Mentor Mission at Ohr Somayach.

Incidentally, Joe Tanenbaum himself eventually became fully *shomer mitzvos* as well.

Holding Their Own After several moves, the yeshivah found its permanent home in the Maalot Dafna neighborhood. A developer was stuck with the foundation of a building, unable to continue building for his original client. He made the yeshivah an offer: if they accepted the external architectural plan, they could have it at a

35 percent discount. Trying to change the external plan would have involved years of approvals, so they went ahead and worked with what they had. It resulted in a *beis medrash* with a lot of alcoves.

"A team of architects once visited," Reb Nota recalls. "They asked how we came up with such an innovative design of public and private space interacting in our study hall. I smiled and said, 'It was rooted in our educational philosophy.'"

Joe Tanenbaum was there to help them make that purchase.

"At the time, the neighborhood was secular and I liked the mix. It was close enough to Geula and Meah Shearim for our *talmidim* to interact with *bonei Torah*, but we could also have an effect on the locals." He remembers how a prominent Israeli journalist who lived in the neighborhood wrote about trying to escape from his yeshivah past. "But late each Shabbos afternoon, the yeshivah boys sing the haunting songs of Seudah Shlishit and I feel like G-d is trying to 'get' me..."

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky once spoke at Ohr Somayach in Monsey. "The Torah world needs the *baalei teshuvah* as much as they need us," he said. "They bring an enthusiasm and excitement to their mitzvos and their learning and it's an example to us all."

Indeed, rather than simply absorb from the chareidim and affect the *chilonim*, the *talmidim* of Ohr Somayach surprised everyone. "Our *talmidim* ended up impacting everyone, even chareidim. They have the freshness and zeal of *baalei teshuvah*, but they've developed into *bonei Torah* and *talmidei chachamim* as well, and they hold their own in established *kehillos*. Many of our *avreichim* who have gone on to the Mir supplement their income by tutoring graduates of conventional yeshivos! And of course, Ohr Somayach alumni hold positions around the world as *rebbeim* and teachers in conventional *mosdos*."

Aging Gracefully The successes were many, but there were difficult times as well: He talks about the tough times with the same enthusiasm as he does the easy ones.

He confides that, being over 75 years old, he's earned the TSA perk of not having to remove his

shoes when passing through airport security.

Recently, a security guard pulled him over and said, "Okay, fine, you're over 75, but you gotta tell me what your secret is. How do you look so young?"

Rabbi Schiller looked at him in utmost seriousness. "You promise you won't tell anyone?"

"Of course," the guard assured him.

"It's a mix of heavy doses of adversity, frustration, disappointment, and *nachas*," the traveling rabbi confided.

The guard was silent. Finally, he spoke. "What's adversity?" he asked.

Reb Nota's face is briefly colored by pain as he discusses his and the yeshivah's greatest loss to date: that of his partner and friend, Rav Mendel Weinbach. "What I miss most is being able to share successes with him. A lifelong *chavrusa* in the *masechta* of *kiruv*. Each resolution of each *kasha* brings back the rush, excitement and *geshmak* of so many years and hours plumbing the depths of the *sugya* together."

Together, Reb Mendel and Rabbi Schiller brought together many talented people to teach, share, and counsel, bringing a special kind of joy. "Reb Mendel was an exemplary *farginner*, there was tremendous pleasure in working as one, sharing hard work and *nachas*."

Adversity has also come in the form of economic downturn, cutting off funding supply, as well as changing patterns in the wider Orthodox community and in the *kiruv* one in particular.

Reb Nota, Always Adapting Now, he expounds, "Economics have always played a role in shaping cultural norms. From 1972 until 1987 most of the students who attended Ohr Somayach and Aish HaTorah found out about these programs only after visiting Israel, some via the efforts of Rabbi Meir Schuster, some through advertisements or word of mouth. We initially began creating seminars and programs abroad as a point of contact in order to recruit.

"Since our goal has always been to give the student the skills and capability of learning text independently in the shortest, yet most efficient

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period of time, it was obviously easier to do so when the student was coming for a defined period. Thus, long before the financial markets crashed in October 1987, we were bringing groups for short periods on reconnaissance missions to scout and encounter the learning and the Land — the Jewish Learning Exchange. It was the first of its kind. It just so happened that after Black Monday, student enrollment in the humanities evaporated and business majors were overwhelmingly dominant. The business major budgeted his time more carefully, no longer roaming the globe with a backpack. Short-term programming was right in place as the recruitment tool for longer learning commitment. J.L.E was there to welcome them.”

He pauses. “*Halevai* we’d have been equally clairvoyant in anticipating the crash of Black Monday!”

Branches, which eventually became independent, were founded across the globe. While

adapting to changing realities by servicing more professionals and young couples, these yeshivos also served as both launching and receiving centers, sending forth students to Eretz Yisrael and welcoming them back as Torah Jews.

“We never changed, but we never stopped adapting, not for a moment.”

The Greatest Antidote Reb Nota shares a thought from Rav Yaakov Weinberg, who said that at Har Sinai, the Ribono shel Olam, as it were, had to make a choice. One alternative was freezing the world so that no new variables would be introduced and, in that glacial state, a document given to a particular people at a specific time would always be applicable. Alternatively, He could allow for a changing universe and then empower His People with an ectoplasmic law to deal with a changing universe — i.e., *Torah shebe’al peh*.

“And that’s the essence of what we do. Everyone has questions, because life is filled with paradoxes. Man is a paradox, as the Rema comments on the *brachah* of ‘*umaflī la’asos*,’ that the creation of a man — fusion of the Divine soul and mortal body — is the wonder of wonders. Everyone struggles with that, and our clientele struggles that much more. On so many levels, Gemara is *the* manual for resolution of life’s contradictions.”

There are those who draw Jews close through offering spiritual enrichment, mystical interpretation, and programs for self-help. “Our diet is essentially Gemara-based, and we have witnessed the results.

“We call it Project Perspire,” he quips. “Sweat over a Gemara and you’ll grow. Guaranteed.”

Stand Close It’s why the yeshivah has addressed another change as well; the outflow coming from within. “The *frum* community has looked to us to help

their struggling youth. Sure, it's because we have a talented staff, because we love questions, but there's something else as well. Sometimes, a disenfranchised teenager meets one of our *talmidim* and gets inspired from that. They see a young man who had a promising career as an executive, athlete, or musician postpone it or throw it away in exchange for Shabbos and Gemara, and that moves them in a way that the *rebbeim* cannot.

"*Kiruv*," Reb Nota remarks, "is a misunderstood term. It doesn't mean only reaching out to someone who is far away." He removes his glasses, folding and unfolding them, "the literary critic Cyril Connolly was a very obese man. He often said, 'Inside every obese man there is a thin man screaming to get out.' We know that inside every secular Jew there is a *frum* Jew *whispering* to get out. That's another reason we call it '*kiruv*' — because you have to stand very close to hear that whisper.... And

now we've learned that even the close ones need someone to listen to their whisper."

He puts his glasses back on and stares at me for a minute. "We're listening."

Home Run Today's Ohr Somayach boasts a dizzying array of *shiurim*. There is a *mechinah* program for beginners, introductory classes for visiting public school students, a program for struggling yeshivah graduates, a preparatory program for future community *rabbanim* and leaders, an intensive program for university students and various internship programs — and of course, the traditional yeshivah and kollel, which is its heart. Different menus, different courses, but one central ingredient.

As Rabbi Schiller escorts me out, he pauses. "We have more than 20,000 alumni *bli ayin hara*, and a few thousand *talmidei chachamim*: but among those, the *prat* that testifies to the *klal* are the 43 Ohr Somayach *talmidim* who

authored *seforim*. That *prat* comments on the *klal*. Thousands learned in that environment of toil in Torah. People who came with no support, no family encouragement, no background, no network — just a burning *ratzon* to learn."

The Dubno Maggid of baseball *meshalim* leaves me with one more. "In soccer, football, basketball, or hockey, you score in a net, cage, or goalpost. In baseball, you have to come *home* to score, and there are a lot of people trying to tag you out along the way."

Eretz Yisrael is home. The yeshivah is home. "The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh understands the *pasuk* that tells us 'When you will come to the Land, you will plant fruit-bearing trees' as a reference to the planting of yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael, *talmidei chachamim* who produce the most nourishing fruit."

This *beis medrash* of Ohr Somayach, a large spacious room with many little corners and alcoves — privacy in a public setting — is a forest, but one where you can see the trees. ●

Glossary for Mishpacha Cover Story: “The Simple Truth, 40 years later, Ohr Somayach founder Rabbi Nota Schiller still wields the same winning method”

Aggadah	Narrative descriptions or illustrations of Torah values
Anavim	Humble, self-effacing people
Askan	An activist-supporter of Torah life and learning
Avreich	An elite married Torah scholar learning in a Kollel. See Kollel, below.
B’iyun	In depth study of Torah sources
Baal teshuva	One who returns to his roots or heritage, or reclaims his innocence
Baal Teshuva Yeshiva	A college catering to students seeking 1. broad knowledge of classical Judaism, 2. self-sufficiency in the study of the literature of Jewish learning, through mastery of its logic and language and / or 3. personal growth learning to living with integrity as a Jew.
Balabatim	Working people or Learner-earners
Beis Medrash	A center of Torah scholarship, with an emphasis on Talmudic study.
Bekius	Broad, expansive study
Ben Torah	A devoted Torah scholar who lives what he learns
Bli ayin hara	We should be protected from setbacks
Bnei Torah	Torah learned and observant Jews
Bochur	An unmarried student
Bracha	Blessing
Chassan	Groom
Chavrusaha	A learning partner with whom one delves into Torah sources
Chein hamakom al yoshav	The comfort one feels in a place he knows (they say, for example, “there is no place like home.”)
Chilonim	Secular, not yet observant Jews
Daf Yomi	Study of the daily daf or folio page (1 of 2711) in sync with Jews around the world, in order to complete the Talmud every seven and a half years
Deios	Torah ideas
Einekel	Grandchild
Eineklach	Grandchildren
Eretz Yisrael	Land of Israel
Farginner	One who does not begrudge the success or well-being of someone else; one who rejoices in another’s joy
Frum	One who adheres to the norms and standards of Torah life
Gadol / Gedolei Yisrael	A Torah giant, with respect to character and scholarship / Torah giants of the generation
Gaon	A genius, or extraordinary pace setter, in the realm of Torah scholarship
Geshmak	Quintessential enjoyment
Hasgachah	Divine Providence
Hashkofah	Philosophical Outlook
Haskalah	Intellectual currents, particularly in Europe, prior to the rebirth of Israel, promoting Jewish assimilation
Kallah	Bride
Kasha	A contradiction that demands resolution
Kehillos	Communities
Kiruv	Jewish educational outreach to instill love of Judaism and study of the source texts of Judaism
Kiruv Movement	The rebirth or renaissance of Torah scholarship in our time, inspiring a rededication to the timeless values, norms and standards of Judaism.

Klal	General principle
Klal Yisrael	The whole or entirety of the Jewish People
Kollel	A learning center for elite married Torah scholars
Lomdus	Analytic study of Torah sources
M'sameiach	To arouse joy, a special mitzvah with respect to the bride and groom
Maamar	A Torah lecture of profound depth
Machshava	Philosophical underpinnings of Judaism
Makolet	A small scale neighborhood store
Makom torah	A place of Torah study and adherence to the norms and standards of Torah life
Mechaber	Author
Meishiv	One eminently qualified to answer questions based on the depth and breadth of his Torah knowledge
Mesivta	High School level Yeshiva Day School, with a strong emphasis on Talmudic study. The Aramaic word for Academy.
Mesorah	The timeless transmission of Torah knowledge: ethics and laws that have the power to instill in every Jew a sense of responsibility, accountability and destiny.
Middah kneged middah	Measure for measure, roughly equivalent to "what we sow we reap."
Mosdos	Institutions
Nachas	Gratification born of seeing the fruits of an investment of one's devotion and resources
Neshamos	Souls of the Jewish people
Pasuk	Scriptural verse
Pirush	Explanatory commentary
Prat	Detail
Rabbanim	Rabbis
Rebbetzin	Rabbi's wife
Rebbi	My personal Rabbi, Teacher, Mentor, Guide, Role Model
Ribono shel Olam	Master of the World
Rosh Yeshiva	Dean of a Yeshiva
Seforim	Books of Torah scholarship
Seuda Shlishis	The third festive Sabbath meal
Shmiras Mitzvos	Embracing Torah & Rabbinic commandments
Shiur	Torah class or lecture
Shmuessen	Inspiring lectures on Torah Ethics
Shul	Synagogue
Sugya	A distinct unit or section of investigation, reflection or analysis in the Talmud
Talmid	A devoted student or disciple
Talmidei Chachamim	Outstanding Torah Scholars
Torah Shebe'al Peh	The vast body of knowledge explaining the original meaning and intent of Torah sources. Literally: The Oral Torah
Tzadik	A person of unassailable integrity
U'Mafli L'aasos	Who does wondrous things
Yakirei Yerushalyim	Treasured Torah luminaries in Jerusalem
Yblcht"a	He / They should live a long and a good life
Yechidim	Individuals
Yissachar and Zevulin	Torah Scholars and Torah Supporters [who divide the incalculable reward for Torah study fifty-fifty]