"For them to know there's a great person willing to come to Baltimore to strengthen and uplift them and show them what Yiddishkeit is for

With his eyes closed, the Kativ Rebbe, dressed in a white-and-gold brocade bekeshah or long coat, slowly recited the Havdalah service marking Shabbat's end as hundreds crowded into Kol Yisroel Yeshiva looked on.

The rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Taub, was surrounded by 40 of his Chasidim from the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, N.Y. Their dangling peyot and streimels, or fur hats, sharply contrasted with the khaki pants, checkered shirts and trendy haircuts of the Kol Yisroel high school students standing alongside.

The sight was commonplace throughout last weekend when the rebbe was hosted by the 2-year-old yeshiva for Orthodox boys at risk. Rabbi Taub, who first met the school's 13 students when they visited him in New York during Chanukah, spoke privately with each throughout the weekend.

"We're trying to talk to them, give them a brachah [blessing] and encourage them," said Rabbi Taub, a father of 11 and great-grandfather. "I'm not in kiruv [outreach], I speak to everyone about what he needs. Yes, I do feel I made a connection, but it's more — it was to encourage them, to uplift them. It's more than just talking."

For the past dozen years, Rabbi Taub, who is in his 60s, has traveled to 15 countries to lend support to the establishment of religious institutions and, more recently, to outreach activities.

"TV, the Internet, the street destroy the children and the home," he said. "Making shalom in the home helps and directing parents what to do with the children. All over, we try to direct, encourage, advise."

The rebbe was invited by Kol Yisroel's dean, Rabbi Yonason David Fischer, who developed a relationship with him seven years ago as a student. "The rebbe's love for Jews is limitless," Rabbi Fischer said.
"For them to know there's a great person willing to come to Baltimore to strengthen and uplift them and show them what Yiddishkeit is, for them to be part of something — just as the Chasidim see the rebbe, they see the rebbe — makes them feel connected. It also makes our place special to see people from the community come here."

Nearly 300 local residents streamed through the yeshiva last Friday evening to partake in the rebbe's tisch, or table — an hours-long dinner in which the rebbe passes around his meal, discusses Torah and leads festive Shabbat singing.

"It was really wild meeting with him," said Naftali Schneiderman, 15. "There was a family feeling at the tisch. I felt very close to him."

The rebbe also met privately Saturday evening and Sunday at Kol Yisroel with residents seeking his guidance and blessings.

"Our goal is to provide a place that is vibrant, warm — where you could feel Judaism," Rabbi Fischer said. "The message we're giving is, 'You're part of the community, your place is where it's happening.'"

The outreach of the sect, which has followers in Israel, dates back to founder Rabbi Izikel — great-great-grandfather of Rabbi Taub — an early 19th century populist in Kaliv, Hungary. Rabbi Taub was born in Romania where he hid with his family during World War II and became rebbe after the death of his father, Rabbi Menachem Shlomo Taub, 20 years ago.

"The main goal in the last six years is to help younger generations falling away," said Rabbi Isaac Brisk, who travels with the rebbe. "He will do anything to help bring back an individual. The rebbe always comes back to see how they're doing and inspire. They know they have someone who will listen and not attack them, but help them out of their problems."

In his talks with each student, the rebbe set specific goals — from Talmud study to combating their yetzer horah, or evil inclination.

"He said to me to learn four pages of Gemarah and know it well," recalled Asher Dahan, 15. "I could if I try. The rebbe knows your potential."

Like other students, Asher said he was astounded by how the rebbe knew their background simply by grasping their hand. "Only holy people could do this," he said. "He knew what I did. He told me ways to help myself."

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