When Zach Cutler, then a fifteen-year-old student at a Modern Orthodox school in Los Angeles, first met the Kaliver Rebbe, he didn’t dream that the encounter would literally change his life.

“At first, when the Rebbe came into the school, I thought it was interesting,” Zach recalls. “But not until I sat down with him privately, in an office, when he was meeting with students individually for five minutes each, did I really see how phenomenal he was. ... Without any idea of who I was, he really connected with me.”

During that short but crucial conversation, Zach became a committed Jew. “I was already really into Judaism, and I loved Shabbat and everything. But I promised him that I would start keeping Shabbat, and from that Shabbat on, I haven’t broken my word in eight years.”
According to Rabbi Yitzchok Mordechai (Jeremy) Feder, the youth director at Aish Kodesh in Woodmere, Long Island, who helped coordinate the Rebbe’s visit to his shul, Zach’s story is a typical one.

“I’ve seen him change people’s lives,” Rabbi Feder told Hamodia.

He described how the Rebbe speaks to bachurim who are facing problematic issues in their lives, ranging from substance and alcohol abuse to other difficult nisyonos, and without having ever met the bachur before, managed to “hit the nail on the head,” pinpointed the very problem each troubled bachur was facing, and suggested a solution.

“They [the bachurim] come away in awe,” Rabbi Feder said, making no secret of the fact that he is very much in awe of the Rebbe himself.

“He’s moser nefesh; he goes all over the country, all over the world. He doesn’t take pay. He just goes. He just wants to go around and help Jews. He doesn’t care if they’re charedi, he doesn’t care what language they speak, he doesn’t care if they are not religious, or even if they’re nowhere on the religious spectrum. He will go anywhere, at any time, to help another Yid,” Rabbi Feder emotionally attests.

The Rebbe, whose appearance and conduct is in perfect accordance with both his illustrious lineage and the Williamsburg community where his court is located, is a most unlikely candidate for the mission he has so successfully undertaken.

Hamodia conducted a series of interviews with individuals of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic background, young and old, Jews of every affiliation and level of observance. They all expressed the same sentiments, that somehow the Rebbe managed to bond with them and inspire them to draw closer to Hashem.

“He connects with every single Yid,” said Rabbi Feder. “With each person he connects in a different manner; sometimes they have a hard time understanding at first, but usually they all come around to seeing that the Rebbe was right.”

Rabbi Feder said that the connection with the Rebbe is far more meaningful than the short, initial encounter would indicate. “This remarkable connection occurred with at least three people I know,” he assured us. The Rebbe managed to call them, apparently at random, but at just the time that they most needed to speak with him, at a time when they were experiencing major yeridos. The Rebbe had no idea what was happening with them specifically, but he decided precisely at the right moment that one of his gabbaim should call that person.

When asked to what he attributes the Rebbe’s remarkable insight, Rabbi Feder declined to speculate. “I can’t even begin to conjecture about that. Those realms are far beyond me. At the very least, it’s ahavas Hashem, it’s ahavas chinam, and it’s a desire to do good.”

The above-mentioned Zach Cutler, who currently resides in Washington, D.C., and is a student at George Washington University, was determined that his fellow students should experience the same inspiration that caused him to change his life. He
recently arranged for the Rebbe to come to the university to meet with the students.

"The Rebbe came all the way to Washington," Zach relates. "He flew there, met with students for about ten hours, and flew back the same day. He did it just to come and meet with our community.

"The Rebbe met with about one hundred individuals. A lot of them have now reconnected with their roots. They’re keeping Shabbat now, or they told him they’re going to go to Israel for a year. A lot of my friends, even those who are very secular, made some very big promises to the Rebbe about Shabbat. I think it’s amazing."

Still exhilarated over the Rebbe’s visit, Zach urges others to do the same.

"It’s not that hard to bring the Rebbe to your school, or your shul, or your community, and it yields very positive results," he says. "All you have to do is call the Rebbe’s office. They’re very open to arranging such visits. Everyone should try it."

When Hamodia contacted the Kaliver Rebbe’s court in Williamsburg and requested to meet with the Rebbe, his gabbai replied, "The Rebbe is at present in San Diego and will be here at home from Thursday until Tuesday, after which he will be flying off once again. Therefore the best time for you to come, the gabbai concluded, "would be on Sunday morning, right after davening."

When one enters the Kaliver beis medrash at 188 Hewes Street, one finds a room full of kollel yungeleit, all deeply immersed in their Gemaros. This kollel was founded by the Rebbe, and is directed by his son-in-law. The Hamodia delegation descended a flight of narrow wooden stairs to the lower level and met Gabbai Rabbi Zalman Leib Rosenberg. Other gabbaim assist the Rebbe as well. As Rabbi Rosenberg says, "All of us together cannot possibly do what the Rebbe does: we cannot constantly be on wheels or wings, and therefore we alternate. Sometimes I travel, and sometimes others do. The Rebbe also has a network of offices that handle his activities in various languages: Yiddish, English, Hebrew, Spanish and French!"

The Rebbe doesn’t call his activities "kiruv;" rather, he uses the word chessed, because he feels he is simply doing a chessed to those lost souls by bringing them back to their roots. Rabbi Rosenberg specified that the Rebbe doesn’t go anywhere with the official purpose of doing kiruv; he travels around imparting blessings and advice to Jews on all aspects of life and business, and at the same time, after blessing them warmly, he asks them to take on particular precepts of Yiddishkeit.

It all began, Rabbi Rosenberg explains, thirty years ago, when a prominent Rav in Argentina called and asked the Rebbe to come be mechazek his kehillah. When the Rebbe met the kehillah, he realized that, sadly, a vast number of Jews in the world were far removed from Yiddishkeit. Ever since then, the Rebbe has not stayed in one place for more than a few weeks. He travels around the world constantly, seeking out Jewish souls and, with much siyatta diShmaya, he is granted a great measure of success in bringing them back to their Creator’s embrace.

A short while ago, the Rebbe spoke at Rabbi Noach Isaac Oelbaum’s shul in Queens. When he finished, an obviously frum young woman came over and told him that when she was twelve, the Rebbe gave a lecture at her school in which he had asked the students to take on Shabbos observance. "I started to keep Shabbos then. Now I’m twenty-two and I’m a kallah teacher." The woman came to the Rebbe’s speech especially to thank him for bringing her back to Yiddishkeit. Every place the Rebbe visits, people who have met the Rebbe before come back to thank him for bringing them back to their roots.

The Rebbe does not accept payment for the brachos he gives. The notices that announce his appearance clearly state that the Rebbe refuses to take any money and there will be no solicitation.

Hamodia posed the following questions about the Rebbe to the gabbai:
WHAT LED THE REBBE TO DEDICATE ALL HIS TIME AND ENERGY TO BE MECHAZEK YIDDEN?

I’ll tell you what the Rebbe keeps saying: The main thing that motivates him is the words of the holy Zohar on Parashas Terumah, where there is much allusion to this topic. He simply cannot stand by and watch so many shuls and Torah institutions being forced to close down due to so many youths shedding all bonds to Yiddishkeit. [He feels] we must save as many as we can.

We are really in the midst of a third “Holocaust.” The first one was carried out by Hitler, ym”s, who massacred millions physically; the second was by Stalin, who destroyed millions of Jewish souls with his Communist venom; and now further millions are falling victim to the apocalypse of assimilation and intermarriage. The Rebbe visits schools all over the world; in some places, like Hungary, Romania and Ukraine, there are very few students whose parents are both Jewish. There are hundreds of thousands of lost souls who can still be saved from spiritual death. The Rebbe compares the “three Holocausts” to the three biggest aveiros — avodah zarah (Stalin), gilui arayos (present-day intermarriage), and shefichas damim (Hitler).

Here we paused for a few moments while the gabbai answered the phone. “A father called,” he reported, “to tell us that his son, who had been on [addictive substances] and with whom the Rebbe had spoken some time ago and convinced to go to yeshivah, had become a chassan! Such phone calls are a regular occurrence here.”

IN WHAT KINDS OF SCHOOLS DOES THE REBBE GIVE LECTURES?

The Rebbe goes wherever he is invited, except Conservative schools, because they consider themselves fully practicing Jews; for example, they’ll say “I keep Shabbos, but Conservative-style.” These people are the hardest to deal with because they have their own principles and philosophy, which are in contradiction to that of halachah.

Sadly, most of these schools today accept non-Jewish students. Twenty years ago they accepted students who had at least one Jewish parent, but today they take in gentiles as well, in order to fill up the classes to meet minimum [government] requirements.

When the Rebbe once spoke at a Neolog [Reform] high school in Hungary, which has an enrollment of 250 students, he asked the students in individual interviews, “Who in your family was born Jewish?” Fifteen students had one Jewish parent, and only eight had two Jewish parents. The Rebbe later asked the principal why gentiles would want to send their kids to a Jewish school. The answer was that the parents said there is nothing to match sharp Jewish intelligence.

Later that same day the Rebbe met another Neolog leader whom the Rebbe asked, “If there are so many thousands of Jews in Hungary, why are the Jewish schools nearly empty?” The Neolog leader answered, “The non-Jewish schools are very good and on a higher educational level than the Jewish schools.”

HOW DOES THE REBBE FIELD QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST?

This principal also posed a question regarding G-d’s justice during the
Holocaust. The Rebbe offered him the following analogy. “An elderly man once had an only child in his old age. His love for this child was boundless and he cautioned his young son to refrain from eating foods or engaging in activities that might endanger his life. But the child ignored his father’s warnings. As a result, the child took ill and the doctors advised the father that the child must undergo a painful operation, lest he die. Understandably, the father was greatly distressed. The child protested that he was fine; he even claimed that his father must hate him to subject him to such a painful operation. Nevertheless, the father understood what was at stake, that the operation must be performed in order to save the child’s life.

“So, too, our merciful Father in Heaven, Whose love for us knows no bounds, instructed us through His holy Torah to observe His mitzvos for our own benefit. If we don’t, G-d forbid, then terrible retribution will be exacted in order to purify our souls, which is the reason for man’s creation in G-d’s image — the body is of secondary importance. And yet the Torah tells us, ‘In all of their pain, He is pained’ and ‘I am with [them, the Jewish people] in [their] pain.’

“And so even as G-d is pained, kavayachol, He nevertheless desires to save His children. In fact, this is precisely what happened when Moshe Rabbeinu first went to Pharaoh in the name of G-d and demanded that he free the Jewish people. Pharaoh reacted by increasing their workload and intensifying their servitude. Moshe questioned G-d: ‘From the time that I came to speak to Pharaoh he has further burdened the people, and You have not saved Your nation.’

‘G-d answered, ‘Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for with a strong hand he shall chase them out from his land.’ Our Rabbis explain that the seemingly harsh intensification of the Jews’ workload actually served to hasten the time for their redemption by 190 years. Whereas G-d originally told Avraham that his progeny would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years due to their severe oppression under the Egyptians, they were only required to remain in servitude for 210 years. Ultimately, their harsh ordeal was for their own benefit. Such are the mysterious ways of the Alm-ghty.”

Once, the Rebbe spoke at one of the

Brief Biography of the Kaliver Rebbe of Williamsburg

The Kaliver Rebbe of Williamsburg, Harav Moshe Taub, shlita, immigrated to the United States as a child shortly after World War II. His father, Harav Menachem Shlomo, a Holocaust survivor, rebuilt Kaliver Chassidus in Brooklyn after it had been uprooted in Europe by the Nazis. Upon his father’s passing in 1978, the present Rebbe was crowned, and under his dynamic leadership the kehillah has experienced remarkable growth and prosperity. In addition to maintaining the institutions built by his father, the Rebbe has devoted his life to traveling all over the globe, wherever there are Jewish communities and schools, in an effort to strengthen both the communities in general and individual institutions in particular. To date, the Rebbe has traveled to more than 50 countries.

These “genes” of outreach were passed down to the Rebbe by way of his illustrious Chassidic lineage, going back to his great-grandfather, the tzaddik Reb Eizikel, who lived during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Reb Eizikel was a disciple of the Rebbe Reb Shmelke of Nikolsburg, the talmid of the holy Mezeritcher Maggid, who was a follower of the holy Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov was renowned for reaching out to unaffiliated Jews who did not observe the mitzvos and making them aware of how special each is in G-d’s Eyes.
largest schools in Argentina. A member of the audience stood up and asked scornfully, “If I may ask (implying that perhaps one is really not allowed to ask), why did G-d bring the Holocaust upon the Jews?”

The Rebbe answered, “It is certainly permitted to ask. You may ask whatever is on your mind. Indeed, G-d wants us to ask questions and to understand the underlying reasons, and not to rely on faith alone. The Torah states, ‘Know the G-d of your fathers and serve Him.’

“The ultimate goal is to know G-d. It is only at the beginning of our religious journey that we serve solely with faith. This is akin to asking a doctor for a remedy. At first we follow the doctor’s instructions blindly, and only afterwards, when all is well, do we ask for an explanation.

“Toward this end, G-d gave us the holiday of Passover, on which we perform all manner of odd behaviors in order to prompt our children to ask questions. This is specifically to teach them to ask, as well as to give us opportunities to provide answers for everything. It is incumbent upon us to answer and teach every child: the wise child, the wicked child, the simpleton, and even the one who does not know how to ask — all of this at the outset of a holiday that celebrates our becoming the nation of G-d. This demonstrates that it is essential for Jews to always ask and seek answers.

“Naturally, for every question, there are many answers and reasons, as our holy Torah is broader than the seven seas. No single individual knows everything. When a doctor doesn’t know something, he must ask a more knowledgeable doctor; so too, one must seek answers from someone with greater knowledge.”

DO YOU SEE ANY CHANGE IN THE KIRUV FIELD AS A RESULT OF THE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION?

The current situation has been the means of bringing a lot of people closer to Hashem. There are those who ask the Rebbe, “Why is Hashem doing this to me?” The Rebbe’s reply to this is: “This is precisely what Hashem wants you to ask. He wants you to remember Him. Until now you may have had an attitude of ‘kochi v’otzem yadi asah li es hachayil hazeh.’ Everything revolved around your own intelligence and strategies, and you didn’t have time to fulfill the mitzvos. You may also have used the money for things that are against the will of Hashem. But now that your parnassah situation has deteriorated and you realize that all your strategies are worthless, you’ve been reminded that there’s a Director in charge of the world, and you also recognize that all the good that you’ve had in the past is from Him. And this brings us closer to Hashem Yisbarach.”

When one enters the Rebbe’s private room and is warmly greeted by the Rebbe, one is immediately struck by the evident display of ahavas Yisrael. The Rebbe’s blue floral bekeshp completes the picture of impressive nobility.

It is easy to understand how the Rebbe’s hadras panim — his ethereal countenance — as well as the soft caress felt in his heartfelt handshake, are powerful enough to penetrate the toughest layers of apathy and light up the very core of one’s soul.