

# AN ATTORNEY'S VENTURE INTO DIPLOMACY

A PRIOR ATTEMPT AT NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH THE UAE

# Amr

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EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

# “Make Every Shul a Yeshivah!”

Rabbi Shlomo Singer Is Fulfilling His Promise to Rav Aharon Kotler

WHEN  
DIABETES WAS  
BLAMED ON  
THE JEWS  
MEDICINE'S ANTI-  
SEMITIC PAST

BLM,  
VIOLENCE  
AND THE JEWS  
RIOTING AND  
RHETORIC

FACING A  
BUSINESS  
RIVAL  
SHOULD I TAKE  
ADVANTAGE OF HIM?

AMERICAN  
TERRORISTS  
REACH OUT  
TO HAMAS  
THE BOOGALOO BOIS'  
VIOLENT VISION

MELBOURNE  
LOCKDOWN  
WILL THERE BE  
MINYANIM FOR  
YOMIM NORA'IM?

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**E**lul always reminds me of the brilliant *shiurim* given by Rav Meir Stern in Yeshiva Gedolah of Passaic, which I was *zocheh* to attend for two years, some 20-odd years ago.

Each day, I would notice an older man sitting almost directly in front of the *rosh yeshivah* with a tape recorder, intently focusing on the words being taught. He reminded me of the nephews of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Gudgada, who would make sure to sit in front of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi.

I was told that he was a local retired *chazzan* who went by “Cantor” Singer. I naively assumed he was a *baal teshuvah* or someone without a classic *yeshivah* background who, upon retirement, asked Rav Stern if he could attend his *shiurim*.

In hindsight, that explanation made little sense. Rav Stern’s *shiur* was known to be one of the best and sharpest *shiurim*. Young men begged and pleaded to get into this *shiur*, and even then, they had trouble fully understanding it until after completing a number of *chazzaros*.

But “Cantor” Singer *did* understand the *shiur*. I discovered that he was not just a local retiree, but that he comes from Torah royalty, is a Torah scholar in his own right, and is on a mission to teach all *Yidden* the *amkus shel Torah*, the depth of Torah! Twenty years ago, I had unknowingly sat mere feet from this remarkable man, but we never spoke until this summer, when he shared with me what he sees as his role in our *mesorah*.



Night seder in yeshivah

## “TAYLOR”ED BEGINNINGS

Rabbi Shlomo Singer’s father, Rav Dovid Yehuda Singer, was a *rav* in the early part of

“BEFORE WE CAN REBUILD TORAH, WE FIRST NEED BNEI TORAH!”

the 20th century in Taylor, Pennsylvania, where he strived for many years to spread *Yiddishkeit*. He later moved his family to Scranton and opened a *sefarim* printing company.

He was a *talmid chacham*, blessedly raising *frum* children in America (an accomplishment that was sadly not so common in those days). One day he received a plea from Rav Meir Greenberg, an emissary of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe. Rav Meir was a huge *talmid chacham* who had spent years learning under Rav Shlomo Heiman, received *semichah* from Rav Moshe Feinstein, and would later become the *rosh yeshivah* of the major Chabad *yeshivah* of Paterson, now in Morristown.

Rabbi Singer tells me about the time Rav Meir called the elder Rav Singer to plead with him to bring his family and children to New York. He told him, "Spreading Torah is vital, but you must make sure that your children themselves will become *bnei Torah*. Before we can rebuild Torah, we first need *bnei Torah*!"

No more needed to be said. Rav Singer immediately sprang into action, and with little to no money brought his family to the Lower East Side. He sent his son, Shlomo Zalman, to Crown Heights to learn—after all, it was the Rebbe who had reached out to make certain that his children would be raised as *bnei Torah*.

Rabbi Singer says he can still remember bringing the Rebbe milk in his study. "When I walked in there, it was like walking into *Gan Eden*! *Kedushah* wasn't just in the air; it was in the Rebbe's smile."

Rabbi Singer notes that his brother had one of the first bar mitzvahs to ever take place in 770. "When my brother and I were brought to the Rebbe for a *brachah* before the bar mitzvah, the Rebbe instructed us, 'Be a *yerei shamayim* and grow in Torah!'"

After spending some time in RJJ, Rabbi Singer switched to Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim, led by Rav Moshe Feinstein, as it was mere blocks from his house. "It's hard to imagine," he smiles, "but [famed comedian] Jackie Mason and I both enrolled to learn under Rav Moshe. (Jackie's father was one of the *gedolim* of the last generation.) Rav Moshe would always ask



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Rav Reuven Feinstein visiting the yeshivah

Yaakov Moshe (Jackie) to emcee events; he loved to see the *talmidim* happy and laughing.”

During his time with Rav Moshe, Rabbi Singer learned the power of *middos tovos* and *hasmadah*. When Rabbi Singer contracted pneumonia, Rav Moshe traveled alone to his house to visit in person! And as for Rav Moshe’s legendary *hasmadah*, Rabbi Singer had the *zechus* to be friends with Rav Reuven Feinstein and to sleep in Rav Moshe’s apartment from time to time. To get to the bathroom, one had to pass by Rav Moshe’s room, where he was up learning until all hours of the night. Rabbi Singer recalls in amazement, “One time, I passed by Rav Moshe’s study in the middle of the night and saw the Rav learning in a chair without a back and with

his feet in a bucket of ice so he would be able to stay awake!”

## THE LION OF TORAH

While continually growing in his own learning, Rabbi Singer also kept hearing about an *Ari Shel Torah*—Lion of Torah—by the name of Rav Aharon Kotler.

Rav Aharon was a legend in Torah even while still in Europe, and his arrival to

America was a watershed moment in Jewish history.

“I wanted so badly to meet him, to see him,” Rabbi Singer tells me.

When Rav Moshe and the entire *yeshivah* headed to Boro Park to celebrate the *siyum* of another *yeshivah*, Rabbi Singer finally got his chance to meet the *gadol*.

As they were leaving, his friend tugged at his sleeve. “Shlomo! You wanted to meet the *Ari Shel Torah*? Well, he’s right over there waiting for a taxi!”

“KEDUSHAH WASN’T JUST IN THE AIR; IT WAS IN THE REBBE’S SMILE.”

They ran toward Rav Aharon, grabbed his suitcase, hailed a cab for him and escorted him into the taxi.

Rav Aharon's destination mattered little to these two *bachurim*; wherever Rav Aharon was heading, they would go with him.

"As soon as the taxi drove off, I thought to myself, 'What have I done?! What have I gotten myself into?! He will ask me about my learning! He will see I am nobody in Torah!' But he never did. Do you know why?" Rabbi Singer answers his own question. "Because he didn't want to embarrass or hurt me. Instead, Rav Aharon only asked me personal and sweet questions about my life. And when he arrived at his destination, he gave a tip to the cab driver like you would not believe! I went to learn by him the very next day!"

## THE LION ROARS

Rabbi Singer tries to explain to me the *gadlus* of Rav Aharon.

"Rav Aharon would clean your house; he would polish your shoes if it meant you would come to learn in *yeshivah*. He was fighting for the very survival of Torah!"

I've spoken to Rabbi Singer many times in preparation for this article, and each time he has another anecdote to share to illustrate Rav Aharon's *milchamah* for Torah in America.

Like the time Rabbi Singer's cousin came up in conversation. "Rav Aharon asked me which *yeshivah* my cousin is learning in. I answered that he isn't in a *yeshivah*. He is going to law school in the fall. Rav Aharon then asked me to dial his number, and as soon as he answered the phone, Rav Aharon quickly grabbed the phone from me and ordered, 'You are coming to *yeshivah*!'"

Rabbi Singer references the OU's *Jewish Action* interview with Rabbi Berel Wein, in which Rabbi Wein recounts that Rav Soloveitchik once said that the students he had in the later years were much more proficient in learning than those in the early days of YU. Rav Soloveitchik credited Rav Aharon Kotler's



**Rabbi Singer giving an *iyun shiur* in the yeshivah**

long fight for classic *limmud haTorah* in America!

Rabbi Singer continues, "I saw the assimilation at that time with my own eyes. When I first came to Passaic, there were only ten *frum* families. Growing up, I knew men with long beards whose kids intermarried, *Rachamana litzlan*! But Rav Aharon fought for our survival, and now, look around! Find me a major city without a *kollel* today!"

## MISHNAS RABBI SINGER

Rav Aharon's single-minded goal was palpable to Rabbi Singer when he was learning at BMG, which at the time had about a hundred students. He recalls that everyone would struggle to understand the breadth and depth of Rav Aharon's *shiurim*.

Together with Rav Shneur Kotler, Rabbi

**RAV AHARON FOUGHT FOR OUR SURVIVAL, AND NOW, FIND ME A MAJOR CITY WITHOUT A KOLLEL!**



all in good humor. What Rav Aharon and most others didn't know, however, is that instead of the *bachur* speaking, he would instead play a recording of one of the secretly taped *shiurim*, with this *bachur* simply mimicking Rav Aharon's gestures.

The *bachur* stood at the *shtender* and began to "speak." Rav Aharon sat and listened and was enjoying the Torah! This was not Purim Torah; this was deep stuff! Keep in mind, such recordings were not common in those days, and coming from Kletzk, this technology was not at the forefront of Rav Aharon's mind.

Rav Aharon was nodding in agreement and enjoying the *lomdus* when it suddenly dawned on him that he was listening to himself deliver a *shiur*!

Rav Aharon did not get upset that his Torah was being recorded. Rather, he made them promise to keep these tapes safe. Today, these reel-to-reel tapes are still utilized by BMG in their production of Rav Aharon's writings in *Mishnas Rav Aharon!*

## A PROMISE TO RAV AHARON

Rabbi Singer tells me that when he was preparing to leave Lakewood, Rav Aharon asked him, "Will you open a *yeshiva*?"

"No," said Rabbi Singer.

"Maybe you will enter the rabbinate."

"That's not for me either," Rabbi Singer replied honestly.

"Well, what will you do?"

"I will be a *chazzan*."

"A *chazzan*!" Rav Aharon exclaimed. "You can sing, and you never sang for me and the *yeshiva*!?"

Then Rav Aharon issued the following order, which stayed with Rabbi Singer all these years. "Wherever you go, whatever *shul* you work for, you must work to turn that *shul* into a *yeshiva*! No *balebos* is unworthy of learning deeply, with *chaburos*, *b'iyun rabbah*. It is not enough to make them *shomer Shabbos*," he exhorted. "They must know

Singer got a hold of a reel-to-reel recorder, created a surreptitious hole in the ceiling, and lowered a microphone.

For some time, they recorded the *rosh yeshiva*'s *shiurim*, giving *bachurim* and *yungeleit* the amazing opportunity to replay it again and again until they "got it."

There was one problem. How would they break the news to the *rosh yeshiva*? Perhaps he didn't want these *shiurim* recorded.

So, they came up with a plan. When Purim came around, one of the *bachurim* went up to a *shtender* during the *yeshiva*'s *seudah*. With Rav Aharon in attendance, this *bachur* was to give over a *drashah* or *shiur* imitating the style and speech patterns of Rav Aharon,

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**"It is simple and obvious that learning in a program like Daf HaYomi B'Halacha can help [Klal Yisrael] in the present difficult situation." Later, he qualified his words with even greater emphasis saying, "It is clear that joining the Daf HaYomi B'Halacha can serve as a means to change the matzav..."**

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Rav Malkiel Kotler, Rabbi Singer and Rav Meir Stern (L-R) at the yeshivah's chanukas habayis/hachnasas sefer Torah

how to delve into the *amkus shel Torah* (the truest depth and brilliance of Torah)!"

"I promised my Rebbe," said Rabbi Singer, now crying. "I promised my Rebbe! Forty years ago is when the *yeshivah* I have today began, and I fulfilled my promise.

"I didn't care to teach them bar mitzvah *leining*—and I am a *chazzan* and could have taught them this! Rather, I listened to Rav Aharon and focused on *amkus shel Torah*. Many of these boys came from deeply Conservative homes and are now learning in Eretz Yisrael."

Rabbi Singer continues, "I want you to

know that my Rebbe's message was not unique just to me. He said this to everyone who went into *rabbanus*: 'A *shul* must be a *yeshivah*! A *rav* must be a *rosh yeshivah*!'"

Over 40 years ago, Rabbi Singer invited a *balebos*, Bruce Goldberg, to his house on Shabbos for some kugel, cholent and in-depth Gemara learning.

Before long, the entire dining room table was filled with men immersed in the depth of the *yam haTalmud*. Then they extended into the kitchen.

Soon, there were so many attendees that

they had to move to Rabbi Singer's garage.

About 25 years ago, Rav Meir Stern urged Rabbi Singer to use the *yeshivah*. Soon after, Rabbi Singer realized that he needed his own building.

He told his late wife, "We need a place for in-depth learning for *baalei batim*, where people from all backgrounds can attend *shiurim*, give real *chaburos*, say *chiddushim* in Torah and experience the beauty of real learning, each on their own level."

Rabbi Singer admits that, at first, they were nervous about how they would pay for the

mortgage. "But we both understood that Hashem has unlimited funds.

"The address of our new, and first home, was 441 Passaic Avenue!"

Before I could think of the significance of this number, Rabbi Singer explained, "441 is the same *gematriya* as *emes*! How amazing is that?!"

Rebbetzin Ita Singer passed away just a few years ago. She was the emotional and financial support for this *yeshivah* throughout its early and challenging phases. She also advocated for a focus on women who desired Torah classes and in-depth *shiurim*. At his *rebbetzin's* urging, Rabbi Singer also has a slew of classes and *shiurim* for women of all backgrounds, housed in a separate building. This women's learning program is called Ateres Bracha/Neve PTI.

## HE JUST NEEDS A GEMARA

Rabbi Singer has the secret to *kiruv*. He truly loves every Jew; his sincerity drips off of him. And his Shabbos table is always graced by Jews from all walks of life. "A *Yid* is always special," Rabbi Singer says.

One of his children shared an amazing story with me. One Sukkos after 9/11, a young man, maybe 20 years old, arrived for the *seudah* in their *sukkah*. The world was still on edge, and this young man was a committed leftist. He held democracy, Israel, America, etc. responsible for the horrific events, focusing on their "treatment" of Arabs as an excuse for the carnage.

"I had enough," one daughter told me.

"There have to be limits as to who can come to our home. It was so soon after 9/11, and I simply could not bear listening to any more of this man's childlike view of the world.

"My father told me, 'You're wrong. His values may be corrupt, but they come from good *middos*. It is his *pintele Yid* for *rachmanus* that is behind his ideologies. All he needs is a Gemara, to be trained in learning, and he will be an amazing Jew!"

That young man is now married and living in Bnei Brak!

This special love for all Jews, and their potential, is seen in Rabbi Singer's *yeshivah* today.

## NER BORUCH/PTI

As the *zman* went on, I witnessed Rabbi Singer do something so different, so revolutionary, that I can honestly say it blew my mind and has inspired the way I act today as a person and a *rav*.

Rabbi Singer is involved in *kiruv rechokim*, and he has had the privilege of bringing back many to the fold.

But here is what was inimitable: While other *kiruv* workers give lectures on light topics or subjects that they think will draw people inside a *shul*, he would invite these unaffiliated men inside one of the most prestigious *yeshivos* in the world and give a class on... Rav Meir Stern's *shiur*!

That's right! He would stand before men who never saw the inside of a Chumash, let alone a Gemara, and slowly and carefully explain the Gemara under discussion, and

go-over the points of Rashi or *Tosafos* or any other *Rishon* that was needed to understand what was to come.

He would slowly and painstakingly draw their attention to the apparent inconsistencies or *chakiros*, and then he would finally penetrate the *sugya* and tie it all together in a bow with the *rosh yeshivah's* analysis and explanation of the pertinent *Acharonim*. Nothing real-and-true was off the table.

And he was successful—he made people *frum* this way!

It was a lesson that while the not-yet-*frum* may not know a lot of Torah, we are remiss to treat them as a remedial group.

Years ago, I received a letter from a *chashuve rosh kollel*. "I was passing through Buffalo and stopped into your *shul* for *Minchah* and *Maariv*. When you spoke in-between, you talked about deep halachic topics that, while interesting, were likely above the heads of your audience and not what they needed to hear," he wrote.

Respectfully, and while I understood where he was coming from, he could not have been more wrong. He never saw Rabbi Singer in action.

Aside from the fact that every member at my *shiur* that night was already *frum*, even if this *rosh kollel* assumed that they did not have a *yeshivah* education, he is wrong to presume that they can't understand a "Rav Chaim," or see the intellectual marvel of *chochmas haTorah*. Why should we deprive them of the very thing that gives us the most *simchas hachaim*—the *simchah* of *limmud haTorah*? Why not explain the reason *behind* the *psak*? Why not challenge them?

This brings me to Elul. Throughout the year, we convince ourselves that we are not at "that" level. We see others or read about others whose ways are inspiring, and the *kinas sofrim*, a healthy jealousy and pining, begins to stir within us.

Elul is when we all attend, metaphorically speaking, Rabbi Singer's class. When we all walk into Passaic Yeshivah, don one of those silk-like yarmulkes found in a basket at the

THE DESTINATION OF RAV AHARON MATTERED LITTLE; WHEREVER RAV AHARON WAS HEADING, THEY WOULD FOLLOW.

entryway, and sit and marvel at who we can, one day, become.

Today, Rabbi Singer has a new beautiful building on the way (still at 441), with over 200 *baalei batim* of various backgrounds attending *shiurim* and learning *b'chavrusa* each week.

Sure, there is *davening*, and *shalosh seudos* on Shabbos, but this isn't just a *shul*; it is the fulfillment of a promise and a dream.

Rabbi Singer's dream—and the sole reason for agreeing to this interview—is for this idea to spread. He says, "Every town needs a real *yeshivah* for *baalei batim*. Not only will it make more people *frum*, but the *bnei yeshivah* who are working are thirsting for this. There are *talmidei chachamim* in every town who are capable of giving high-end *shiurim* and are in need of the extra *parnasah*. They can challenge these older students—give them *chaburos*, write *chiddushim*. *Shuls* will publish *sefarim*!

"I want you to know that this *yeshivah* was not created just for those new to Torah. What is the fate of the *kollel yungerman* who leaves the walls of the *beis midrash* to go to work? He will learn the *daf*? That's great, but what of the *amkus* of Torah, its true depth and *simchah*?! Many *shuls* already offer some in-depth *shiurim*. But this has to be a program, a night *sefer*, where the *baalei batim*, too, give over Torah."

He continues, "When I would speak to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky about my idea for a *yeshivah*, he too would agree. 'Lomdus! It's all about *lomdus*!'"

Rabbi Baruch Bodenheim, one of Rabbi Singer's sons-in-law and associate *rosh yeshivah* at PTI, shares with me, "It's not just our *baalei batim* who benefit, but their children—who day after day see their fathers come home arguing over an intricate point in the Gemara—become superstar *talmidei chachamim* in their own right. We see the fruits every day."

"I am 86 years old," says Rabbi Singer. "I have to carry on the message that every *shul* can be a *yeshivah*! We have to share the sweet-



Krias haTorah in the yeshivah

ness of *amkus haTorah* with the world! This is what I promised my Rebbe, Rav Aharon."

On this last point, a video spread around after this past year's Tishah B'Av.

It was the renowned *rav*, Rav Zev Leff, speaking to his *shul* during *kinnos*. In it, he says, "A *rav* in Passaic, Rabbi Shlomo Singer, has a *shul* where the *baalei batim* learn, but not just *stam* learning *Daf Yomi*, or learning something peripheral, but learning *mamash b'omek*. *Ad kdei kach* that these *baalei batim* give *chaburos* and are *mechadesh chiddushim*! And this *rav* feels that this is something that is crucial. Torah *b'amkus* is not just for *bnei hayeshivah*; rather, the goal of every *shul* should be to be like a *yeshivah*!"

Here, I should make the obvious point that the above is not to disparage *Daf Yomi*, *challillah*, but to challenge ourselves to try to delve deeper.

## THE DREAM

I could spend the rest of the article speaking about his *yeshivah*, but this is not what Rabbi Singer wants.

Rabbi Singer shares one last story with me, "Many years ago, when Torah Umesorah was successful in opening day schools across the country, they held a special event in Lakewood.

"Principals from North Carolina, Tennessee

WE SEE OTHERS OR READ ABOUT OTHERS WHOSE WAYS ARE INSPIRING, AND THE KINAS SOFERIM, A HEALTHY JEALOUSY AND PINING, BEGINS TO STIR WITHIN US.



and all over the country came. Although the goal was to give a *mazal tov* and say *She-hecheyanu*, the principals all arrived looking despondent.

"I mean, put yourself in their shoes! They were dealing largely with families not interested in Torah-true Judaism. It was an uphill battle. They would teach the essentials and then see these children go off to public schools or college and forget their *Yiddishkeit*. It was a painful job to have back then.

"But Rav Moshe spoke last, and he stole the show. I still have the recording.

"Rav Moshe asked, 'Why do we bless our children to be like Efraim and Menashe? Perhaps you will say that it's because they were raised in Torah in the depth of *tumas Mitzrayim*... and that is true, but it's also a lie! Our children can't reach that level. We can try to have them emulate Rabbi Akiva, an Abayei, but Efraim and Menashe? *Rabbosai*, we bless our children this way, even though it's impossible, even though it is but a *guzmah* (an exaggerated desire). Because to succeed in *chinuch* we have to compare them to the best there ever was. If you wish to succeed in *chinuch* you can't just teach students the

essentials. You have to teach them as if they could become the next Efraim and Menashe!

"And if you wonder, how indeed was Yosef so successful? It is because he taught them from Yaakov, the personification of pure, unbridled, unfiltered, unwattered-down Torah. This is how we succeed in *chinuch*! By holding them to their highest potential!"

Rabbi Singer says that every *menahel* walked out of that speech with a new mission: They will not shy away from teaching youngsters *amkus haTorah*.

"This can change the Torah world! Look at Passaic now," Rabbi Singer points out. "So many *mosdos*. How did this happen? I remember when it was a *midbar*! I came for *parnasah* and to fulfill the promise to my Rebbe. I would never have dreamed Passaic would be what it is today. But I see the success here, and I know it can happen everywhere. My Rebbe wanted this so much."

Rabbi Singer pauses, and then again begins to cry.

"Yes, there have been a lot of *chashuve* and hardworking *rabbanim*, but none of it could have happened if Rav Meir Stern didn't walk into town so many years ago with ten *talmidim*! *Amkus haTorah* is the only hope cities have for growth. And now, *baruch Hashem*, we have reached the point where it need not be reserved just for *yeshivahleit*!"

In other words, and as Rav Moshe expressed in that speech, for a school, city or *kehillah* to thrive, they must have the loftiest—even seemingly impossible to reach—goals. They must be able to witness Torah at its deepest levels. Without that ingredient—without a *kollel* or a *yeshivah* (and without a *rosh yeshivah* or a *rosh kollel* for their children to look up to), it is hard for a town to grow and flourish.

Rabbi Singer concludes our conversation. "I am just a *talmid* trying to fulfill a promise to his *rosh yeshivah*. Help me spread the word, help me share how successful this can be. Every *shul* can become a *yeshivah*! The *Ari Shel Torah* lives on!" ●

## SECURE THE GREAT PROTECTION THAT IS GUARANTEED FOR THOSE WHO LEARN HALACHA DAILY



**"We have to strengthen ourselves. During these days, everyone should add *chizuk* in the learning of Mishnah Berurah. By doing this, we will cause pleasure to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and a great benefit to the neshamah of the Chofetz Chaim. The Chofetz Chaim will certainly advocate for all of us, to merit a good year and a *kesivah vechasimah tovah*."**

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