



Rav Yitzchok  
Scheiner at  
the  
Homeshield  
Solutions  
office

# Torah Partnerships in the Workplace

## The Phenomenon of Adopt-a-Kollel Corporate

BY GERSHON HELLMAN

Seven years ago, the Torah world in Eretz Yisrael was in crisis. The Yesh Atid Party wielded much power in the government and slashed the budget for *kollel* stipends to an unprecedented low. As *kollelim* across the country were unable to meet their budgets, young families were unable to put bread on the table. Men toiled in Torah all day, but they couldn't provide for their families, not even to the standard of their already bare-bones lifestyle.

One business owner in America runs a company that has a large branch in Eretz Yisrael. This branch employs hundreds of *frum* women, the majority of whose husbands learn in *kollel*. The budget cuts affected them tremendously, and many found themselves on the brink of destitution.



One morning, a newly hired employee came to work with a small bag of cereal. She sent an email to her manager with the following request: The office provided coffee and milk to the employees to enjoy during the day. Because of the shortage of money, there wasn't any milk in her house, and she hadn't been able to have cereal with milk for breakfast. Would it be okay if she skipped her share of coffee for the day and used the milk instead for her cereal?

The manager was very disturbed and forwarded the email to the owner in America. The owner was shocked by what he read and was moved to action. He felt that *klal Yisrael* had to do something to help; it wasn't enough to simply shrug our shoulders and say, "*Nebach.*"

He recognized that all Jews have a share in Torah study and could help *talmidei chachamim* in dire need; assisting them was not just the domain of *gevirim*. After

much deliberation and discussions with *rabbanim*, he came up with the idea to connect *shuls* and *batei midrash* in the Diaspora with a partner *kollel* in Eretz Yisrael. While most individuals couldn't offer much financial assistance on their own, the power of the *rabbim* was much stronger, and when *shuls* came together, substantial amounts of money could be raised. Each *shul* would be assigned its own *kollel*, creating a mutually beneficial partnership. Partnering *shuls* would commit to covering a percentage of the budget of its partner *kollel*, enabling it to make it through the month and allowing Jews around the world to share in the Torah of Eretz Yisrael.

Within a short time, Adopt-a-Kollel became very well known in *frum* circles. The program was warmly endorsed by the leading *gedolim* of both the United States and Eretz Yisrael. Rav Don Segal, for example, was extremely enthusiastic about

the idea. He asked to meet with the directors of the organization, and insisted on standing the entire time he spoke to them as a sign of respect. He praised them at length for their efforts, and described how partnering with *kollelim* is "*kodesh kodashim.*" Rav Don then turned to the Adopt-a-Kollel representatives and asked them to give him a *brachah!* The men were shocked and felt unworthy to give a blessing to one of the *gedolei hador*. But he insisted that they had tremendous *zechusim* through their work, so their *brachos* were extremely valuable.

One unique aspect of Adopt-a-Kollel is that every penny goes directly from the *shul* to the *kollel* without having to go through the organization. This means that 100% of the money goes to the cause, without a cent being spent on overhead.

The connection between the partners transcends simply fundraising. When the *rav* of the *shul* travels to Eretz Yisrael, he

is received with great honor by “his” *kollel* and is frequently asked to address the *avreichim*. When members of the *shul* visit, they often spend part of their stay learning in the *kollel* with the young men with whom they have developed a bond. Numerous *shuls* have also arranged *yarchei kallah* retreats for their members to be part of a structured learning program. And the opposite is also true: The *roshei kollel* frequently travel overseas and visit their partner *shuls*, where they address the *mispallelim* and offer *chizzuk* and *divrei Torah*.

The *kollelim* accept the *shul* members as family, and when someone is going through a hard time or facing illness, they *daven* for him at the *mekomos hakedoshim* or learn in their merit. In the early days of the pandemic, one *shul* in America arranged a 24-hour-straight “*retzifus*” *sefer* as a *zechus* for all the *cholim*. The *shul* members took a 12-hour shift during the day in the United States, and their partners in Eretz Yisrael took the second 12-hour shift during the day in Israel. The benefits of such a mutual partnership were clear.

Rabbi Bernfeld, director of Adopt-a-Kollel, relates, “I speak to *kehillos* around the world and am always amazed by the scope of the movement. There are tens of thousands of Jews who donate to their partner *kollel* consistently—every single month, year after year. It is also mindboggling how the donations increased after the pandemic began. Without exception, every *shul* increased its donations. It is clear that this is a great *zechus* for *klal Yisrael*.”

Perhaps less well known is Adopt-a-Kollel’s more recent growth of its corporate branch, which connects businesses with *kollelim*, thus allowing offices to become partners in Torah learning. In a corporate setting, the partnership is a way to unify the employees in a higher pursuit.

This model has been implemented in various ways. In some cases, all of the employees participate and donate an equal share to the program. In other companies, the employees donate whatever they can and the employers match the donations. While every business is different, the result is the same for all: transforming a workplace into a *makom Torah*.

# 121 eCommerce

“*Yidden who work,*” rather than “*working Yidden*”

■ **Based in Cleveland, Ohio with a global operation**

■ **Adopt-a-Kollel Partner: Kollel Bnei Aliyah**

■ **Founder & CEO Ben Chafetz**

**121** eCommerce is recognized as a world

leader in the field of website development, maintenance and customization with expertise that includes designing website optimization.

Founder and CEO Ben Chafetz is regularly featured in industry publications and speaks at key industry events. He is also a devoted communal activist in Cleveland and supports many local, national and international causes.

Some of the company’s more famous clients include Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, RAM, Beechcraft, Cessna, HVAC, and Just for Men, though they also work with many smaller businesses that have benefited greatly from their expertise.

“In general, our model of 121 eCommerce is that the staff is ‘*Yidden who work,*’ rather than ‘*working Yidden,*’” Ben Chafetz explains. “We start our day with learning and *davening* and we end our day with more *davening* and learning. Work is something we have to do in the middle, but



A  
121eCommerce  
Adopt-a-Kollel  
corporate event

even our work should be with a higher purpose. Tying our profits to a *kollel* is just a natural aspect to that. It's another way to tie our work to *avodas Hashem*. It's a way of bringing the Torah's *brachos* into the workplace."

As such, when he first heard that Adopt-a-Kollel was considering opening a division for companies, his first thought was that he wanted to be one of the first to sign up. To his understanding, the Yissachar-Zevulun partnership is supposed to be a normal aspect of a business, so it made a lot of sense to tie his company to a *kollel*. In line with this thinking, Adopt-a-Kollel is not the only Torah-supporting initiative of 121 eCommerce. The company also supports two local Cleveland *kollelim* in different ways.

Chafetz's approach to Adopt-a-Kollel is that the ownership fully matches all donations made by the employees.

"I tell my employees, the *kollel*

pays a certain amount every month," Ben relates. "If you give half of one *kollel* check, I will match it, which means that it's like you're giving one *avreich* his full salary!"

It's an official arrangement, as whatever an employee decides to donate is deducted automatically from his paycheck and the matching funds are automatically added to the donation. The workers were enthusiastic about this opportunity and readily arranged to give what they could.

Rather than asking to be paired with a *kollel* at random, 121 eCommerce conducted an extensive interview process with approximately ten potential partner *kollelim* before settling on a partner.

"We had specific criteria we were looking for," Ben explains. "We wanted a *kollel* that focused on the *rebbe-talmid* relationship, and where the staff and employees at 121 could hear regular *shiurim* from the *rosh kollel*, who would

have to be primarily English-speaking, as well as the *kollel* members."

Equally important was finding a *kollel* where his team would feel comfortable interacting with the *yungerleit* and spending time there on visits to Israel. He also wanted a *kollel* with a strong sense of accountability for the learning, for example, regular *bechinot* and a focus on sticking to the *sedarim*.

At the end of the interview process, the committee chose the *kollel* of the famed *gaon*, Rav Yitzchok Glazel, Kollel Bnei Aliyah. As per the criteria, Rav Glazel delivers a highly anticipated *shiur* over Zoom to the 121 staff once a month on Rosh Chodesh. Before COVID, he would visit the office and deliver the *shiur* in person.

Before the pandemic restricted travel, Ben made a point of visiting the *kollel* numerous times, and was always warmly welcomed to join the learning as a temporary *yungerman*.



Yitzchok Deutch

## ID Tech Solutions

*“We believe in integrating learning into our business and showing one and all that Torah is a high priority for us.”*

■ Lakewood, New Jersey

■ **Adopt-a-Kollel Partner:**  
Kollel Kalev of Beitar

■ **President and CEO**  
Yitzchok Deutch

ID Tech Solutions is a Lakewood-based company at the forefront of the technology field. They serve as a one-stop, individualized resource for IT, security and communications-related products and services, offering the industry’s most cutting-edge solutions.

The company encompasses a wide range of clients across industries, including healthcare, education, construction, real estate, nonprofits, and small businesses.

Yitzchok Deutch, president and CEO of ID Tech Solutions, was already a fan of the Adopt-a-Kollel concept for some time before the chance arose to join the corporate division.

“One of our key employees is Beri Taub, a grandson of the revered Kaliver Rebbe of Williamsburg,” Yitzchok Deutch shares on how he found his *kollel* partner. “Beri’s father, the Rebbe’s son, Rav Eliezer Tzvi Taub, leads a *kollel* in the city of Beitar in Eretz Yisrael.”

Yitzchok has another connection to Rav Taub, as his *rav*, Rav Shaul Simcha Friedman, *rav* of Bais Medrash Shemen LMinchah of Lakewood, is a son-in-law of the Kaliver Rebbe, which makes him a brother-in-law of Rav Taub.

At one point, Rav Taub was in Lakewood to raise money for his *kollel*, and Rav Friedman asked Yitzchok if he could help. Yitzchok’s good friend, Shulem Ilowitz of Prime Insurance had

told him about Adopt-a-Kollel corporate when he joined, so he saw this request as a good opportunity to form his own partnership.

“We have a decent amount of employees,” Yitzchok adds. “We all love Beri and have the personal connection to him. And I felt that this could work.”

ID Tech was already a *makom Torah* to a large extent, as Yitzchok has already worked to encourage the spiritual growth of his employees through hosting *shiurim* and all kinds of *ruchniyus*-enriching *chizzuk* events at the business for the past 20 years. Since the beginning of the last *machzor* of the *Daf HaYomi* nine years ago, ID Tech has maintained a well-attended daily *Daf Yomi shiur* in





ID Tech  
Adopt-a-  
Kollel  
corporate  
launch event

the morning for employees. The company also arranges other learning opportunities during the afternoon with *shiurim* on *halachah* and *mishnayos*. The Adopt-a-Kollel idea was introduced to the employees at a gala *siyum* arranged by the office on *Daf Yomi Seder Kodashim*, where Yitzchok made a dramatic announcement about the partnership, which was eagerly accepted by the employees.

It also helped that the personal connection to Rav Taub was already in place, as he had previously visited the business both as a beloved employee's father and as the CEO's *rav's* brother-in-law. The partnership served to

strengthen the bond and formalize it around Torah learning. Rav Taub has visited the business again since the partnership was formalized and spoke to the employees with deep emotion.

"Some people say not to mix the work environment with learning and *ruchniyus*," Yitzchok says. "We believe strongly that the opposite is true. We believe in integrating learning into our business and showing one and all that Torah is a high priority for us. That's why we start our day every day with a *shiur* and that is why it was natural for us to connect with a high-level *kollel* in Eretz Yisrael."



Shmuel  
Wechsler

# Homeshield Solutions

*"We are always looking for ways to bring *ruchniyus* into the business."*

■ Lakewood, NJ  
and Chicago, IL

■ Adopt-a-  
Kollel Partner:  
Kollel Kaminetz

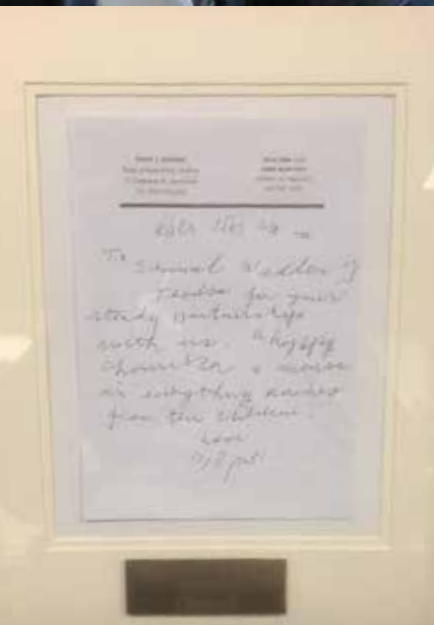
■ Founder  
and CEO  
Shmuel  
Wechsler

**H**omeshield Solutions is a preservation company with offices in Chicago and Lakewood, and over a decade of experience preserving and rehabilitating homes and properties across the country with efficiency, consistency, and quality. They are recognized as an industry leader in asset preservation and maintaining foreclosed and distressed properties across the Midwest region and the Mid Atlantic/Southeast region, as well as preservation, renovation, construction, and transforming old or distressed properties into beautiful, desirable homes.

The company has completed over 1,000,000 work orders in 31 states since 2008.



The letter from Rav Scheiner to Shmuel Wechsler



“We were always looking for ways to bring *ruchniyus* into the business,” Shmuel shares. “We have learning programs for our staff in the office and we are involved in many different spiritual endeavors [namely, giving a lot of *tzedakah*].”

The obvious next step to him was to adopt a *kollel*. The idea was under consideration, but when the opportunity arose to partner with one of the *gedolei hador*, Rav Yitz-

chok Scheiner, zt”l, “it was a no-brainer.”

R’ Chaim Zev Edelman, a close *talmid* of Rav Scheiner and a good friend of Shmuel’s, suggested the match between Homeshield and the *kollel* of Yeshivas Kaminetz, under the auspices of Rav Scheiner as the *rosh yeshivah*. The decision makers at Homeshield viewed this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to connect with one of the Torah leaders of the generation, and a deal that could not be passed up.

Shmuel traveled to Eretz Yisrael, where he was welcomed into Rav Scheiner’s home and granted a personal meeting. Rav Scheiner made it clear that he himself would consider Homeshield to be

*shutfim* in the *kollel*’s learning and the company would hold a special place in his heart. When the partnership was formalized in 2016, Rav Scheiner attended the first event held in the Homeshield corporate office and delivered warm words of *brachah*.

The employees were very excited to be a part of this partnership and eagerly joined.

The Adopt-a-Kollel partnerships are officially in place for one year at a time, with events held yearly to formally renew for another year. At one renewal event, Shmuel declared, “Kaminetz is Rav Boruch Ber’s *mosad*. To think that our office now has a *shai-chus* to Rav Boruch Ber! How incredible is that?”

From the time of the formation of the partnership until Rav Yitzchok’s passing in January, Rav Scheiner maintained a correspondence through letters and calls with Shmuel and the rest of the staff in Homeshield, during which he continuously expressed his love and gratitude. One of the last letters Rav Yitzchok ever wrote was to Shmuel, dated just three days before his *petirah*. The letter is a treasured item that Shmuel keeps at home.

The partnership with the *kollel* continued with Rav Scheiner’s son-in-law, Rav Krauss, who maintains the close connection to Homeshield, along with the current *rosh yeshivah*, Rav Berel Lichshtein.



Shmuel Wechsler (R) and his partner Tzvi Reifer (L) with Rav Yitzchok Scheiner, zt"l

■ New York

■ **Adopt-a-Kollel Partner:** Kollel Shas Givat Zeev, located north of Yerushalayim

■ **Co-CEO** Chaby Orfali



Chaby Orfali

# Merkury Innovations

*"If a Jew is learning, it's our job to support him."*



**M**erkury Innovations LLC is an import-export company in the consumer electronics field based in New York City. The company employs dozens of employees across numerous locations and generates millions of dollars in sales per year.

Merkury Innovations has the exceptional merit of being the very first company to adopt a *kollel*. As the CEOs relate, they were moved to

partner with a *kollel* from a desire to earn a share in the full-time learning. The corporate heads don't specifically come from *yeshivah* backgrounds and so did not have the opportunity to learn on the same level as others who had. Busy as they are today with running a thriving business, they are not always able to learn as much as they would like, so partnering with a *kollel* was the perfect way to bring the highest level of Torah study into their business and lives.





*Chaby Ofali receiving a brachah from the Skulener Rebbe for the partnership*

The idea of a *shul* partnering with a *kollel* very much spoke to Chaby Ofali, co-CEO of Merkury Innovations, and he was soon struck with the question of why the same concept couldn't be applied on the corporate level.

"My brother-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Heller, is an Adopt-a-Kollel coordinator for the New York area," Chaby relates. "He was going around from *shul* to *shul* arranging partnerships for the Adopt-a-Kollel and I spoke with him and discussed the possibility of doing something along the same lines with corporations. That is how the entire program started. We were lucky enough to be the ones to get the idea going."

From his brother-in-law, Chaby already knew all about the Adopt-a-Kollel program, and had heard stories about all the *kollelim* they had sponsored. Considering the demands of his business and the time it took from his ability to study as much as he would like, he sought to establish a Yissachar-Zevulun arrangement in partnering and supporting full-time *yungerleit*.

Chaby's idea was immediately embraced and the promise of expanding the program to the corporate world was viewed as an extremely powerful opportunity. When the first partnership was formalized, Chaby, his co-CEO Steven Levy, and *gabbaim* from

Adopt-a-Kollel met with the Skulener Rebbe, *zt"l*, who issued his warm *brachah* and strongly endorsed the idea.

Merkury's partner, Kollel Shas Givat Zeev, is led by Rav Zalman Dishon, a son of the famed Rav Shmuel Dishon of New York.

"I am close with Rav Shmuel Dishon, the father of the *rosh kollel*," Chaby shares. "That in itself was enough of a selling point for me. Also, my brother-in-law did research on the *kollel* and learned that it is a very top-notch institution with *avreichim* learning on the highest level."

Though he hasn't yet had the opportunity to visit the *kollel*, the *rosh kollel* reaches out regularly with warm messages to keep in touch

and maintain a relationship in Torah.

Chaby also notes that he's seen his business has also reaped dividends from the partnership. "There's no question it had an immediate impact and had a positive impact on the business," he asserts. "I think it's an amazing program in general and I think if more companies did it, they would see a lot of *brachah*," he adds.

"Most people who work five days a week are extremely busy and don't have the time to learn as much as they should. Something like this is something I would definitely recommend."

While many companies prefer to be matched with a *kollel* associated with a similar background, Merkury is a *Sefardi*-owned company that is partnered with an *Ashkenazi kollel*. For Chaby, such details were never even a consideration, unparticular as he is if the *kollel* is *Sefardi* or *Ashkenazi* or *chasidish*. As Chaby sees it, if a Jew is learning, he should be supported, no matter what type of Jew he is. At the end of the day, someone is studying Torah, and that's what matters most. ■