

“STILL WE DON’T DO A THING”

Shai Gefen conducts an exclusive interview with Rabbi Schmidt , rav in Shavei Shomron, in which the rav describes the incredible miracle he experienced and gives his views on the situation in the Holy Land.

BY SHAI GEFEN



On Monday, the 4th of Kislev, the rav of the yishuv Shavei Shomron, Rabbi Yehoshua Mordechai Schmidt, experienced a great miracle when he traveled from Kedumim towards his house. A car passed him close by and



SNAPSHOT BIO: RABBI SCHMIDT

Rabbi Yehoshua Mordechai Schmidt is 34 years old and was born to Holocaust survivors. He grew up in Kfar Avrohom which is near Petach Tikva. For the past five years he has served as the rav of Shavei Shomron.

For many years he lived in Kiryat Arba and was the *talmid* of Rabbi Dov Lior. Rabbi Schmidt is considered one of the young and energetic Rabbis of Yesha. He founded a *kollel* and a *hesder yeshiva* in his yishuv in which *chassiduss* is part of the curriculum. Rabbi Schmidt has many *talmidim* who live in *yishuvim* in Yesha, still from the days when he taught in Kiryat Arba.

Rabbi Schmidt is of the new breed of young Rabbis in Yesha who are bringing a fundamental change in the thinking of important timely subjects, which has been proving itself in a number of *yishuvim*. His name recently became headlines when he was miraculously saved from a murderous ambush.

dozens of bullets were shot at him, some of which went through the rav’s *kippa* and coat. His head was merely grazed by the bullets, and when we contacted Rabbi Schmidt he was still overcome by the enormity of the miracle he had experienced.

R’ Schmidt is considered one of the youngest and most successful *rabbanim* in Yesha. To his credit is the establishment of a *hesder yeshiva* in Shavei Shomron, where he arrived a

few years ago.

Tell us what happened to you.

I went to bring my children from the *talmud Torah* in Karnei Shomron. In the middle of the trip my car started to stall out and I realized I wouldn’t be able to go back with the car and get the children. I stopped at a garage nearby and left my car there. A few minutes later a taxi driver from the yishuv showed up, Yair Chayibi and his daughter. I sat in the back

and we drove off.

This is the important part of the miracle. For some reason I decided that today I wouldn't take the children with me, and I asked somebody else to take them, so the children weren't in the car. When we got to the incline in the direction of Shavei Shomron, not far from Kedumim, we were suddenly shot at from a passing car. Later we learned that they shot 28 bullets at us. One bullet pierced the metal frame of the car and literally passed by the area you place the *t'fillin shel rosh*. I still have a scratch, but aside from that, nothing happened. From there, the bullet kept going and made a hole in my *kippa*. The newspapers called it "*kippat magen*" (protective *kippa*).

Later, the district commander of the Shomron, Yossi Adiri, pointed out that another bullet had entered the upper part of my jacket, but miraculously - nothing happened to me!

Yair and his daughter were more seriously injured. The girl underwent surgery on her hands, feet, and large intestine where five bullets entered. I visited her, and *baruch Hashem*, by the end of the week, she had gotten out of bed.

Miracles like that don't happen every day...

This was definitely an incredible miracle, news of which really made waves. It's not every day that a bullet flies by your head and scratches it, making a hole in your *kippa*, in addition to another bullet making a hole in your jacket!

Afterwards, the driver told me how the miracle was even greater than I thought. In many instances of drive-by shooting, death is a certainty. The terrorists get out of their car when they see their victim's car out of control, and they finish the job. They did that to Danny Yehuda when he was on his way to Chomesh;

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a fifteen-year-old made believe he was dead and that's how his life was saved. They did the same thing to the Kahane couple, and wanted to do the same to us. They stopped their car and wanted to make sure they had killed us, but after a few seconds they decided to drive on. Why? I don't know, but it was a great miracle for us.

Did you bentch gomel?

Of course! On Shabbos, the *yishuv* had a big *seudas hoda'a*. The miracle uplifted the whole *yishuv* and gave additional significance to our lives here. I definitely see a great *hisorerus* in the wake of the big miracle that happened to us. People from all over the world called to ask us whether



Rabbi Yehoshua Mordechai Schmidt publicizing the miracle: ...the bullet kept going and made a hole in my *kippa*. The newspapers called it "*kippat magen*"

the miracle had really happened as reported. All the big newspapers had the picture of me holding the *kippa* with the bullet hole. It's just incomprehensible how I wasn't hurt.

A Jew from America asked me for the *kippa* because he wants to put it in a special museum exhibit. For now, I have the *kippa*, and I show it to everyone in order to publicize the miracle. I went to Rabbi Lion Levy, the Nadvorna Rebbe, and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu and they all blessed me and expressed their thanks to Hashem for the miracle.

How do you explain the miracle?

I'll tell you something simple which I tell my students in *yeshiva*: The One who said oil should ignite, will tell vinegar to burn. Hashem is the one who determines a person's fate, and that is why the bullet could enter the *kippa* but not my head. It could damage my jacket, but not me. By way of contrast, we had a tragic story of a boy who was killed in a road accident, and not in an attack.

In recent years I've been fasting every Monday and do other *tikkunim*. Maybe in that *z'chus* Hashem saved me. Even after I was attacked, they wanted to give me a drink and I didn't accept it until nightfall.

Tell us something about your yishuv, Shavei Shomron.

Our *yishuv* was founded exactly 24 years ago. It is located past Kedumim, a three-minute drive away from Sh'chem. Shavei Shomron is literally at the foot of Har Eival.

Since I mentioned Har Eival, I'd like to tell you about another miracle that happened to me at the beginning of this war. Rabbi Harling (may Hashem avenge his blood) was killed when he went up Har Eival on Chol HaMoed Sukkos with a group of tourists. At the time, Rabbi Harling had asked me to join him on the trip, saying I was considered the *mara d'asra* of the area. For some reason I



A newspaper report about the miracle

declined, even though I never refuse things like that. In the end it turned out that my life was miraculously saved.

Back to the *yishuv*: The *yishuv* has over one hundred families, all religious. When I came to the *yishuv* five years ago, a *kollel* was founded, and two years ago we founded a *hesder yeshiva*. We also have a *mikva*. The *yeshiva* and *kollel* give a very strong spiritual boost to the *yishuv*.

I heard that the yeshiva has chassidic studies.

Yes. I have dozens of volumes of *chassidus* at home. I buy the Rebbe's and Rebbe Rayatz's *s'farim* and learn them and give classes in them. I have a *chavrusa* for *Tanya* with Rabbi Zev Oppenheim from Emanuel. In the *yeshiva*, too, we have *chassidus* and *Tanya* classes. It is part of the *yeshiva* curriculum. The *chassidic* atmosphere adds a great deal to the spiritual atmosphere of the *yishuv*, and to the *yiras Shamayim* of the *bachurim*.

What is your connection to Chabad?

I was always drawn to *chassidus*. My father was a Ropshitzer *chassid*, and so I grew up in a *chassidic*

environment. I was raised in Kfar Avrohom and over the years was drawn to *chassidus*.

Many people wonder how you can live in these dangerous yishuvim right on the frontlines.

You have to realize that the battle here is not the usual one between two nations. It's a spiritual battle between the Jewish people and the nations of the world, and this is how we must view it. This is Eretz Yisroel, which belongs to us, and we live in a *yishuv* of Eretz Yisroel which we will never leave. If we strongly project the fact that we won't be frightened and we won't budge, then we will definitely win this difficult war.

I heard an interesting *vort* on the *pasuk*, "Ko'ach maasav higid l'amo" (He related the strength of His deeds to His people). On the first *pasuk* in Torah, Rashi explains that the *pasuk* comes to answer the claim the nations of the world will have, saying we are robbers for conquering the land of the seven nations. Why isn't this Rashi brought on the words of the *pasuk* he quotes, "ko'ach maasav higid l'amo?" The answer is that first we have to be fully cognizant that Hashem gave us this land, and then

things will work out with the *goyim*.

What do you have to say to those who set policy in Israel?

First of all they have to know they have the most important job in bringing salvation to the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel. Eretz Yisroel doesn't belong to us for rational reasons, otherwise we could just as well have taken Uganda as Hertzl suggested, and all our problems would be solved. Sharon has to know that a "deposit" was placed in their hands and they have to handle it according to Torah. The "deposit" is theirs only if they do what they have to do.

In connection with this, I want to mention what the Rebbe told Moshe Katzav ten years ago – that if they will give away land, then he would personally topple the government, as it says, "the man who is afraid and fainthearted should go home." Our leaders have to know good and well that whoever harmed Eretz Yisroel ended his public career in an unnatural manner. This happened to Begin, Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak. You can even say that those nations who harmed Eretz Yisroel were themselves severely harmed. Whoever harms Eretz Yisroel is putting his head in the lion's den.

What should be done now?

We are in a state of war. We have to formulate a clear strategy and implement it. Till this day, we still don't know precisely what we want, while the Arabs articulate exactly what they want. We have to get the Arabs out of here, because this is not a normal situation. This is a war and unfortunately I think we will wake up too late. I'm sorry to say, we don't have leadership or a strategy.

Sharon has begun talking about a Palestinian state.

We Jews invented this idea of a Palestinian state. The basic idea and the talk about it, came from us. After

the Six Day War, instead of sending the Arabs back to where they came from, to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, we let them stay here and added more! Now we're paying the price. I don't think we have to be ashamed to say this out loud. It's only if we are independent thinkers and don't try to build our ideas on what the media and the Left say, we will manage to be influential. It's the simplest idea of all – that the Arabs should go to their lands in "family reunification," while the Jewish people lives securely in its land.

I don't even ask anymore why the Jews didn't react during the Holocaust when the Germans sent them to the gas chambers. At that time, the Jews couldn't react. Today we have everything, and still we don't do a thing.

Why is it that the Left is not embarrassed to talk about dismantling *yishuvim* and transferring Jews from throughout Yesha, while the Right is ashamed to say the truth?! After Rabin's assassination, the religious sector decided to keep a low profile, and indulge in self-flagellation. This was a big mistake. A person must be humble and act with humility before everyone on the personal level, but on the national level we must go with our heads held high and state our views clearly. We

need to be proud of our Torah education, of our *kedusha* and *yiras Shamayim*, as it contrasts with the degenerate lives others lead.

You mentioned the period following Rabin's murder, when the nation went into a deep sleep. The impression is that they still haven't woken up, and exhaustion and fear seem to be undermining everything.

You're right. I spoke with many *rabbanim* and I asked them how *gedolei ha'dor* can be quiet and not express their views when such terrible things are taking place. This is *pikuach nefesh* for all of us. They should all see how the Lubavitcher Rebbe conducts himself, in a manner of "do not fear any person."

They make important gatherings about *chinuch* and *kashrus*, but what about the house? One of our *roshei yeshivos* was at a gathering like this and he said to the people there, "What are you discussing when the house is burning down?" Eretz Yisroel is burning! If, *ch'v*, there is "peace" with the *goyim*, five million Jews are in real danger. I'm not talking about intermarriage, which is tearing us asunder. Before the last war there was terrible assimilation. This war is actually slowing that down.

In your opinion, what do you think the *rabbanim* should do?

The *rabbanim* need to clearly proclaim that the government is making a *chilul Hashem* when it speaks to *goyim* about giving away parts of Eretz Yisroel. If the army doesn't operate properly, they will have to put up walls to protect the lives of Jews in Yesha and all over Eretz Yisroel. We have to shake the country up! If Sharon knew that when a Jew in this country is attacked, the entire country shakes, things would look different, but unfortunately this doesn't happen. The Arabs began throwing stones, then they moved on to knives, from

there to shooting, continuing with explosives, mortars, and suicide bombers, and now they're a regular army.

In light of what's going on today, I don't even ask anymore why the Jews didn't react during the Holocaust when the Germans sent them to the gas chambers. At that time, the Jews couldn't react. Today we have everything, and despite that, we don't do a thing. I know this is harsh but that is the way it is.

Do you think there's been a change lately?

There's been a change since Ze'evi's murder. That's a fact. The army took action in a way they never did before. They entered villages and suddenly began grabbing the murderers of Ilan Saadon and Avi Sasportus (may Hashem avenge their blood), the murderers of Hillel Lieberman and Reges and many others. This shows that although the army *can* take action, it hasn't until now, and the political sector is not really interested in capturing these murderers.

The change is definitely not enough. A fundamental change has to take place and sorry to say, it doesn't look like that is happening. We are continuing on the same course which brought us to where we are today.

A person must be humble and act with humility before everyone on the personal level, but on the national level we must go with our heads held high.

What should people do about this?

The first thing is to do *t'shuva* and to know that these are special times before Moshiach's coming. We definitely have to be aware of Moshiach's coming and do what it takes to bring him. You asked earlier whether there's a change among the people. The situation is very complicated: on the one hand you see very warm Jews. I picked up some soldiers and saw to what extent the heart of the Jewish people is warm to Torah and *mitzvos*, and how you just have to ignite the *neschama* for it to shine, or as it says in *chassidus*, to arouse the hidden *kochos*. There's no question that the situation has also led to a great change among the nation. The trials we are now

experiencing, are bringing us to a state of elevation. On the other hand, you see the behavior and the people who are setting the tone in the state and you can't help but sense that something is rotten inside. All of the political leadership has nothing to offer in any area whatsoever.

How are you handling things in your own *yishuv*?

There are great difficulties. We are surrounded by Arab villages which haven't been dealt with seriously by the army. We started this discussion with the miracle I experienced, but that was not the first miracle this *yishuv* has had. There was a fellow by the name of Eli Gursh, who, 36 hours after he received an armored vehicle from the organization for the development of Shomron in which he worked, had his vehicle booby-trapped with heavy explosives. If his vehicle hadn't been armored, who knows what would have happened?

We have another person living here, Gershon Horsov, who also had a bomb planted in his car, and miraculously he walked out with slight scratches. *Boruch Hashem* we've see many wonders and miracles. The *yishuv* is definitely handling the difficulties, and we are strengthened and strengthen each other, as it says, "one man to another will help, and to his brother will say *chazak*."