

HERE'S *my* STORY

TAKING UP THE REBBE'S TIME

RABBI SOLOMON TRAU

In the 1950s, when I was a young man, I befriended Rabbi Moses Rosen, who was the chief rabbi of Romania. Whenever he came to New York, he prayed in my *shul*, which was the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, and when we discovered that we both spoke French, it brought us together. We became good friends, our wives became friends, and it was a great friendship for friendship's sake, as the saying goes.

On one visit to the US, Rabbi Rosen said to me, "I'm going to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, would you mind coming along with me?" I said, "Mind? I'd love to!"

His appointment was for one o'clock in the morning, but nevertheless, when we arrived at the Lubavitch Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway, the street outside was crowded with people – dozens of *chasidim* were waiting there. When they saw Rabbi Rosen, they recognized him because he was famous – an Orthodox rabbi holding the position of chief rabbi in a Communist country was something very unusual – and they immediately made room for him.

Although we were early for our appointment, we were invited right in, and the Rebbe came out of his office and hugged Rabbi Rosen, whom he had known from before. Rabbi Rosen introduced me as a young rabbi from Belgium, a student of Rav Amiel, the spiritual leader of the *Shomre Hadas* Jewish Community of Antwerp. And the Rebbe started talking French to me, telling me that he had read Rav Amiel's books, and he mentioned the *Darchei Moshe* in particular. He also asked me specific



questions about the Jewish community in Antwerp, which he knew about very well.

When the Rebbe spoke with Rabbi Rosen, he also knew all the Romanian communities by name. Romania is a large country, with many towns with Jewish populations. I can't remember their names, but the Rebbe remembered everything. He not only knew the names of the communities, but also exactly how many Jews lived where. And he wanted to know more. He asked Rabbi Rosen if there was kosher food, if there were Jewish schools, whether the Jews wanted to leave Romania to go to Israel, or if they wanted to immigrate to America. He was very involved in this and interested in every aspect of Jewish life in Romania.

Now Rabbi Rosen had come to ask the Rebbe's advice concerning a particular problem. At the time, Romania

continued on reverse

MY ENCOUNTER
with the REBBE

An oral history project dedicated to documenting the life of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. The story is one of thousands recorded in the 800 videotaped interviews conducted to date. Please share your comments and suggestions. mystory@jemedias.org

had only one *shochet* – I remember his name was Rabbi Pinchas Wasserman. This man wanted to leave Romania to visit his children in Israel. But if he left, Rabbi Rosen said, there would be no kosher meat in all of Romania. Should he be permitted to go? Although the Communist government of Romania gave out such permissions, Rabbi Rosen had a great



Rabbi Moses Rosen

deal of influence with the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, so the matter of the permit was basically in his hands.

I remember the Rebbe's response. He said, "This is not a matter of *halacha*, Jewish law,

this is an issue of *mentshlichkeit*, human compassion. On the one hand, the man wants to see his children, and it is a very humane thing to let him. On the other hand, thousands of Jews will be left without kosher meat because he is the only *shochet* available."

Then the Rebbe thought for a moment and said, "My advice is to tell him that he can leave for six months to see his children, but under the condition that after six months he comes back."

Before we knew it, two-and-a-half hours had passed; it was almost three o'clock in the morning. Outside, dozens of *chasidim* were waiting, and they couldn't believe it. Usually when somebody went into the Rebbe's office, he stayed for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, but this was highly unusual.

Rabbi Rosen became concerned that maybe we had stayed too long, and he said, "Maybe I overstayed, I'm sorry for taking up so much of the Rebbe's time."

But the Rebbe responded, "Rabbi Rosen, you represent a large Jewish community of many Jews, and this is their time. If anything, I am taking up *their* time by keeping *you*."

Rabbi Solomon Trau was a member of many prominent Jewish organizations, including the RCA, American Israel Club, the Joint and the United Jewish Appeal. He was interviewed at his home in New York City in December, 2010.

In honor of our dear Rebbe

by Anonymous

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לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין
ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיו

This week in....

- > **5660—1900**, Rebbetzin Chana, daughter of Rabbi Meir Shlomo Yanovsky, chief rabbi of Nikolayev, married Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, son of Rabbi Baruch Schneur Schneerson, in Nikolaev, Ukraine. Their first son, the Rebbe, would be born to them two years later. *11 Sivan*
- > **5692—1932**, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka's younger sister, Rebbetzin Sheina, married Rabbi Mendel Horonstein in Landwarow, Poland. In his private journal, the Rebbe noted a number of the Rebbe Rayatz's practices at the wedding. *10 Sivan*
- > **5732—1972**, the Rebbe instructed that, as a thank you to children who had sent birthday wishes to him two months earlier, Chabad educational institutions in Israel give a special Siddur or a Tanya.¹ *11 Sivan*
- > **5734—1974**, in response to a tragic car accident in Kfar Chabad which killed four people, the Rebbe held a special *farbrengen* during which he encouraged everyone to increase their Torah study and performance of Mitzvos, and specifically, the Mezuzah Campaign.² *11 Sivan*

1. *Igros Kodesh Vol. 27, p. 21.* 2. *Sichos Kodesh 5734 Vol. 2, p. 177-184.*



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