



## THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

*Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita*

Time is a great gift, especially when Hashem grants you moments of sublime illumination. Allow me to share with you just such a moment I had the merit to share in.

In the summer of 1960, the Torah community of America witnessed one of the most spiritual events in recent history. Rumours had spread that a unique tzadik who had been held in a Communist jail for many years was about to be free and would be coming to the United States.

A feeling of shared excitement permeated the air as stories were told of this great man. We heard that he had chosen to stay in Romania after the war so that he could offer spiritual hope to the many trapped in that Communist territory. For years he fought a lone battle for Torah, being jailed at regular intervals. He adopted hundreds of Jewish orphans, teaching them and sharing with them every part of their lives. He married off many of them, treating them as his own children — all this under the noses of the hated tyrants who swore to stop him at every juncture. After much diplomatic manoeuvring, he was freed from prison on the condition that he leave Romania forthwith.

We had heard that throughout his time in prison, this tzadik was not allowed to have any seforim and that he had composed, in that place of agony, niggunim for every single passage of Tehillim.

It was this hero of the spirit who was now awaited with such anticipation.

He arrived in New York without a coat, carrying nothing but the enormous spirit that had withstood so much torment. That first motzei Shabbos a reception was held for him at the old Camp Agudah site in Ferndale. Thousands came to see this living saint, and all willingly packed themselves into the large yet inadequate building.

The place was hot, everyone was perspiring, yet no one moved. Suddenly, a gentle ripple made its way through the crowd. The silence was heavy with anticipation, and then through the door walked a tiny figure, white-bearded, stooped-shouldered, with eyes that sparkled. This was American Jewry's first sight of the Skulener Rebbe, ztz"l.

There are those special moments in every life that remain engraved

בס"ד



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in one's heart, bringing hope and brocha for the future. I had heard of heroes, seen great sages, but never had I experienced the electrified atmosphere that surrounded those Yidden who were waiting to greet a tzaddik for the first time. America likes its heroes tall and larger than life, yet here was this little wizened figure that seemed to percolate with love for every Jew.

He was soon sitting at the head table, and with a voice from another time he started to sing his beautiful songs. Every phrase was given new, heartfelt meaning; you could almost touch the words as he stretched them into an eternal line that reached the heavens. In his unique, high-pitched voice that was still vibrant, the tearfulness mixed with the joy. These were songs created by a huge heart, one textured with love for humanity.

Then this special tzaddik told us these amazing words of Torah:

“Each year Parshas Masei, which describes the journeys of Israel in the desert, is read during the Three Weeks, the mourning period between the seventeenth of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av. This teaches us that just as all the trouble and bother that our forefathers endured during their travels in the desert had a purpose — to bring them to the Promised Land — all our wanderings in exile have a purpose: they are meant to purify us and ready us for the final redemption, may it come soon.”

We stood in awe as the words, so soft and gentle, flowed from his holy mouth with genuine love. He trembled at the thought of the pain Yidden had to bear and wanted them to know how much it meant to a loving Eibishter. He who had gone through so much, said — no, cried — that we would see light and redemption.

Many years have passed since that hot Motzei Shabbos in Ferndale. I am certain there are those who still remember that night, and took the Rebbe's message to heart. I was blessed to be in that throng of neshomahs, I was young, still in my teens, but the sweet voice caressed my neshoma with a light that still gives me strength.

The Three Weeks are a time for inner reflections. Our people still await our total Redemption but just as that holy Yied whispered to our hungry hearts all those years ago, these times are but steps on our way to salvation, take them with a melody in your heart.

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