

Bernat Sauber



I am the one on the left, and next to me that's my younger cousin Jozsef Nemes. The photo was taken in Szekelyhid in 1934 or 1935, when we were still attending the yeshivah there. My father wanted me to become religious and to be able to carry out the tasks, if not the rabbi's, at least related to the synagogue. I spent the first one and a half year at the yeshivah in Magyarlapos, but then my father didn't want me to be there anymore, because he knew that if I remain in Magyarlapos, it wouldn't work out. And the yeshiva in Szekelyhid [Sacueni, in today's Romania] was the most distinguished one in Romania, and all the great rabbis finished that yeshivah, and it was my father's obsession. My father sent me to Szekelyhid, together with my younger cousin Jaszi Nemes. I was around 14 when I got there. It was quite costly to be there, we had a regular canteen there, and we stayed in a sector until a very rich American Jew came and built a beautiful, storied boarding house, and we moved in there. I was there for two and a half years. Dr. Rosner was the rabbi there, he was one of the most erudite rabbis in the country. In Vienna there was a Hebrew university and he took his doctorate there. The system was the same as in Magyarlapos, the rabbi explained. There you could see which class people were coming from. The rich Jewish boys had a separate canteen, they ate goose meat, cracklings and goose liver there, anything was prepared especially for them. We, the middle-class and the poor, got around one kg of bread that we had to portion. Breakfast consisted of white coffee, the lunch was consistent, and we had supper, too. Everything was kosher, of course. I met there some very religious Jewish boys. I was religious, too, but I didn't have a long payes, just short ones, and I used to put them behind my ear. In the yeshivah from Szekelyhid we didn't take up the weekly pericope anymore, we were beyond that. Instead, we studied the Talmud. The rabbi had some quite large, very thick books he used to teach from. He extracted something from them, for instance the Gitn [the tract of Talmud by Gitn], the divorce. What were the rules in order for a Jew to be separated from his wife? There was no such thing that a woman divorced her husband, only the husband could divorce his wife. There were around 250-300 pages on this issue. And it had 2 or 3 interpretations. This wasn't working as simple as one took it and read it, and gave a simple explanation. Instead, one had to provide an explanation for each section, which wasn't in the text, it had to be said based on a deduction. The rabbi gave a lecture on these issues, but we didn't take notes, we only paid attention to what he

was saying. The interesting thing was that these comments were not written down, these were just coming by themselves. I'm not saying that those who finished yeshivah knew everything word for word, but they knew the essence of all the comments. We learned together. We stayed in something like a campus. The wealthier Jewish boys rented rooms, in these rooms there were 4 or 5 beds, and they slept there. There were such students, 5-6 years older than me, who also attended the yeshivah, these were the bocherim, bocher means in fact young man. They were called hazr-bocherim. Hazr means repetition, so they were the repeater bocherim. The bocher already finished yeshiva, some 4, 5 or 6 years, and they were able to teach almost at the rabbi's level. We had one older bocher beside, they helped us rehearsing. In the morning we went to pray. If the rabbi gave a lecture, we listened to it, after that we went home and until noon, 1 or 2pm, the four of us, five with the bocher, we rehearsed one step at a time everything, because we had to learn everything that was said at the lecture, since each weekend, on Friday, the rabbi examined us. In fact the examinations began already on Thursday afternoon and lasted until Friday noon. Everybody had to be there for the examination, and each time we got grades. There was the small alef, that is the a for satisfactory, the middle alef for good and the big alef for very good. There were only these three grades. There was a register with all the students registered in it, written in Hebrew, and the rabbi recorded there your grades. This is how the teaching took place back then. There was no such thing that someone had no satisfactory knowledge. It wasn't possible because only talented and clever people were admitted there. Otherwise it would have been impossible to understand those things, even if they would talk about a verse for 5 days. Only those boys went there, who were in the first place children of religious parents, and furthermore, if they were smart enough. For those who were unable, it was just an unnecessary trip, since after 2-3 weeks they were advised to leave and learn a profession. I got to this yeshivah in mid 1933 and studied there for 2 and a half years. It had 250 trainees, and this was quite a large number.