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'The rabbi was not a *darpok*'

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The Holtzbergs made it their mission to know India and get the hang of living in the country, Sandra says. They wanted to become local.

"Rivki would come with me to the fish market. With her fingers pinching her nose shut, she would ask in Hindi 'How much for the fish? Not 1,000. 400!' They both knew Hindi. They travelled all over India and helped set up Chabad houses in Bangalore

and Goa. In Mumbai they would often visit the malls in Goregaon (*north-west Mumbai*), which they liked."

By the time Moshe was born to the couple in 2006, the Chabad House in the back streets of Colaba Bazaar was busier than a tourist hostel. Though run by the orthodox Jewish community, Chabad Houses are places that any homesick Jew, religious or not, comes to for a meal or for prayers or to celebrate a festival in a home away from home or even just because he or she is lonely.

The Colaba location, and the building with its multiple floors, suited the Holtzbergs well because it facilitated the arrival of Jews travelling in India, be they backpackers staying in the nearby cheap hotels or businessmen from the neighbouring five star hotels.

"In a month, on an average anywhere from 200 to 400 people would come over," recalls Sandra. "Having 25 people for dinner every night was not uncommon, and Fridays (*the Jewish Sabbath*) it would go up to 45 or 50. The vegetable man from the local bazaar would come by at least 20 times in a day! So too the provision shop fellow bringing water and soft drinks, The guests were from all over, Russia, USA, Israel, everywhere businessmen, tourists. Businessmen would often bring their Indian friends. People loved coming there. Dinner was always at eight."

Never did the Holtzbergs feel unsafe in India. "They on no account ever thought India or Mumbai was dangerous. They were around when the bomb explosions took place at the Gateway of India/Zaveri Bazaar and in the trains. But the rabbi never worried. Once there was some *ladai* (*fight*) in the *galli* (*lane*) between Shiv Sainiks and the Congress, and the rabbi was watching from his gate. I told him to go in. But he said I am within my gate, nothing will happen. The rabbi was not a *darpok* (*coward*). We never had even a *shak* (*slightest inkling*) that something like this could ever happen," she recalls sorrowfully, her words trailing off into pained silence as she contemplates the cataclysmic events of November 26, 2008.

Image: Little Moshe Holtzberg with his maternal grandfather Shimon Rosenberg in a recent picture.

Photographs: Courtesy, the Rosenberg family

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