

Moisey Sivashinsky



This is my maternal grandfather, Moisey Vulfovich Sivashinsky; he is 20 years old here.

The photo was taken at the end of the 1890s in Saint-Petersburg; it is winter and he is dressed warmly in a coat with an astrakhan collar and a similar hat. His moustache and beard have just begun to grow.

Grandfather Moisey, as well as grandmother Khana, came from a religious Jewish family. The Sivashinsky family came from the kohens. Kohens have the highest level of sanctity, since their

assignment is to serve at the temple and to perform sacred work.

Any service at the synagogue compulsorily includes a kohen: for instance, if ten Jews gathered, they had the right to start the prayer, but there should be a kohen among them.

Yiddish was the mother tongue of grandparents Khana and Moisey; they also spoke Russian rather well and correctly, but preserved Jewish 'singing' intonations in their speech.

They kept kosher and observed all fasts; celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays; prayed a lot and attended the synagogue often. Grandfather Moisey was a rather important figure in the Jewish community of Leningrad.

He was a shochet and a mohel. As a shochet he was acknowledged by the synagogue and had the right to ritually slaughter the cattle.

As a mohel, he obtained the right from the Jewish religious community to perform the ceremony of circumcision for boys on the eight day after their birth.

Grandfather did it very professionally in sterile sanitary conditions. His daughter-in-law, the wife of his son Vulf, was a pharmacist; she brought him bandages and other necessary sterile accessories.

The performance of this ceremony was of ritual character and required certain courage on Grandfather Moisey's side, as the Soviet Power didn't only unwelcome, but also persecuted the ministers of religious cults [during the struggle against religion].

He was ranked among such people, that is why he was 'deprived', he was disfranchised and deprived of other rights. I remember old Jews often came to visit Grandfather Moisey.

They spoke quietly about something, discussed something and prayed together. His opinion was highly evaluated. Visiting my friends once when I was already an adult, I mentioned by incident my mother's maiden name.

Guests of venerable age exclaimed, 'Oh! So you are Mshaisik Sivashinsky's granddaughter?' It pleased me very much to see that grandfather was well-known and remembered.