

Efim And Tseita Tseitlin



This photo was taken in 1930 in Saratov. Sitting first to the left in the first row is my father, Efim Tseitlin, next to him is my mother, Tseita Tseitlin. The rest of the people in this photo are unknown to me.

I have some vivid memories from childhood about the time I spent together with my father. Father frequently took me to the synagogue, or I just ran up to the second floor, where it was. Public worship is frequently interrupted by blessings. Everyone who bears the surname Kogan, steps forward, to where the Torah is, in a special big cabinet, the tabernacle. They turn to all of us, who are not Kogans, and bless us, even the Kogans, who had just reached the age of 13, that is, had just had their bar mitzvah. All the others stand, with their eyes closed or looking downwards, and the Kogans fold their arms like this: hold their arms above our heads, including the thirteen-year-old boys, they look at us, and we have no right to look at them. So they are holding their arms like this and reading the prayer of blessing. And even the 90-95-year-old men are standing with their heads bowed.

My father was a gabbai – a representative. The word gabbaim means the administration of a synagogue. My father and grandfather were elected to it. We occupied honorary seats in the synagogue, in the first row. All seats were bought out. Father had chosen a seat next to a window for himself, it was permanently his. The chair had a seat that could be lifted up, and it was possible to keep the tallit there. It could be locked, too.

There was one funny incident. Once I am sitting on Father's chair, he's standing nearby, and an old man – our neighbor Levit, a god-fearing old man, of whom I was very afraid because he was so strict – slapped me on the knee and said, 'So, do you know, how they bless us?' – it was right after the Kogans had blessed us. I said, 'How? – Like this.' – and I bent my head and closed my eyes. 'But did you know, that if you look at them first, you will go blind? And if you look up a second time, you will die.' I was really scared to death, and blinked at him. And he waited a little bit and said,

‘Shame on you, little boy, you didn’t even hear or understand what I said.’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ He answered, ‘How can you possibly look a second time if you go blind after the first? My grandson guessed it, but you are not so bright.’ I took great offence at him.