

Moses Tsvey



This is Moses Tsvey, paternal grandfather of I, Alexander Tsvey. The picture was made in Vitebsk in 1900. Father's brother Solomon Tsvey gave me that picture after grandfather died in 1966.

My paternal great grandfather Moses Tsvey lived in the town Sebezh, Pskov oblast not far from Latvian border [about 500 km to the west from Moscow]. I do not know when and where he was born. Moses was a jeweler, making bronze and copper ware. He also worked as a watch mender. He was an educated and well-read man, which was a rarity among Jewish craftsmen. Moses was a peculiar man. He was a vegetarian, which was not common with Jews. His family did not stick to vegetarianism and great grandfather let everybody choose their own way. Besides, great grandfather was a free thinker criticizing certain dogmas of Judaic religion. He did not recognize some of the rites. I do not know what exactly he disapproved of, but I know that he did not cover his head and smoked on Sabbath to boot. They wanted to excommunicate him from the synagogue for that. Back in that time it was a rigid punishment. They took into account his literacy and his large family and he was not excommunicated, fortunately. Great grandfather remained living the way he was used to.

I was interested in the origin of the last name Tsvey ['zwei' means 'two' in Yiddish]. I asked grandfather about it. Then, I had an idea that it was a distorted version of the ancient Jewish name Tsvi. Name or a surname Tsvi is widely spread in Israel. I think the clerk misheard the name and put Tsvey instead of Tsvi.

My paternal grandfather Moishe Tsvey and grandmother Basya-Riva Tsvey (nee Mostova) lived in the town of Volyntsy [800 km to the west from Moscow] Gomel oblast, Belorussia. Grandmother was a stately and beautiful woman. My grandfather fell in love with her and wooed her. There is a

family legend - grandmother told grandpa: "Prove that you love me!" and he took off valenki [warm Russian felt boots] in wintertime and had been running around on the snow until grandmother agreed to marry him. Of course, grandmother was the boss in the family.

My father was the first-born. Grandmother gave birth to him in 1902. I know only his Russian name [Common name] Yuri. He must have had a Jewish name, but I did not know it. Mother had escaped to talk about father. He was a grey-eyed, tall and good-looking man. He played mandolin very well. The Tsvey family was musical on the whole. Unfortunately there is little I know my father's siblings. Now the family is gone, and there is nobody I can ask questions. I remember father's brothers Abram, Israel, Solomon, Efim and sister Sofia.

The family Tsvey was well-off. They dealt with leather - beginning from the tannery, making leatherwear and selling it. Grandfather had his own store. Children also were involved in work. They bought skin of the animals and tanned it. Being the eldest my father did most of the work. He tanned the skin manually by using hazardous chemical agents, staying by the tub with the solution for tanning. He must have undermined his health during work and was afflicted with tuberculosis, which caused his death, also during his work. After revolution as of 1917 authorities took production from grandfather and the family was bereft of the source of income.

In late 1920s father's parents and brothers moved to Leningrad with families. Grandmother died in 1940. She was buried in Leningrad Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish rite. Grandfather got married for the second time. She was also a Jew. Grandfather remained religious till death. It is difficult for me to judge his religiousness, but I know that he strictly observed Jewish traditions, observed kashrut. Grandfather died in 1966 in Leningrad having survived the siege. He was buried next to grandmother in accordance with the Jewish rite, the way he wished.