

Samuel Eiferman In The Braila Synagogue



This photo was taken at the Synagogue on Yom Kippur, in 1998. Behind me, to the right, is Mr. Lazar Horenstein, a history and geography teacher who died in 2002. Beside him is Mr. Profeta from Bucharest, who is the cousin of journalist Profeta. Two rows behind, you can partially see Mr. Magder. He died in 2006.

I go to the Jewish Community on every holiday; on certain occasions I even go there twice a day. Men sit in the right half and women sit in the left half. There are very few of us left - only 14 of us still attend the services. The youngest Jew is 60 years old. There are only three men in Braila who are older than I am: Bernstein, 81, [Max] Wolf, 84, and [Silo] Oberman, 86. [Ed. note: Centropa also made interviews with Mr. Max Wolf and Mr. Silo Oberman.] When none of them shows up, I'm the oldest man in the synagogue.

My wife goes to the synagogue too, but only on major holidays, 3-4 times a year. Women don't attend the regular service. Prayers are read in Romanian because most of us can't speak Hebrew. In fact, Bernstein and Mr. Luthmar are the only ones who can. I can speak Yiddish though. Bernstein and I are the only ones in Braila who can speak Yiddish well. The rest can barely understand it because they grew up in the Kingdom, where Yiddish wasn't that widespread. Their fathers may have spoken it, but the Jews of my generation didn't learn it.

For a long time I didn't care too much about keeping the Jewish traditions. It was only after the Revolution that I began to pay attention to them. Holidays are a nice thing, after all. We have the Passover, then Rosh Hashanah in October, then Chanukkah. I wasn't familiar with the customs; all I could do was remember my days as a child and have my wife cook the same things as my mother used to: meatballs with noodles, beans with noodles, dumplings, meatballs with mashed potatoes...

On Pesach we buy matzah from the Jewish Community and we cook traditional dishes. They're not too particular - you need to have chicken or beef, soup, stake, "meatballs" made of potatoes with eggs and matzah flour. There are fasting periods when you're not allowed to eat certain foods. But I can't observe the fast because I'm on medication. We still get aids from the Community: 8 parcels per year.

I often go to the Jewish Community in Braila. We have a local club where we gather with our spouses, many of whom aren't Jewish. There's also a women's club where members reminisce about the old days. Unfortunately, there are so few of us left.