

Nikodem Krasucki



This is my favourite grandfather Nikodem Krasucki, my mother's father.

This photo was taken in Warsaw; it must have been taken at the end of the 1930s.

My mother's father, Grandpa was a rather short, very handsome man with a small beard.

He had studied law but never graduated: he probably went to university in Poznan for a while.

He was fluent in Polish, Yiddish and Russian, as he was born in Russia; he had an excellent command of German and some knowledge of French, as well as Hebrew, as he had naturally received, as was traditional in that family, a sound religious education.

He was able to read books in Hebrew without difficulty.

Among the newspapers that could be found in his home - and I used to browse through them, especially when there were many sporting events on - were:

Gazeta Polska and Nasz Przegląd - an excellent, splendid newspaper, perhaps the best Polish Jewish paper of the time.

Next, he bought some newspaper written in Yiddish, which, I believe, was a Bund paper.

That reflected Grandpa's philosophy that one should listen to different opinions.

Grandpa had a huge library, filled with religious and secular works.

He didn't belong to any political party, but held centrist views; he considered Pilsudski - to be the man in Poland in whom the Jews should put their hopes.

In terms of myself, Grandpa Krasucki had a very strong influence on the formation of my views; I loved him very much and he was very good with me.

Grandma was warm-hearted and good, but she wasn't a figure of authority in my eyes, whereas Grandpa represented the genuine intellectual authority for me.

In my family, it was my grandpa who provided, in various ways, my link to the Jewish religion, and more precisely to its customs.

He considered religious issues, Talmudic aspects, less important, but believed that the Jewish religion consisted of a set of customs that every Jew should respect and observe.

Grandpa used to tell me frequently that the most important thing was to believe in and act in accordance with God's commandments and to respect Jewish tradition because it represents the customs of our people that unite and distinguish it.

On the other hand, he didn't attach much significance to what I might call religious zeal or exactitude, even though on occasion I did see Grandpa praying dressed in a tallit.

I also recall that he used to go to the synagogue, though I'm not sure if he did that every Friday.

And it was Grandpa who had bought that engrossing book on the history of the Jews, in which I read with bated breath about Moses, the walls of Jericho, all the kings, etc.

I remember, too, that it was Grandpa Krasucki who took me to a religious service on the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur].

The shul we went to served a section of the city, which didn't have many Jewish inhabitants.

The prayer house stood in the courtyard of one of the houses on Mokotowska Street, on the odd-number side; it seems that the tenement belonged to the Erbsztajns, a well-known Jewish family.

I felt very proud to be there with my grandpa, for he knew many of those present and many people knew him; as Grandpa was greeting everybody, I found it fascinating: here was some distinguished

professor from Warsaw University, there an owner of twelve tenements, next was some guy about whom the newspapers had written that he had committed some huge fraud but he wouldn't let them lock him up.

That was the richness of prewar life. As thinking, sensitive child, I took the Day of Atonement seriously, of course; I knew that it was a day for self-reflection and examination of my relationship to God.

The purpose of the Day of Atonement is to recognize one's own faults.