

Mera Schulman Among Her Students (Hebrew Lessons)



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in the apartment of Valery Ladyzhensky, a Hebrew teacher in 1990. It was taken by one of the students. In my life it belongs to the period of reviving Hebrew.

My life greatly altered after 1990. It happened the following way. In 1990 all our family went to Riga to celebrate the 60th anniversary of my sister. One of the guests told everybody about her Hebrew studies. She demonstrated her achievements, naming everything on the table in Hebrew. At first she named bread and butter, but when she came to sausage, I got greatly excited: she made a mistake and I (being not conscious of it) corrected her loudly. Here it is necessary to take into account that for 50 years I not only did not speak Hebrew, I even tried to forget it. When we came back to Leningrad, I met my friend from Electrosila Factory and asked her where it was possible to find Jews in Leningrad. She advised me to go to the Synagogue. I had no idea where the Synagogue was situated, but I managed to find it. There an announcements arrested my attention. It notified about organization of the Leningrad Society for Jewish Culture (LSJC) [the Leningrad Society for Jewish Culture was founded by Jewish activists. It was officialy registered in 1989].

I went to the LSJC and got exactly to Hebrew lesson. I addressed the teacher on Hebrew (I started recollecting it with difficulty) and asked his permission to be present at his lesson. I did not like the level of studies at all. I realized that I wanted to teach and not to study and addressed the cooperative society Development. I have got to know that in the city there was only one expert in this sphere - Valery Izievich Ladyzhensky. My first difficult test was to understand time and place of our meeting, which he dictated me in Hebrew. But I managed and we met. Valery gave lessons at home. There were a lot of persons interested, because it was a period of great aliyah. [Aliyah means going up (Hebrew). In Hebrew they say 'to go up to Israel' and not 'to come to Israel'. That is why to make aliyah means to repatriate to Israel. Great aliyah - great number of repatriates]. Groups of 10 students each, alternated each hour. Valery delivered a part of his groups over to me. And already a month later I started giving lessons to groups at home. My students were interesting people; it was a pleasure for me to teach them. Soon I finished Hebrew advanced course under

Ladyzhensky leadership. I am very grateful to Valery Izevich. He left for Israel long ago, but we are still in touch. We are friends and correspond until now. I visited him in Israel.

A year later I went to Ulpan Halom [Halom is a Hebrew school for children and adults, it works in Petersburg since 1992] and offered them my services of a teacher. I got a job there. It happened in August 1991, and I work there up to the present day. During these years I had time to work both at the Jewish University [Petersburg Jewish University was founded in 1989 and it was the first institution for Judaica studies in the former USSR], at Migdal Or School [Petersburg Jewish gymnasium Migdal Or exists since 1991. There are 180 pupils at two departments (for boys and for girls). Most graduates continue their studies in different Jewish educational institutions abroad, mainly in Israel] and at Lamed Sunday School [Lamed Sunday school was founded at the Petersburg Jewish University in 1992 for people interested in Judaica. About 50 students visit the school free of charge].

During last four years besides Hebrew I taught Yiddish at the Jewish Community Center. It seems to me that it is my teaching activity in the sphere of Jewish education that has filled my life with real sense. It is a pity, certainly, that it happened when I was already more than at mature age; and it is unthinkable that it could never happen. Just imagine! The language, which I tried to forget all my life, to suppress it in itself, has become my permit to the new interesting world.