

## Kofman Raikhchin At The Sephardi Center



This photograph was taken in 2003 and you can see a Sephardi rabbi of St. Petersburg congratulating me on the occasion of my 79-th anniversary. Here I'll tell you how we got acquainted.

To tell the truth, when I became a pensioner I was bored for lack of an occupation. And I had a friend, a Jew. In contrast to me, he knew much about the Jewish life of our city: he visited Hesed Avraham Welfare Center and the synagogue. He spent his free time working at the Nadezhda factory: a small factory at Hesed Center producing wheelchairs, crutches, canes and other things useful for elderly and disabled people. Understanding my low spirits, my friend brought me to that factory. I liked to be there and started working as a designer. I received no money for my work: we all were volunteers. I worked there about 7 years. I made business trips. It was interesting for me, because I made myself useful. But later everything changed there: they started doing business and I did not like it. They started paying workers, while when I came there for the first time, there worked only volunteers. It seemed to me, that after that something very important disappeared, the spirit of workers group changed and I did not want to work there any more.

As soon as I began working at the Nadezhda factory, I identified myself as a Jew. You understand of course that I am joking now: I never forgot about it, but before I knew nothing about the Jewish community of the city. In Hesed I got to know that at the synagogue there was a group for studying basis of Judaism. I went there and found it good. I have been studying there already for several years. We begin at 9 o'clock in the morning with a pray (chief rabbi is at the head of it). I like listening to rabbi singing, I like his pretty voice. Listening to him, I always recollect my father

praying. After praying there come teachers from yeshvah. They tell us about the week's Torah portion, Jewish holidays, and history of our people. We study in homelike atmosphere: people argue, ask questions. Most of the group members are pensioners.

And earlier I visited synagogue very seldom, even not every year. We did not celebrate Jewish holidays, did not observe Tradition. But since 1980 we celebrate Seder at home. Our family is not large (we have no relatives), but we invite our friends and in total we gather about 20 persons. Natalia Alexandrovna prepares snacks, and I am responsible for spiritual part. We do not observe kashrut strictly, but we never eat neither pork, nor sausage.

About 8 years ago together with my friend Rem Altshuller we decided to found an organization devoted to memory of Holocaust victims and history of Jewish heroism. That was the opportunity for my son to render us invaluable assistance: he found for us interesting information in different libraries, spent many hours searching in the Internet. At first we wanted to organize our work at Hesed, but its director said no. Please don't ask me why: I do not understand it. Sephardi organization lodged us. Their rabbi Rabaev put a room at our disposal. There functions an exhibition and a library. Pupils of Jewish schools, Jewish businessmen often visit us, and they like our exhibition.