

Joiseph Muchnik With Sons, Duvid And Leibl



My paternal grandfather, Joiseph Muchnik (first from the left), with my father, Duvid Muchnik (first from the right), and his younger brother, Leibl Muchnik (in the center). This photo was taken in Orhei some time in the 1930s.

My paternal grandfather, born in Orhei in the 1850s, was rather wealthy. He owned a big leather/shoe store: it sold shoes and leather, glue and components for shoemaking. His clients were shoemakers of Orhei and they often visited my grandfather at home. My grandfather and my father treated them with scorn: the shoemakers' guild was at the very bottom of the town's hierarchy. My paternal grandmother died long before I was born. I can't even remember her name. My grandfather remarried. His second wife Udl boasted of her distant relation to the very Baal-Shem-Tov. She was 20 years younger than my grandfather and agreed to marry him for his wealth. They didn't have children together. She and Joiseph were very religious. They were real Hasidim. When my grandfather grew old and blind, and could work in his store no longer, Udl left him and moved to America, where her daughters lived. My grandfather lived to the end of his life in solitude, getting warm by our hearth. He died in 1935.

My father's younger brother Leibl, born in the 1890s, also owned a store. His first wife died and he had to raise their son Haim. His second wife Rosa was quarrelsome and irritable. She didn't accept the boy and he had to live with other people. Rosa and Leibl had two sons: Yakov and Shura. He was a failure both in his family and in his work life and all he thought was left for him was to put an end to his life. Leibl was found hanging in the shed by his house. This happened in the late 1930s. Rosa, who was much affected by this, didn't even live two years after his death.

My father, the oldest in the family, was born in the early 1880s. I don't know whether my father had any education besides cheder. All I know is that he was a rather literate man. He could read and write Yiddish and Romanian. He must have also known Russian. He loved Pushkin, but we didn't speak Russian in our family before the Soviet rule was established. My father, being the oldest son, was helping my grandfather Joieph in the store before the Soviet rule was established. My father was raised in a religious Hasidic family, but he never became a Hasid. My father was very religious, but he observed religious beliefs other than Hasidic ones. It's hard to say to what religious trend my father belonged to. All I remember is that he often argued with my grandfather about religious issues. My parents' marriage was prearranged, as was quite common in Jewish families.