

Benjamin Zylberberg With Jewish Combatants



This picture was taken in Warsaw in the 1980s. It was a funeral ceremony of an unknown TSKZ [Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews] member. In the foreground from left to right are standing Aleksander Zajdman, me and Prajs (members of TSKZ).

Although I'm not religious, I have always felt Jewish. As soon as I came back to Poland in 1944, in Lublin, I registered with the Central Committee of Polish Jews. In the 1970s I started getting involved in the TSKZ. I helped to organize the Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims of World War II. Later on, in the 1990s, I worked in the editorial office of 'Dos Yidishe Vort.' I'm still in touch with the editorial board, as a translator and proofreader. When I worked at 'Dos Yidishe Vort,' when I wrote in Yiddish I signed myself 'Beniamin Zylberberg.' Although my official name is Boleslaw Janowski, my roots are Jewish, after all, and Zylberberg is my parents' name.

My attitude to the state of Israel has changed over the years. As a young boy I was influenced by my brother Wigde, a Bundist, and like him I believed that Jews should stay where they were born and their fight for autonomy. But after the Holocaust I started looking differently at it, and when in 1948 the state of Israel was established, I was delighted.

When in 1966 I visited Israel, I resolved to meet my old friends from Krasnik. Many of them live in the Tel Aviv area, and in Tel Aviv itself there's even a synagogue known as Krasnik, because my countrymen pray there. When I visited them the holiday of Simkhat Torah was approaching, and my friends persuaded me to go to the synagogue with them, although they knew that I'm not religious. And when we were there they asked me to dance with the Torah. I tried to resist, but they said, 'This is such a rare opportunity for you - dance!' And I agreed. I danced in the synagogue with a tiny copy of the Torah that the Jews who survived had smuggled out of my hometown.