

Leon Solowiejczyk



This is me at the Jewish community in Lodz. The photo was taken in 2003 or 2004 but I don't remember who took it. I am in touch with the Jewish community in Lodz nowadays. I go for prayers, if my health allows me to, of course. I started going there after I retired. There used to be communities before that, I used to go there for holidays, but I didn't like the atmosphere that was there. But after my wife died, the situation changed. I didn't know what to do with myself. I was all alone. At first I would go to visit my brother, then come back. My brother lives in Vilnius. And so, slowly, I got used to it. And everything started reminding me of my childhood home. It was a traditional, Jewish family. And I like this Symcha [Symcha Keller, the leader of the Jewish Religious Community in Lodz], because he's such a kind person and always tries to hold everything together. I've gotten used to it and I feel well there. It's my life now. I can tell you one thing about my attitude to religion. I never used to be particularly pious, but I believe in tradition. Not just in Jewish tradition. I respect all kinds of traditions in the world. When I was in the Russian Army I used to

meet the Tatars, the Kalmyks and the Kazakhs, these different nationalities. And the Polish religion, or the Eastern Orthodox one, I accepted all these traditions and I was interested in them. I always respected them. And I always lived well with people. So I was never really religious, but if my grandparents did it and my parents did it, then why should I keep on doing it. Well, I know about it more or less. I sometimes used to call it 'stories, fairy tales.' I was interested in that. And people don't know anything about it, about the Bible and there are such wise things there. Well, I don't really celebrate the holidays nowadays. If someone comes over to visit, then yes. I go there for Easter, bring some matzah, but we don't go through all the rituals, because it's a tough religion. For someone who had never come in contact with it, it would be something unthinkable to have three sets of pots in the kitchen. Knives, forks. And you can't eat butter in the same dish you use for meat. And then there are these 'parewe' [parve] dishes, these neutral ones. My wife is a Catholic, but she's not too religious. I don't mind it. Well, she sets up Christmas trees for Christmas. She has granddaughters, they invited us for Christmas Eve. Why should I not go? I've come in contact with many religions, not just Catholics. So I feel well here, I can say. And, well, if you've managed to live such a long life, then you should really thank God.