



MAINTAINING OUR JEWISH HISTORY

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Alexandra and Nicoleta are staying in the same room. It is 7:30 AM and the CD player bursts into life, flooding the building with music. The two 14-old girls jump out of bed. Still squinting, they advance to the lobby and start dancing on the tunes of "Kol Nedarai". The first steps are a little clumsy, the yawning is frequent, the eyelids not fully open yet. But Alexandra and Nicoleta are not alone. They are quickly joined by Etti and Ely from Brăila and the guys, Bobby and Marc from Cluj Napoca. Many others are to follow. These teenagers have learned to wake up on the rhythms of melodies discovered with fascination, only a few years ago. Through each song, they have found the beauty of a culture, of a history, of a civilization...

The Judaism and Jewish History Seminar from Cristian (Romania), organized between 15 and 28 August, now in its seventh year, brings together members of Jewish communities from all over the country. By this time, it has reached a new generation of young people, willing to carry

on the Jewish life and its traditions in this country. Ten years ago, nobody could believe such a thing would be possible anymore. Back then, the two main options for youngsters were aliyah or the assimilation. Today, all they want is to be active here, in Romania. This unexpected change was brought by FEDROM's Youth Department, coordinated by Sandra Segal. However, nothing would have been possible without the JDC and its donors who believe that these young people deserve a chance.

Marc Doptess, a 16-year old boy from Cluj-Napoca, displays a bandana on his head. He plays handball, loves motorcycles and hip-hop music. I can feel shivers when he confesses to me that "it was during the last Shabat at the camp when I think I discovered a special connection with the Divinity. From now on, I will go to the synagogue on each Shabat". Among the seminar's guests there are four youngsters from the Republic of Moldova. Victor Brodsky is in charge with social assistance for those in need, at the Jewish Community Association in Chișinău. This is his fourth year here. "I don't exactly know how to explain it, but there's a

family spirit here. Maybe it's due to the fact that this villa belongs, by tradition, to the community. I started to feel like home in this place," he tells us with real emotion. Same with Irina, also from Chișinău, who found out there was a free place in the camp just a day before the seminar. In three hours, she managed to get ready, pack her bags and board a train that would get her to Brașov 15 hours later.

Each of the children at this seminar has his or her own special history. Only a few of them come from families who keep the Jewish tradition alive. In a way, the sons and

daughters have become, after the experience provided by the Youth Department, teachers to their own parents.

This year's topic is „Judaism and the 20th Century”, a more than generous subject that includes anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the rebirth of Israel as a state, obviously without covering, in a mere two-week period, all the issues. What it sets to accomplish is to offer the young people certain thinking paths. They get a chance to understand what it means, both for them and for those around them, "to be Jewish".

