

Yasef Romano

YASEF ROMANO

ISTANBUL

TURKEY

INTERVIEWER: ALBERTO MODIANO

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I had the opportunity to interview Yasef Romano thanks to his daughter Ines. I became acquainted with Ines through her job in Matan Baseter [1](#) Barinyurt. When the subject of Ines' father being from Edirne came up, I offered to interview him. Yasef Romano spends 4 - 4.5 days of his week in Edirne due to his work. He comes to Istanbul to be with his family on Fridays. He spends the Sabbath and the weekend with his family. When he comes to Istanbul, he stays in the flat no. 15 in Hayriye apartment, no. 17, in Gayrettepe Girne Sokagi (street). His wife stays here during the week too. They spend their summer vacations in the bay of Saroz as a family. He is a very active person, having been president of the Rotary and head of the Edirne Jewish community. While we were doing the interview, he suddenly had to have surgery due to an ailment he suffered. When we resumed the interview approximately three weeks later, his health was as good as it had been in the past. He has not neglected to instill the values and traditions he has inherited from his father and his religiosity into his daughters. Yasef Romano is a kind, optimistic person who is full of love. The interview with him was spread over a period of three months because of his health problems and his vacation. We met him three times for the interview.



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Family background

Our roots on my father's side are from Rome, Italy. We found this out from the registrations in the Diaspora Museum in Israel. We thought we had Spanish roots. We did not have the opportunity to talk with my father's father or mother about how we came to Edirne. That is why I don't have much information, I don't remember at all. Our father did not talk much, either.

My paternal grandfather, Yasef Romano, was born in Edirne, my grandmother, Ida Romano was also born in Edirne, I do not remember the birth or death dates for my father's father. My father's

mother's maiden name was Dudu. I know that my grandfather was a tailor in Edirne. I don't have any more information.

I did not get to meet my mother's father or mother.

My father Yuda Romano, was born in Edirne in 1905. My father first started to work as a secretary in the Edirne Jewish community. Later on he became a rabbi. But you cannot call that being a rabbi exactly. He worked as a philosophy teacher in Alliance Israélite Universelle [2](#) in Edirne which was a foreign school. He taught philosophy classes in French. He raised a lot of students. The students he raised constantly came to visit him. He had another job also. My father started commerce, but he continued with the community work. He was serving as Grand Rabbi also.

He worked as a cantor too. But he could not open the Sefer Torah as a cantor. Why: We managed a store together. I opened the store on Saturdays. And since he was my business partner, he said: "We sin on Saturdays, I cannot open the Sefer Torah in the synagogue on Saturday". But he raised important rabbis. He had more knowledge than rabbis. My mistake towards him was to open the business on Saturdays. Until he died, on Saturdays he neither touched electricity, nor warmed up food. He was excessively orthodox, he would not let others shop on Saturdays even, and he wouldn't talk to us. He was very angry with us for opening the store. But it was not possible to close the store in Edirne.

He was a very social person in Edirne. They would meet every Saturday at 10.00 a.m. in a wine store. But the wine seller was an important Jewish philosopher named Israel Reytan. He would open his store only when the mayor pasha came on Saturdays. He would have philosophical talks with the mayor, pasha and head of municipality of Edirne. Sometimes they took me too. I remember this very well. Sometimes they would meet in a library, open the books, and do their own interpretations. He died in 1988.

He is still remembered in Edirne. Some of the students he raised in Alliance school became mayors or ministers. Unfortunately I do not remember the names. He would help the poor, everyone. He helped the government of Israel a lot too. [After the death of Rabbi Mose Behmuaras, who took over the job from Hayim Becerano, the general secretary, Yuda Romano took care of business in the Edirne community in the 1940's due to the absence of a Grand Rabbi. Yuda Romano was the representative of the Jewish Agency from Edirne between 1940-1946, and was a big help to the Jews who were coming from Bulgaria and Greece en route to Palestine; he waited for the trains, sleeping in the stations through the night. (Rifat N. Bali Edirne Serhattaki Payitaht, YKY Publications 1988 p. 224)]

After I was born, my father worked at the Grand Rabbinate then, in 1955 he started a business with me as well as working at the Grand Rabbinate. We sold gasoline and tires for automobiles. At the same time, he continued at the Grand Rabbinate. He would open the Sefer Torah until 1955. After 1955, because I was opening the store, and because he was my business partner, he said I was sinning and did not open the Sefer Torah.

My father died in Israel on March 2nd, 1988, and was buried there. He had an open sore on his face for thirty years. He had skin cancer. He could not have that sore taken care of, once and for all. The doctor said, don't touch it, it will not bother you. At the end it started penetrating under the skin. Since my older sister lived in Israel, my father went to Israel, had surgery and got rid of it. He stayed with my older sister, he kept calling me, "my son, take me away from here, take me to

Edirne, I want to stay in Edirne, and die in Edirne". It wasn't meant to be, he died in Israel. I could not go to his funeral because my passport wasn't ready, he was buried in Israel. However it happened, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs got news about my father's death. I received a phone call from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They said, your father died in Israel, your father belonged to Turkey, we will cover all the expenses to bring his funeral to Turkey. Because your father was very useful to the government. I was not expecting something like this then, I could not answer on the spot. Then I thought, why should he come here, he is buried in the holy land, with requests and so on, he stayed there.

My father wore a shirt, tie and jacket with a felt hat, summer or winter. He shaved every morning. He even had two pieces of advice for me. He would say "My son, you will go to work before the sun comes up, and you will not insult your friends, how do you insult them? By having a beard. You will shave every morning, absolutely and absolutely, as soon as you get up, you will face your friends, your clients, shaved. If you face them with a beard, it is a big insult". I never forget his words. For twenty-five years, I am at work every morning at 5:30. I get up at five, I go to bed at midnight or one in the morning. I have tried to apply his legacy for 25-30 years. He had another testament. When my wife's father died in Edirne, sometimes we could not form a minyan for the morning prayers. I would get up at 5:30, go from door to door, and gather a minyan. This is a habit for me now.

My father was excessively serious, very interested in philosophy, he was a good philosopher. My father was a true philosopher, they still remember his philosophy in Edirne. I inherited his principles too. He never thought negatively in his lifetime. He always thought positively. Let's think of good, may it be good, he used to say. When sometimes we would say something like it will be bad tomorrow, "don't even utter it", he would say. "Always think positive", he used to say. He never thought negatively and he did not let us either.

My mother Ines Romano was born in Edirne. I do not remember the birthdate. She was a very humble woman. She would not attend meetings a lot. Because my father had a principle. When my father came home from work, he wished to see my mother across him. When my mother went somewhere, she would come half an hour earlier. When my father arrived, my mother had to be the one opening the door. But this was a habit based on love and respect. My father had a principle about food. Don't ever leave the table full in the evenings. In the evenings you get up hungry. Eat the most food at lunch, because you can eat till the evening, he would say. My father used to eat at lunch. He would arrange his schedule accordingly, when it was 12 noon, he would come home from work to eat, my mother would worry, has the food gone cold?

My mother was slender and graceful and her hair remained black till she died. Every mother views her child differently. But she spoiled me excessively, even my spouse complains about this. My mother and father never let me want for anything in my life. My mother was even a big support when we went out with friends, as a group. When my friends got fifty pennies, I would get a hundred pennies.

My mother is a highschool graduate, I do not remember which highschool. My father on the other hand, graduated from university. He studied in Istanbul, I do not know which university. But I think it was either economics or math. He would solve all of our math problems. I know very well that he studied in university. Their mother tongues were Turkish and Judeo-Spanish, they would speak

Spanish and French among themselves, they would speak Turkish with us. Because we did not speak the Judeo-Spanish language very well, they would speak Turkish with us.

Our livelihood was from the gasoline station and auto tire store that we opened with my father in 1955. My father previously had a salary from the Grand Rabbinate, that is to say, the community. In addition, he had a salary from the school. He was a great Mason. He hid this for 60 years, he told us two years before his death. He was a very tight-lipped person.

My mother and father probably met in Edirne, because they were both from Edirne. There was a great love between them. Yuda Romano constantly would come to the balcony and serenade her. Their love was very, very strong. There was great affection. When my mother was sick, my father would cry. A person who appeared so serious and strong, when my mother got the flu, he would cry in the other room. When they asked him why he was crying, he would lament "what if something happens to her?". My mother would do everything he said, but at the same time she was wary of him. For example, sometimes she had to buy something on a Saturday, she would go without letting him know and come back. Their wedding was in the Edirne Synagogue, I do not remember the date.

My father always dressed very well, but on Saturdays, he would dress even better. He was a person who attached a lot of importance to Saturday. He reserved his best outfits for the Sabbath day. He did not dress like this even on Yom Kippur. Even his shoes would be polished, as if new. He wore a vest, jacket and hat even in the month of August. He dressed well till the day he died. My mother was like that too. I did not take after them, not even 10%.

The financial situation of the family was good. There were no cement houses in Edirne then. The houses were made of wood. But it was one of the most beautiful houses in Edirne. It had three stories. Our house was at Kaleici, Dogan Mahallesi, Cumhuriyet Caddesi. This was in the Jewish neighborhood. There were no bathrooms in the houses then, but this house had a bathroom and a laundry room on the ground floor. On the second floor, there was a guest room, a bedroom and a livingroom. On the top floor my parents' bedroom, sittingroom, kitchen and another livingroom. His room was on the top floor. We used to live with my wife on the middle floor and relatives on the bottom floor. It was quite a big house. There were beautiful antique furnitures. The heating was provided with a stove. Coke coal was used for heating then. There were trees, plants, in the garden and a cistern where rainwater gathered. They probably used the cistern for laundry. I think there was also a cat in the house. A lady would come continually for housework.

There were quite a lot of books in our home. When my father left for Israel, he went with the philosophy books. My older sister lived on an upper floor. He was going to Israel for surgery. My mother had died in 1986, from arteriosclerosis. My older sister prepared his bag. She put his underwear in his bag. Then my sister went upstairs, when she left, my father emptied that bag completely, and put only the philosophy books. I will take my father to the airplane, I can't lift the bag. I ask him, "what did you put here", he says "I put underwear". "Is that possible?", I say. This is his answer: "I will not need underwear there, your older sister will find me some underwear anyways, but she cannot find these books".

He did not stay home much, but wherever he went, he would read the same philosophy books. "Dad, you have read this book before" I would say. "My son, I take pleasure every time I read it" he would reply. We had the Koran, Bible and Torah, all three in the house. He would read all and

interpret them for everyone. He even provided the explanation to Muslims. He was that knowledgeable. When he left for Israel, he went with the philosophy books and he died with the philosophy books. In addition, he had a lot of books on religion. He recommended the books by Orhan Hancerlioglu to me. He enjoyed reading the newspaper a lot.

I assume that there was no one in Edirne or Istanbul that was as extremely religious as he was. He applied all of the Jewish traditions. He observed kashrut. He went to the synagogue every Friday and Saturday. He attached a lot of importance to celebrating holidays, he wanted to see all of us at his side. You pay holiday visits on holidays, as you know, but when it was our holidays, he would let the public know, because he wanted them to come and see how to celebrate Jewish holidays. He wanted them to know what Yom Kippur, or Rosh Hashana signified. In Passover, a table would be laid out, 30 people would sit down with him as the leader. He would read the Seder in Hebrew and the reciting tone. We always reminisce about those days.

He participated in a lot of social events. But he also had an inclination towards a particular political party. He leaned towards the Party of the People. That is what he claimed, maybe he said it because of politics. They would ask "Who did you vote for?". I would not tell that even to my wife, this is between me and G-d. All the Jews voted for the Democratic party, but he supported the Party of the People, if he was serious about this, or this was a joke, he did not tell anyone. My father did his military service, but where, I do not know.

All of my father's neighbors were Jewish. They had a very good relationship. Everyone felt reluctant in front of my father. Because he was excessively strict and minded the rules, even we did not speak much inside the house. His friends mostly were the mayor, the pasha, the head of municipality of the time, that is to say, the bureaucrats. They found it difficult to be friends with him, because they could not attain his personality or knowledge. They wanted to take advantage of his philosophical knowledge.

He never went on vacation.

My father was part of six siblings, four boys and two girls.

Isak Romano was younger than my father. All of his siblings were born in Edirne, then they came to Istanbul for commerce. He was in the business of cheese in Istanbul. Isak's son, Jojo Romano lives in Istanbul. His grandson was involved in a meat scandal.

Salvator Romano was the manager at Grundig. Then he emigrated to Israel. I do not know if he is currently alive.

Nesim Romano did not work. His siblings took care of him. He died.

Ines Kalvo, housewife, lives in Israel.

My mother was five siblings, four girls and one boy.

The oldest was Gina (Alkalay) Gerzi, the one younger, Doret Gerzi, lives in Morocco. She probably died. One sibling was shot in Greece and died, I do not remember the name, then it is my mother, and she has a younger brother, Nesim Gerzi, he lived in Marseilles.

My mother and father did not visit often with their relatives. That is because there wasn't the transportation vehicles of today, then.

Growing Up

In my childhood, I think close to 15,000 Jews lived in Edirne. The Sabbath days had a special place. That day, after leaving the synagogue, we would go strolling to parks, to river banks. Saturdays was a different event for us. Everyone dressed well. There was a park called Bulbul Parki (Nightingale Park), ladies, gentlemen, when they left the synagogue they would eat their dezayuno [Ladino term for breakfast] (boreks) there. On Saturdays, this event was known among the Turks too. There was a beautiful unity. This will be considered a reproach, but today's Grand Rabbinate in Istanbul cannot provide this unity. Here everything is about materialism. I am still on the Board of Consultants of the Jewish community, one day we are at a meeting of the Board of Consultants. Naim Guleryuz was presiding. "Dear Yasef, would you like to say something too?" I said "Yes", the Grand Rabbi was then David Asseo. "I have a complaint about you, you cannot inspire the Jews in Turkey with unity, accord or brotherhood. Please do not create separatism. In addition, the subject that bothers me most is assimilation. In the future this is going to be a big problem. Please let's take measures against this. Let's be in unity and accord with Jews. A small child cannot go to Dostluk Yurdu [Jewish Youth Club founded in 1966]. It is a question of money. You only look at it from above" I reproached them. I still think this way. They help a lot, they educate students, but it stays at this level. Why, they do their own advertisements. After that I did not go to a meeting of the Board of Consultants again. There was a lot of unity and accord in Edirne. My father was a very strict man, but he paid a lot of attention to solidarity among Jews. We were all like a family. Whenever someone had a problem, or someone had a happy occasion, we would run there. That is to say we shared everything. We lived through the good days and bad, the sweet and the beautiful together.

There were a lot of horses and horse-carriages in the city, quite a lot. Transportation was provided by this anyways. We would go on city tours with horse-carriages. The streets were covered with paved stones, but sometimes the roads could be muddy too. There was a population of 40-45.000 in Edirne. The Jews numbered 15.000.

There is one synagogue in Edirne that is now demolished. In the old times, there was one synagogue in each neighborhood. They were about 40-50. For example ladies had a separate synagogue. This was like a one-room prayerhouse. They would gather and do their prayers. They had a rabbi, a gardener. There were synagogues according to professions. There even was a city club. It had no name, I even was on the board of directors. All social activities took place there. I worked on the board of that city club too. I am not a founder. This club was for Jews. There would be balls, garden parties once a month. For example, we would gather there after lunch, it had a large library for whoever wanted read, or we played card games. From time to time, musical meetings took place.

The Edirne Synagogue is a story in itself. We did not gather there every morning. We gathered in the midrash that was next to it, in the back. The memory that stayed with me most was Saturday prayers. There would be lunch after Saturday prayers, then we would get together with the rabbis, all the Jews would eat their meal, and then enter the synagogue again and would sing different songs from different tones. For example from Dede Efendi, but we sang it in Ladino. They were all

inclined towards Turkish Art music. These were in Hebrew. Today I don't remember them. In Ladino, with the tonality of Turkish Art music. Nisim Kalaora, he even practiced music with my father for an hour and a half there. That moment still lingers in my memory. They distributed cheese candy to all of us there. It was a very interesting thing.

As far as I can remember, there was one usher and three rabbis. One was the famous Rafael Pinto, he worked in the Grand Rabbinate too. It had a mikveh, Talmud Torah and a Yeshiva.

The Jews lived in the neighborhoods of Kaleici, Sabuni Mahallesi, and Bostan Pazari Mahallesi in Edirne especially. They were sellers of dry goods and notions, moneylenders and cheese sellers. We had electricity in my childhood, and running water.

I lived through events of antisemitism. At the time there was the campaign of "Citizen, speak Turkish". ³ Later a "Death to Zionists" association was founded. It was the years of 1964-1966. They did not want the public to shop from Jews. But we stayed on top of them insistently with the help of the Police Headquarters. The one who helped us most was the father of Emrullah Isik, police chief Feyzullah Isik. He put a positive end to the event. He threatened the association even if it was illegal. In addition, there was thefts in the synagogue. The books of the synagogue were sent to Istanbul.

I do not remember military parades or special celebrations, but I remember something relating to our holidays. We are going to temple on Yom Kippur day. Coincidentally, the same day is the first day of Ramadan. We are going to temple at 7:30 in the morning for Yom Kippur. I don't remember which period it was, just as I arrived in front of the synagogue, a police car approached and stopped. He asks "Brother, where are you going?". Of course he does not know I am Jewish. "I am going davening", I said. The police said "When there is Selimiye, the old mosque, why do you come here to daven". I said I will go here, without explaining. Of course he doesn't know what a synagogue is. I still remember this small argument.

I still remember the Independence march and the Tenth Year march.

There weren't any merchants or vendors where we shopped exclusively. There was a neighborhood bazaar and shopping was done there. The men of the house went shopping.

I was born on August 6th, 1938. I did not go to preschool. My mother took care of me. My first education was in the Ismet Pasha ⁴ elementary school where I was president for 30 years. The name of the school was later changed to Sehit Asim school. I finished junior high and highschool in Edirne highschool. All were public schools. I loved social studies, history and geography most. I hated physics. One day we were experimenting in the laboratory. They were going to test us on that experiment. I left the lab saying I am going to the bathroom, I had loosened the fuses. I could never grasp physics, that is why I got special tutoring.

I did my national service in Denizli during 1959-60. While I was in the military, I got engaged on May 27th, 1960. I returned to Edirne in 1962. Before I left for the military, I was working in my father's business. I got married and started working. I took over the business which was the sale of auto tires in 1962 completely. I still do this work. We also had a franchise for Mobil. Later my father retired.

Our elementary school friends were generally Jewish. Of course there were Muslims too. We had a good dialogue. There was no religious discrimination in school. We were together with Turks in groups of friends. They did not discriminate.

My wife's older brother Menahem Razon was my friend. We had parties amongst ourselves. We gathered in houses on Sundays. We visited relatives in their homes on holidays.

I liked soccer and music. They provided me with private lessons because I liked music. I did not play any instrument, I only took tonality lessons. We had stone records. We had a gramophone. We did not take vacations that much in my childhood. We would go to Karaagac on the weekends in Edirne with my family. We had a house there. In my childhood, there were two or three taxis in the city. We went to Karaagac every Friday at lunch time with my mother. My father stayed in Edirne because he had to be in the temple on Saturday. My father would come on Saturday in the evening. We sometimes went on Saturday morning. All the Jews would come there. It was a perfect summer resort. I don't remember it but all the embassies, Greek embassy, Bulgarian embassy, American embassy had house there.

At the time we would go on the train from Edirne to Istanbul. When the train was going to Istanbul, it would pass through Greece, it would stop for five-ten minutes, then we would enter Uzunkopru. We would go from Edirne to Greece, then to Uzunkopru in Turkey with the train.

We are three siblings. My older sister Ida (Nee. Romano) Kasuto was born in Edirne in 1929. She is married to Sami Kasuto. Sami Kasuto was a grocer and seller of candy in Edirne. He was from Babaeskili. My older sister has two sons. One is Hanri Aaron Kasuto, the other Yuda Kasuto. They left for Israel in 1964 and 1966. Henri worked in Turkey quite a bit. He still comes and goes. Ida Kasuto currently lives in Israel. Her son Aaron died in Israel during the six-day war [5](#).

My second older sister Rejina (nee Romano) Sarfati, was born in Edirne in 1932, she died in Istanbul in 1994. She studied in Ismet pasha elementary school. She attended junior high and highschool there too. She married Samuel Sarfati She had two daughters and a son. Meri and Ines are the daughters, Modi the son. Ines lives here. She is on the board in Goztepe Kultur dernegi(cultural association) now, Meri and Modi live in Israel. My older sister's husband worked in shipping in Edirne. Later he came to be with us. When my sister died he left for Israel and lives there.

We would always go to Mahazike Tora[6](#). They would even call us up to the bimah on the Sabbath as Mahazike Torah students. The rabbi would not read some of the portions, we would all sing it together. It was more tones of songs, I would get up and sing three lines, another friend would get up and sing another three lines. That is how it was on Yom Kippur. On the weekends, every Sunday, we would definitely have one or two hours of lessons, we would always have education during holidays. My father participated too. There was no Hebrew education in Mahazike Tora, we only learned how to read. My father knew Hebrew in Edirne. There was no one else who knew it in Edirne. I think he learned it from Mahazike Torah too. But Hebrew and the language of the Torah are different. My father knew both the language of the Torah and Hebrew. We only learned how to read religion.

My father was very official on the Sabbath. I still remember it like today, when it was Friday, around four or five, we would come home. It was not exceptable not to bathe. Then we would put on our new clothes, and we would wear them the next day too. We would all go to the synagogue. There was even a place for ladies in the big synagogue. Then we would gather around the table at home. If the table was not set early on Friday evenings, my father would bring the place down. The table had to be ready around five. We will go to the synagogue. If it was necessary to leave the house at seven-thirty, we would leave at seven-twentyfive. My father would say “No. You will go early, dedicate yourself to G-d, you will discard all your thoughts”. You will face G-d and G-d only, there. He would insistently admonish us about this. Please do not think about your classes when you are going to temple. Do not think about money when you come to temple. Do not think about your business when you come to temple. Don’t ever ever say “My G-d, help me with my business”. G-d knows all of this. If you are worthy of him, G-d will help you, he would say. The biggest sin would be to say, my G-d, I don’t have money, help me. His most important habit was to go to temple early on Saturday mornings.

My bar-mitzvah took place in 1951. We were very wealthy then. It was a nice bar-mitzvah. It left a nice impression with me. The piece that was written had really affected me. I don’t remember exactly. They had given us a piece of writing both at the temple and the day we celebrated. That we had to be respectful to our mother and father, that we would not sin against G-d, it really affected me. We were very emotional. We had celebrated the evening in our home in Edirne. It was crowded, the whole community came because of my father’s duty.

I liked Rosh hashana holiday best. Kippur was a little boring. You could have fun during that holiday. Purim also went very well. We did not eat meat that was not kosher, therefore we did not eat out much.

During the War

Because I was born in 1938, I do not know much about the history of the Turkish Jews around the 1940’s. My mother’s sister was in Greece. The Germans took her from there to Austria, and from there she was sent to the camps.

My deceased father met hundreds of refugees running away from Europe.

Due to my father’s duty, we were not affected by the Wealth Tax⁷.

In the spring and summer of 1943, there were a lot of events of arresting and displacing that happened towards nonMuslims. The father of my wife and two uncles went to the 20 military classes⁸. The conditions were very harsh, they even had to drink from streams where frogs lived.

We were very affected from the campaign of “Citizen, speak Turkish”. We became low-spirited. There were even sermons in mosques; “Do not shop from Jews”. Posters were hung. “Citizen, speak Turkish”. I started commerce in 1945. It did not affect me. There was even a letter. There is a friend who we love a lot, Tekin Sayinbas. He did not want to be friends with a large group. He liked being friends with us a lot. He received a threatening letter because he was friends with us. This had scared us a lot. Later this friend stopped seeing us. But now we are still in touch.

My father saw the Thrace events⁹, but it did not reflect on us.

My wife's mother Sofi Razon (maiden name was Razon) was a very religious and Zionist person. She never said anything against anyone. She always protected. She was very religious. She did not light the stove on Saturdays. Muslim women who lit stoves would go around outside. She would call one of them and had it lit. She would never light a fire, on Saturdays.

My wife's father is Salamon Razon. He like growing eggplants, tomatoes. They had a grapevine. On summer evenings they would eat dinner underneath the grapevine. In the home of my wife's family, they had a chicken coop, cats and dogs. Her older brother Menahem liked animals. One day he brought home a dog he found on the streets. It will stay in our house, he said. Later he grew so much, he did not fit in the house or garden, they made him a guard dog at the door. My wife's childhood was very pleasant. She grew up in open air, in parks. Her mother tongue was Judeo-Spanish. My wife's mother did not speak Turkish well. They would speak French or Spanish most of the time.

He was very close to his family. He worked in the commerce of dry goods and notions. He had two stores. He stayed in one, my wife's older brother Menahem in the other one. She had a very good childhood, she grew up in a very loving family. She lived in Edirne in a wooden house. It was three stories. She has one older brother and one older sister. They now live in Israel. Nady Behar and Menahem Razon. She had a very good childhood with them. My father was a very special person. He died when I was still engaged, very young, at 54 years of age. He did not see our wedding, our wedding took place three months later. My wife still misses him dearly. They would invite relatives on holidays, on weekends, on Sabbath days, and eat all together and sing songs, it would be very pleasant. Long tables would be set for holidays. He had friends. Twelve girls, twelve boys, they would go out and have fun together. Later all of the Jews left for other cities or out of the country.

My wife's father did his military service in Sarikamis. My wife's father Salamon Razon, brought his merchandise to the house they lived in. Later her aunt tried to convert that to money at home. Dina Razon (Mizrahi) is still Erol Mizrahi's mother. He closed up his house during the Wealth Tax and moved to Ortakoy in Istanbul with my wife's mother, older brother and older sister. When business took up, they returned. My wife's mother used to tell us, they had difficult days. They would get a quarter of a loaf of bread with a ration card, at one time when they were in Kuzguncuk, my wife's older brother and sister would go to buy bread, on the way home would eat the bread before they reached the house. Everything was prepared at home. Bread and something similar to bread "Panne de pinion" (corn bread) it was called. There was severe shortage. My wife was not born yet, these are what her family relates. My wife was born after the war. My wife's aunt Dina Razon, was an outgoing person. Her mother and father died when she was very young. She became an orphan. When she was 11, she was raised by my wife's mother and father. My wife knew her as her older sister. She was 11 years old when she came to my wife's family. After her mother and father died, the father married her sister (that is how it was back then), my wife's father Salamon Razon was born. The father was the same, mother different. I do not know her education, she speaks Spanish all the time. She loved people, helping everyone, chatting, and also matchmaking and she was good at it. She also knew how to sew very well. She sewed a lot in Edirne, her sewing was "Haute Couture".

My wife's brother Mehaheem Razon was my classmate. We grew up together, with her older brother. We were children from the same neighborhood, our houses were very close. The spark happened from there.

My wife Luna Romano was born in Edirne on August 25th, 1944. She studied in Sehit Asim school. She went to junior high and highschool in Edirne. They went out with the same group of friends for years. They would get together at homes on weekends, hold parties. My wife's family are people who are loved and respected in Edirne. Today we still continue our friendship with some of her friends in Istanbul.

After the War

Our wedding was a little sad. My wife's father had passed away before the wedding. We were in mourning because of that. In our family, mothers and fathers are above everything. We were raised in formality, but attachment was more prevalent in my wife's family. In a family where everyone is so close, our wedding took place in an atmosphere of melancholy due to the absence of the father. Normally one would organize an evening for a wedding. We could not have the wedding even though we were wealthy. We were going to have fun but there would be sorrow in us. We married on September 9th, 1962 in Edirne Synagogue, we went to Istanbul by train that night, we stayed at the Hilton hotel.

My older daughter Ines was born in 1964, and in 1973, my younger daughter Sima. My wife struggled in Edirne for their education. She won entrance to Besiktas Anadolu Lisesi (Besiktas Anatolia highschool) after finishing elementary school. We were obliged to come to Istanbul so my younger daughter could get a better education. My wife had to cut her ties to Edirne. We did not want to leave her alone in Istanbul. We helped her so she could study here. Then my older daughter got married. We came and went for her too. Our life was spent on the roads. But we are tired now. Luna is more attached to Istanbul now.

We did not have a refrigerator in Edirne in our childhood. One Saturday, we were having guests from Istanbul. My wife's mother and father prepared the food on Friday and lowered it to the well. The weather is hot. She lowered the fish too, so the food will not go bad. When the food was pulled from the well, the rope snapped. Everything fell to the well. My wife's mother cannot forget her agitation. "What am I going to serve them" Thank G-d she was a very prudent person. There were meat based meals in the screened closet. The food that had been baked did not go to waste fast. Those were taken out. Later on they stopped keeping food in the well. We had a cupboard, we would buy ice blocks from the ice store. They had a very beautiful garden. They had every fruit you could think of.

My wife's family celebrated every holiday with all the details. During Purim, relatives and friends in Edirne would give out Purim candy. It was red and white Purim candy. They made different shapes from Purim candy, the six corner star, a heart and so on. He would make candy as big as a tray, there was an old candymaker, he used to make the candy, the name of the candymaker was Sami Kanetti (father of Soli Avigdor) and he would decorate the tray beautifully. We would put our best tablecloths on the tray and arranged the candy on it. At the same time, you would put tezpisti (a syrup-soaked cake) and an orange in the middle, I do not know the meaning of this. This was sent especially to those who were in mourning. The women who worked for us distributed it to houses. They would be tipped in houses. So many sweets were made for Purim that we had a cupboard, during those holidays, it would be filled with sweets from one end to the other. Especially during Rosh hashana borekitas, tatli de muez(walnut sweets), tezpisti, mekikler (a kind of muffin), so many, many things were made. Because there were a lot of guests coming and going, a lot of

sweets were made at their house.

When you say Passover, cleaning up started a month before. Everything would be unstitched, would be washed. Anything you could think of would be washed. We had a special cupboard for Passover. In that cupboard, the pots and pans, plates that were to be used only in Passover were kept separately. When Passover came, they would all be taken out, washed, the old ones put away, and the ones for Pesah arranged in place. You could not find flour ready to use in Edirne in Passover. The matzos were thick and hard. They were so hard, that there was a bakery in Edirne called Has firin. That bakery would be washed, cleaned, prepared for Passover and matzos were produced. This was a bakery with arrangement but we, the Jews bought it in 1964. The matzos would be baked there after they were prepared. Yuda Romano participated in the preparing. The matzos looked like round breads and were flat. But they became hard when they waited, we ate it with difficulty. We always softened it to eat. Since there was no matzo meal, we would grate this bread. My mother made us grate it all the time, so it would be ready. Cakes, tezpistis have to be prepared, there is no flour. We would grate, and we would add it to other meals.

Later we would start preparing the food. Among the Passover foods, the one made with spinach was called ‘Minas d’ispanaka”. Now this meal that is baked in ovens, was fried at the time. It was fried on a pan, burmelos (fried matzo and egg balls), fritaz de ispanak, pirasa, patates (frittatas of spinach, leeks, and potatoes). Potatoes wasn’t popular then, later it became more popular. It left us the impression that you don’t eat it. Kilos of spinach were bought, washed (he tells while laughing) and cooked. We did not eat rice. We did not eat feta cheese or kasheri even. There wasn’t much then like today. Our wine came from Istanbul. We would also make Sarope (jam-like candy made with sugar and water).

My wife’s mother would make a special pastry from pumpkins for Rosh hashana. My wife still cannot manage that. Because the dough was special, she would roll it herself with her hands. She would cook the pumpkin with sugar and make a special pastry. She would also cook leeks. Because these are the first vegetables to come out. Rosh hashana has a special meal. Of course there is no fish in Edirne but carp. Sheatfish cannot be eaten because it does not have bones. As you know, boneless fish cannot be eaten in Judaism. Carp really was prepared deliciously. I still remember the delicious taste. My wife’s mother would make any sweets you can think of in Rosh hashana. We had a cupboard, that cupboard would fill up with sweets. My older brother had a sweet tooth. One day he had eaten enough sweets, but because he wanted more, he had climbed on top of the cupboard, and when he climbed on top, the cupboard fell on him. Those sweets became inedible then.

You did not do anything on Tish ha Beaf, you would sit and fast. The weather would be hot anyways. You don’t go in water. This habit is still in use. We wouldn’t even go to the riverbank to sit. That is a relief, it cannot be done on a day of mourning.

My wife tries to continue the traditions she learned from her mother and father in Edirne. Even if she is not as religious as them, what is important is that she continues the habit. She does not eat treyf, she likes applying things that are religiously required. I pray to G-d that our children will be like that.

My older daughter Ines Romano, was born in 1964 in Istanbul, in Guzelbahce clinic. She grew up in

Edirne. She finished elementary school, junior high, highschool and university in Edirne. She is a metallurgical engineer. She married Moris Aldis and has a daughter named Doris. Aldis family is also from Edirne. She had a very happy life in Edirne. The children grew up in open air and gardens. My younger daughter Sima is born in 1974. She was born in Istanbul too. She finished elementary school in Edirne. She attended junior high, highschool and university in Istanbul. She finished Besiktas Anadolu Lisesi. She studied sociology in Mimar Sinan University. Currently she is a teacher in Marmaris. She is married to Tansel Cetin. She has a daughter named Melis. They live in Marmaris. She is married and has a daughter.

My children had Jewish friends until they started school. It was necessary to come to Istanbul, and that is difficult after a certain age. My younger daughter was the only Jew in her school. There was even an incident there. She entered religion class. In the religion class, her teacher told them that Jews were bad people. This happened in the first year of junior high.

She knows my younger daughter is Jewish, of course. Of course, the next day she did not go to school. The principal of the school was a good friend. Another friend also got involved. That teacher was laid off after a while. My daughters did not have to go to religion class, but to prevent separatism, they never refrained from going and memorized the prayers.

My older daughter likes Turkish folk dancing a lot, there were some international competitions, she even participated in them. My younger daughter Sima also likes folk dancing, but she especially likes Israeli folk dancing. She even taught Israeli folk dancing in the Jewish highschool.

We lived in a villa type house in Edirne after we got married. We would come to Istanbul very often. We would come to Istanbul almost every weekend. When I come, I go to the movies, theatre, to meetings. I don't have any free time. We go to Enes and Saroz for vacations with my family. And we also go to Antalya in the month of May.

I had a lot of trips out of the country. Mostly Greece, Bulgaria, Netherlands, England and Israel. I went to Greece and Bulgaria alone for social activities. To Israel with my wife.

The islands seemed very far to us. Tekirdag, Sarkoy, that's where we would go.

In our trips out of the country, the children would accompany us. There were groups of friends in Saroz.

I raised my children according to Jewish traditions. They go to synagogue often, bat-mitzvah was not known in Edirne, therefore we did not do it.

The nights of seder that we held when we were married were magnificent. My father would gather all of us. Because he had more knowledge than rabbis, he could read the prayers with the right tone. We were very crowded. The whole family read. Now in Istanbul, we try to apply the traditions but we are not as crowded as we were.

His wife relates: "In my family, the relatives would gather like that, my mother would cook a lot of different foods, the kids would come, a wonderful table would be prepared. My mother was also a very orthodox, religious person. She would not touch fire on Saturdays, she would look for a person to light the stove on Saturdays, people would pass on the street, she would make them light it. The nights of Passover truly constitute memories that we cannot erase from our minds".

My wife continues her traditional cooking at home.

My father is buried in Israel, my mother in Ulus Jewish cemetery. Kaddish was recited at the funeral. We do the yartzheit every year on the anniversary of their death.

My close friend from a large community Tekin Sayinbas was born in 1935, knows Jewish history more than I do and knows the Jews who live in Edirne better than I. He has books on this subject. Our friendship started before I went to the military. For 55 years we keep in touch every morning either with phone or other means. He is my beloved friend. He loves Jews a lot. He even has books about this subject.

There is one more person but I cannot stay in touch with him as before. Rifat Mitrani. He lived in Edirne too.

I took positions in a lot of organisations. I carried the presidency of the elementary school after the birth of Ines. I was president for thirty years. There was a change I brought to this school That is why they did not want me to leave he presidency. When there was no television even in homes, we were working together with the wife of the mayor Unal Erkan (he also was chief of security, and president of Diyarbakir section management among other things) in Sehit Tahsin school. We put a television in every classroom, and we put a video in the room of the principal. Whatever the subject of the day was, the cassette would be put in the principal's room, that subject could be followed in every classroom at the same time. This system did not exist in Istanbul even, not just in Thrace. We entered the computer age in our school when no school had such technology.

I started in the Rotary in 1977 to be of service and I am still continuing to serve. I became the founder of Edirne Rotary club. We started it with 20-25 people. When the Rotary was going to be founded in Edirne in 1977, I did not know what Rotary was. I had an older mentor, he is a lawyer. The attorney Altinel, my dear Yasef, we will take you into the Rotary, they said. We are creating it, we will take you into the founders, he said. I said let me read about its philosophy. Don't read at all, he said, let's make you a member first, you will read later. I entered without knowing, after starting it I read about its philosophy, I was really very happy. I became a secretary after it was established. I served as secretary for 13 years which can be a world record. After becoming president, I became assistant to the governor. And I am still continuing. I have been working actively since I started. This year, 2005-2006, I see as my "Golden Year". I will serve not only Edirne but all of Thrace.

The biggest project in my life is establishing a center for disabled children. It was established with the name "Edirne Therapy Center for Mentally and Physically Disabled Children". You might say, what relationship do you have with disabled people. I am very socially active in Edirne. One day, I am sitting at work, a family came with all of its children. I am looking for Mr. Yasef, they said. "Mr. Yasef, you serve everyone, but you do not do anything for families with disabled children". I had not thought of such a thing until that moment. "My son is disabled, but we cannot get him the care he needs in Edirne, we cannot get it in Istanbul either. I take my child to Eskisehir every ten days and bring him back. Would you please give a hand for disabled also?" she said. Next to me was the Textiles Central manager of the famous Bezmen group, Erdal Bey. We came face to face and said why shouldn't we do this job, we said. We could do it, but with what. That day the word disabled imprinted on our minds. That person affected us. One day I receive a call from international Rotary. There are 25-30 young people coming from Germany who will transit through

Edirne, they needed help in Kapikule. But they were a little late . I could not send them to Istanbul that day, I hosted them in Edirne. I was very useful to them, and I did not take a penny. One of them was a governor, he asked me if I had a project from Rotary when he was leaving. "I really want to be involved in disabled people" I said. The guy took note of it. He visited Turkey, went to Syria, and returned to Germany.

A week, ten days later, I received a letter, "There are very big schools in Germany for the disabled" he said, "send me a team, I will host them for 15 days, I will provide you support with the help of the university, and you send your doctors here". We sent them a team of doctors led by Sait Erdem. They stayed 20 days in Germany. We made an international project, worth 20.000 dollars. The dean of the time gave up, I will not do this job, he said. All of our efforts were messed up, we sent the doctors to Germany. We were completely disillusioned I did not lose my conviction. I had a friend in Ankara. I called him. I told him about the project. I told him I found 20.000 dollars too. "But I cannot find anyone to implement the project", I said. His answer was " If you find Ihsan Dogramaci, he will take care of your business". Dogramaci was president of YOK(Committee for Higher Education) then, a very good friend of his. He finds Dogramaci at his place, tells him the situation, we will take care of it right away, he says. He immediately calls the dean in Edirne, Ahmet Karadeniz, on the phone and says; "Dear Ahmet, I congratulate you, I heard that you are cooperating with the Rotary Club. You embraced them, wonderful. I am sending you a letter of commendation for the work you do, he said. But things did not progress fast after this. The dean provided a doctor for the clinic, we have seven patients, we cannot accept more. We don't have money either, I started sitting at tables in mosques. I am collecting donations for the disabled. There, one citizen who does not know me, asks the reason. I explained the situation. We started a center, but it is not enough, if we find around 5 millions, then we can do something, I said. This friend gave us the five million, he was very touched when he saw me. The Jews are collecting money in the mosque for the disabled. We could only do excavations with this five million liras. We could not do anything else. He gave a place in the university of course. He asks me what is happening. My dear friend, you gave this money, we did the excavation, we have to wait for the rest from the government, I said. Would you lead this job, he asked me, I accepted. If you are going to be on top of this job, I will support you, he said. He gave 1.000.000 Swiss francs. This is a very big amount. With this money, we established the biggest disabled center not only of Turkey, but of the Balkans under my management, and it is still currently under my management, and it is very important for me, I am attached. In this hospital where we started with 5 children, now there are 2,000 disabled children. There are mentally challenged and physically challenged. This is a project as big as Turkey. I go there three to four days a week. The approximately 15 doctors that work there work under me. This provides me with the greatest happiness, I am so attached to these disabled, that I even built a park for them. Because the families of the disabled children are ashamed of their children. In reality it is nothing to be ashamed of but unfortunately they are. We built a park just for them on the road to Karaagac, on a 10 acre plot, which this citizen donated again, we built a big park for the disabled children's families. The families come with their children, everything is free. Now, that is my biggest happiness. There are ceramic and art workshops inside the school. All the rooms are spotless, the families participate in the education and everything is taught to the children including getting dressed. There are two psychologists for these children and their families are visited too. Our therapy is free.

Outside of the Rotary, I am involved in the disabled. When the Edirne community was crowded, we had a lot of friends, and we did a lot of activities. The families of Kalvo and so on, all came here. We continue our friendship here too. Now we are friends with people who came from Edirne. We could not become part of the community of Istanbul.

Of course my wife, she goes to Dostluk yurdu on Mondays, and prepares seminars at Ulus on Thursdays, for women, she goes there.

The birth of the nation of Israel makes me very emotional. For a person to have a country is wonderful. It gives you a lot of confidence. However we manage here, we live with that confidence. If they did not exist maybe we would be seen in a different light. My wife never forgets, when the six-day war⁴ started in Israel, the b'ris of our relative Niso was taking place at home in Edirne. That day the war started, we are very agitated, very scared, very impatient, the circumcision was done, we dispersed to our homes. We all decided none of us should leave our homes. There was a panic that they might do something to us. We were the subject of a lot of discussions. A lot of things were being said, this scared us, we were relieved when the war ended. Of course the fact that they were stable gave us a big peace of mind. More than a peace of mind, it is the place where we would find shelter.

One year we had the intention to do aliyah there. When we were in Edirne, before we moved to Istanbul, first my mother and father, we made our preparations that we would all go together, in the meantime my mother and father went to Israel for the wedding of their grandchild, my mother suffered a stroke, we thought that the atmosphere did not sit well with her, and we changed our minds. The government of Israel had provided my father with a furnished house to settle there. But it wasn't meant to be. We have friends and relatives who have gone to Israel to settle there. We still keep in touch with them.

We were very affected by the revolts against Greeks in 1955 and 1964. My wife's older sister was getting married then. The wedding was going to take place, we were going to get the wedding dress that we had ordered, the owner was Greek. When we went to get the dress, we did not find any wedding dress, everything was looted. Of course we had to buy another wedding dress later.

We don't have such a good dialogue with the community. I am on the council of representatives. Why am I there. Edirne is a community. Their president is automatically a member of the council of representatives. Edirne is also accepted as a community, even if it is one person or five people. I go to all the meetings. I give speeches too. But I saw that the speeches stay there. Everyone speaks up, there are some very good proposals, but nothing is done. No one was involved in the event of the Edirne synagogue. The collapse of that synagogue made us very sad. Right now there are people in the community staying on top of it, the dean's office in the university, and Unicef stepped in. G-d willing, something will happen this year, I am very hopeful. There is always hope.

Let me tell you about another event. There is a bazaar in Edirne called Kapalicarsi (Closed Bazaar). That bazaar was built during the Ottomans. The bazaar belongs entirely to the religious foundations. This event is one we lived through three to five months ago. All of the stores belong to the foundations. The treasury examines all the foundations. One of the stores is registered as belonging to the Edirne Jewish community. I have a very good relationship with the attorney for the Treasury. The attorney said, I discovered something; one store belongs to you as a community. You

can have it reinstated from the foundations, he said. For a year now, the foundations have been renting the place out and receiving the money. I have in my hand a certificate stating I am part of the Edirne Jewish community, I can open a lawsuit, sell the store in the name of the Jewish community and take the money. I did not do this. I informed the Grand Rabbinate immediately, come, let's take care of this, I said. They send a lawyer to Edirne, open the lawsuit. The foundations say, you leave, we will pay you 180 billion liras. There are some snags that arise, I become part of the talks. The affair is concluded, the money arrives to Istanbul to the Grand Rabbinate. I discovered this, I informed you, can't you even say thank you? But when problems arise, the lawyer can call me at night, I am the one who brought this to light, I don't want anything. But our Jewish community never, until they conclude their business, pashaiko, when the business is taken care of, the friendship is also done. That is why I am a bit distanced from and offended by the community.

There is a synagogue in Edirne, it is demolished, I told the Grand Rabbinate, I am the only Jew left in Edirne, I am not able to do much of anything. I gave the mayor's office an ultimatum and I said you cannot touch this place as long as I am alive. This is my legal right. I told the Rabbinate in order to save it. We cannot do it, they said. This temple is a historical building. Then I found a friend of mine who is a dean in the university. The dean says o.k., we went and talked to the foundations, we turned it over to the university, I will do it, he said. But the dean got scared, when there are so many mosques, if they say the university is doing this, it would reflect negatively on me. But let's say the repair costs 100 liras, I will provide 99 liras, have your community pay the other one lira. Let's say the university and Jewish community are working hand in hand. It might work if they say this is how it happened. I went ahead and brought the great dean to Istanbul. The Grand Rabbi was Asseo then. Of course he did not participate in the meetings, he had lawyers. The dean explains, I will have this synagogue built for Yasef's sake, he says. Do you know what the people there answered? "Do not ask for money from us, use our opinions and advice". The dean said, this, I have, I have the money too, I can build one hundred percent of it, but public opinion is important. An event was done in Istanbul for the synagogue. To fundraise, the people in Edirne came by buses, so money could be collected and used. But when nothing came from the community, it didn't happen. In the end the building collapsed. I can never forget the day that building collapsed, how I was distressed. In our community they only ask for money. No one took charge. They could have asked for a little support from outside. So that at least the synagogue could stand erect.

I am in the council of representatives, once a month, or once every 15 days, a letter comes so we will participate in the meetings. The council of representatives meet at some places. Once at Or-ahayim¹⁰, once in the building of the Grand Rabbinate, another time at Barinyurt. We would be approximately 50 – 100 people. Most of the times it was presided by Naim Guleryuz. Whoever wanted to speak spoke. I got up, talked about assimilation, come let's tackle this problem together, I said. What more can we do for these people, we form associations, we will work at it, they say, nothing comes of it. Three months later, five months later, records are kept, nothing happens.

I gave a conference only at the council of representatives.

I wanted to take part in a social program voluntarily, I wanted to work together too. They called me, I gave a speech. Two or three years ago there was Ida Ben Romano, "Yasef you are an expert

on the subject of the disabled, in this Jewish community of ours, there is no place for the disabled". They wanted a conference from me. A school serving 2,000 people opened in a place like Edirne. I did not spend a penny out of my pocket. Our Turkish friends are very emotional about this. When I say I want to do something like this, a disabled children center opened in Edirne that is not only one of the few in Turkey but one of the few in the world. There are 2.000 disabled children. I am the administrator, the founder, there are 30-40 doctors working there. They are all under me. I didn't know this business either, but I worked there voluntarily. Come. Let's do something similar for the Istanbul Jewish community, I said. We also have very emotional people. Let's start with one lira, I said. There are disabled children among us too. The families are ashamed, they don't take them out. I wanted to work, Ida Benromano encouraged me in this, she helped me. A lot of people came, listened, it did not happen.

Here once a month, once every two weeks and during the holidays I go to Ortakoy synagogue, and once in a while to Sisli synagogue.

I do not use the internet and e-mailing to communicate with my family much, my secretary uses it. My computer is on 18 hours. 150-200 e-mails come daily, and as much are sent.

I am very loyal to the Jewish religion, but I do not advertise it. My life cannot consist only with Jews. Because I am in Edirne. I even educate my children continually about religion. Religion bonds us. If we are loyal to it, everything turns out better. I am as loyal as I can be. My wife is more religious than I am. She follows all the holidays, everything. But I do not pressure my grandchildren to own their religion.

My grandchildren go to the Jewish school and will graduate from there. They take part in all the activities.

When I come to Istanbul for the weekends, the friends who came from Edirne get together as a group, we eat our meal. We learn our ideas about the community. I put out this struggle so the Jewish community can be more active. I put them under pressure. I have a very good group of friends.

I do not get involved in politics. Cem Boyner had formed a party. He offered me to form his party's Thrace section. I did not accept this. He was going to give me all the responsibility for Thrace. I was the president of Rotary. Rotary is always on a higher level. Of course he wanted support from me as a Rotarian to increase his financial power. I did not accept it. Only, I have a point of view, for a rich person and a poor person to be equal. For a poor person to get the same care and to live as a rich person does. You might say, he has money, the other doesn't, but I believe in supporting the poor. I think I lean towards the left a little with that point of view. I live a regular life, but the poor person there cannot, my conscience bothers me. That is why there are differences of class all the time unfortunately.

We were very upset with the bombing of Neve Shalom in 1986¹¹ and in November of 2003¹², we got calls from our Turkish friends, they all conveyed their condolences. Everyone was in a panic. Our Turkish friends were as affected as we were.

I talk Turkish with my wife ninetyfive percent of the time, and Spanish the rest of the time, I use the Turkish language with my friends and children all the time.

Your philosophy in life: I formed my life philosophy based on three words and think the same way since 1975. Love, I approach everything with love. I do not get angry at anyone, I face everything with tolerance. That is to say, I based my life on love, tolerance and a happy demeanor. I continue on these three principles. Believe me, even if someone curses at me, I will face it with tolerance, I will face it with a happy demeanor. I would open my hand and help someone who slaps me. These three words constitute my life philosophy.

GLOSSARY

1 Matan Baseter Bikur Holim: Literally ‘Secret Help Care for the Sick’; a Turkish Jewish community institution that looks for the needy in the community and helps them. It supports children in school and health related issues, sends needy families all necessities for the Jewish holidays, and looks after the sick. All expenses are met by donations and sponsorships inside the Turkish Jewish community.

2 Alliance Israelite Universelle

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum; nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865, then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople in 1867, Shumla (Shumen) in 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those that had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

3 Inonu, Ismet (1884-1973): Turkish statesman and politician, the second president of the Turkish Republic. Ismet Inonu played a great role in the victory of the Turkish armies during the Turkish War of Independence. He was also the politician who signed the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, thereby ensuring the territorial integrity of the country as well as the revision of the previous Treaty of Sevres (1920). He also served Turkey as prime minister various times. He was the ‘all-time president’ of the CHP Republican People’s Party. Ismet Inonu was elected president on 11th November 1938, one day after Ataturk’s death. He was successful in keeping Turkey out of World War II.

4 Six-Day War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

5 GKD

Goztepe Cultural Association, Jewish social club for people of all ages, founded with the aim of preventing assimilation.

6 Mahaziketora: Talmud Torah, Sunday school where Judaic religious education was given to Jewish children.

7 Wealth Tax

Introduced in December 1942 by the Grand National Assembly in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions caused by wartime mobilization measures against a possible German influx to Turkey via the occupied Greece. It was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of who were Christians and Jews. Those who lacked the financial liquidity had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. Those unable to pay were subjected to deportation to labor camps until their obligations were paid off.

8 The 20 Military Classes: In May 1941 non-Muslims aged 26-45 were called to military service. Some of them had just come back from their military service but were told to report for duty again. Great chaos occurred, as the Turkish officials took men from the streets and from their jobs and sent them to military camps. They were used in road building for a year and disbanded in July 1942.

9 The Thrace events

In 1934, after the Nazis came to power in Germany, anti-Semitism was rising in Turkey too. In fear of disloyalty the government was aiming at clearing the border regions of the Jewish population. Thrace (European Turkey, bordering with both Bulgaria and Greece) was densely populated with Jews. As a result of the anti-Semitic propaganda of the rightist press riots broke out, Jewish property was looted and women were raped. This caused most of the Jewish population to leave (mostly without their belongings) first for Istanbul and ultimately for Palestine.

10 Or Ahayim Hospital: Istanbul Jewish hospital, established in 1898 with the decree of Sultan

Abdulhamit II and the help of idealistic doctors and philanthropists. As a result of various fundraising activities the initially small clinic was expanded in 1900. Today, the hospital is still operating serving both Jewish and non-Jewish patients with the latest technologies and qualified staff.

11 1986 Terrorist Attack on the Neve-Shalom Synagogue

In September 1986, Islamist terrorists carried out a terrorist attack with guns and grenades on worshippers in the Neve-Shalom synagogue, killing 23. The Turkish government and people were outraged by the attack. The damage was repaired, except for several bullet holes in a seat-back, left as a reminder.

12 2003 Bombing of the Istanbul Synagogues

On 15th November 2003 two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues. The terrorists drove vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside, however, 26 pedestrians on the street were killed; five of them were Jewish. The material loss was also terrible. The terrorists belonged to the Turkish branch of Al Qaida.