

Yosif Levi With His Relatives



This is a photo of some of my closest relatives, taken in 1980 in Sofia. I'm on the right, next to me are: my brother Isak Levi, my sister Adela Naftali and my brother Mordechai Levi. The child is Isak's oldest granddaughter - Teodora.

Adela had a problem before leaving for Israel. That was in 1966 or 1967. My brother-in-law used to work as a refrigerator technician and upon his immigration to Israel he had to expatriate, sign different declarations, and it was very difficult for him to get permission to settle in Israel. In 1948 there wasn't such a problem. A lot of people immigrated to Israel then and some of them even wanted to return. Yet, Chervenkov banned the returning. People were forbidden to come back to Bulgaria on the occasion of weddings or funerals, or as guests, and this brought families a lot of grief.

During the wars between Israel and the Arab countries, of course, we were on Israel's side. However, Bulgaria was on the side of the Arabs. It was a curious fact that in 1973 when Egypt attacked Israel the newspaper here wrote that it was vice versa: that Israel attacked Egypt. Things were interpreted in that way.

I didn't openly express that I was on Israel's side during the wars, but it was natural for me to be on Israel's side. Politics at that time was a completely different thing. Bulgaria had strong contacts with the Arab countries at that time. It supported the Arab cause, because it maintained close economic relations with Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and other countries and it was natural for it to support their interests. At some point Bulgaria's position was overdone. There were such writings that Israel was an artificially created country and that it shouldn't exist. The communists also supported that thesis because it was the political line followed by the Soviet Union also.

I can say that I felt a certain change of attitude towards me during the wars in Israel. It was because of the people's general disposition at that time: they used to consider Israel the greatest aggressor. Israel was a synonym of aggression. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrey Gromyko, announced that an Arab-Palestinian state must be founded and it was immediately accepted by Bulgaria.