

Lea Beraha

Lea Beraha

Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Maiya Nikolova

Date of interview: August 2002



Mrs. Lea Beraha lives in an apartment of an apartment block situated in a nice quarter of Sofia. Her home is very well kept, clean and tidy. Mrs. Beraha is an extremely energetic person and very active both physically and mentally. She shows natural inclination for dominating the conversation, as well as for a concrete statement of her ideas. In spite of her age, she continues to keep her body and mind fit. She is full of life, well informed and interested in everything happening around her.

[Family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[Post-war](#)

[Glossary](#)

Family background

My ancestors, both on my mother's and my father's side, are Sephardi Jews. After the persecutions of the Jews in Spain, they spread all over Europe [see [Expulsion of the Jews from Spain](#)] ¹. I didn't know my grandparents as they died early. I only have vague memories of my paternal grandfather, Betzalel Delareya, and of my maternal one, Benjamin Mamon. I don't remember anything specific about their looks or their surroundings.

My father, Yako Delareya, born in 1885, was orphaned very young. My grandfather's second wife, Rashel Delareya, chased away all his children from his first marriage. She gave birth to three kids. My father told us that he used to clean the ships in Ruse for which he got a salary. One of his brothers was a peddler and the other one was a cutter-tailor in an underwear studio. One of his sisters was a worker and the other one a seller. I don't remember anything particular about them. They all left for Israel. We had hardly any contact with them. Now they are all gone. My father's kin is from Lom and Vidin, whereas my mother's is from Sofia.

I don't remember anything about my maternal grandparents. My mother, Rebecca Delareya, nee Mamon, was born in 1904. She had four sisters and four brothers. They all took care of each other. One of my mother's brothers owned a café and the other one was a clothes' seller. I only remember that one of them was called Solomon, but I don't know which one. Her sisters were housewives. They spoke mostly Ladino and Bulgarian. My mother's kin had a house on Slivnitsa Blvd. My mother's eldest brother inherited the property from his father and compensated his siblings financially.

Unfortunately I don't know how my father and my mother actually met. After the events of 1923 [2](#), in which my father took part, he returned to Lom - I don't know where from - with my mother, whom he was already married to. They settled in the village of Vodniantsi. With his little savings my father bought a small shop - a grocery-haberdashery. My mother told me that they were quite well off at that time. Because of his active participation in the events of 1923, my father was arrested. Then some villagers robbed both the household and the grocery. All that my mother could save was an apron, which I inherited after she and my sister, Eliza Eshkenazi, nee Delareya, moved to Israel. This apron became a real treasure for our family.

When my father was arrested, my mother was eight months pregnant and my brother, Betzalel Delareya, born in 1921, was two years old. My father was sent from Vodniantsi to Lom, Belogradchik and Mihailovgrad. There the prisoners were forced to dig their own graves. The witnesses said that after the execution the grave 'boiled' like a dunghill piled up with half- dead bodies. Luckily my father was late for the execution. Some of the Vodniantsi villagers helped my mother with some food and alcohol. My mother took my brother and accompanied her husband, shackled in chains, and the two horsemen convoying him. They stopped quite often on the road using my mother's pregnancy as an excuse, though, actually, while having a rest, the two guards ate the food and drank the alcohol. Thus my mother helped them to be delayed and instead of arriving in Mihailovgrad in the evening - the grave was dug the whole night and the prisoners were shot and buried in the morning - they only arrived around 11am the next morning.

The policemen swore at my father and sent him to Vidin to put him on trial there. I have no idea how many years he was given but because of different amnesties he was released after two years from Baba Vida Fortress [3](#). When my mother went to visit him there, she passed my brother over the fence. The other prisoners held him and took from his clothes letters especially hidden there for them. At that time, while my father was in prison, my mother had a stillborn child. Then she began working as a servant cleaning other people's houses. She survived thanks to food charity and the little money she was given for the housework. Thus she was able to provide for my brother and bring food to my father in prison.

When my father was freed, the family first tried to stay at my grandfather's, as he had some kind of property and could shelter them, but my father's stepmother chased them away. Then they came to Sofia and settled on the grounds of the Arat tobacco factory. My father started working there as a courier, while my mother worked as a cleaner. By destiny's whim I later worked as a doctor in the very same tobacco factory for 14-15 years. While my mother was pregnant with me, she once fell down when carrying buckets full of coals. Therefore I was born with a trauma, moreover we both had a scar on the hip.

Growing up

Before the internment we used to live in Odrin Street where we had two rooms with a small kitchen. The conditions were still extremely miserable. Because of the constant arrests my father's status got worse and worse, and therefore every house we used to rent was poorer than the previous one. I have lived in places full of sweat and mould. We never had our own property. My father's income was very insufficient and every time we had to change our lodging to a poorer one at a lower rent. All these living estates were in the third region - the Jewish quarter in Slivnitsa Blvd., Odrin Street, Tri ushi Street, Morava Street. [What is called the third region today was the

poorest quarter in Sofia when Lea was a child.]

My mother's family was more bound up with Jewish traditions than my father's. My mother and her elder brother valued the traditions very much. They were religious. My mother wasn't a fanatic, yet we observed Rosh Hashanah, Pesach and other holidays and traditions. When we had to keep the fast [on Yom Kippur], my mother did it for real, while my father only pretended to. We accompanied my mother to the synagogue and then my father brought us back telling us, 'Let's eat cakes now before your mother returns.' At that time we used to sell ice cream, which was prepared with egg-whites. My mother used to make the cakes from the yolks.

It was a tradition for the Mamons, my mother's family, to gather every Saturday evening at their eldest brother's place. There were only two rooms. Every Saturday evening they used to take the beds out, arranged the tables next to each other and gathered the whole kin. My uncle, as far as I remember that was Solomon, was the wealthiest of them. He was good-hearted and generous, though his wife controlled and restricted him. Once on [Fruitas 4](#) he lied to his wife saying that he had had a dream in which God told him to give everyone 20 leva. So he lined us, the children, up in a queue. Each family had two to three children, so we were around 25 kids. We opened our bags and he gave each of us fruits and a 20 leva silver coin. It was such great joy for us, as we were very poor. I still have that coin, while my sister spent hers immediately. I was very angry with her for doing so.

The children of our family were on friendly terms with each other. We never quarreled. It's a pity that these traditions are gradually falling into oblivion in the Jewish community nowadays. Every Friday came Topuz Bozadjata, the quarter's boza carrier, who was Armenian, and poured boza [5](#) into large vessels. He used to give the adults shots of mastika [6](#) as a bonus.

After the internment, when we came back impoverished and hungry, my mother's brother Solomon sheltered us in a building, next to the house he had inherited from our grandfather. A Bulgarian woman, a prostitute, lived next-door at that time. Only a small corridor separated us from the room where she used to accept men. We were just kids and that was my mother's worst nightmare.

There were five of us inhabiting one room. We slept in a plank-bed. There was a soldier's stretcher, in which my father was bedridden, lying sick after the labor camp, and where he actually died. The rest of us slept on the plank-bed. The toilet and the running water were in the yard. Our room was two meters long and three meters wide. We had a case, which served both as a kitchen cupboard and a wardrobe. I found a small table in the yard, left by some other family, and I fixed it so that I could study there.

I have a very embarrassing memory of that house. I attended evening classes at the time and my parents' work was extremely exhausting. Once I was studying mathematics by the light of a bedside lamp as I was going to have my term exams. My father warned me several times that no one could go asleep because of me. Finally he got so angry that he broke the lamp. I sheltered myself in the corridor, continuing my work by candlelight. Anyway, I managed. I was very ambitious.

My brother was six years older than me, whereas my sister Eliza was four years younger. They were both very clever, good-hearted and intelligent, yet they didn't show any particular desire to continue their education. My father practically beat my brother to make him study. My sister wasn't

very inspired with the idea of a further education either. After our father's death in 1947 I begged her to stay in Bulgaria and take a degree. I was already working and I could provide for her. She didn't want to. She got married and went to Israel.

I was a lousy student till the 4th grade of elementary school. I almost failed. It was thanks to the birth of Simeon II [see Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Simeon] [7](#) that I was able to pass from the 3rd to the 4th grade. [Editor's note: On the occasion of the birth of Simeon II, son of the tsar, heir to the crown, all students in Bulgaria got excellent marks at the end of the school year.] I studied in the Jewish junior high school till the 3rd grade. We studied the usual subjects plus Jewish history. We studied everything in Bulgarian. Only the Torah did we read and write in Hebrew, and we also had Hebrew as a separate school subject.

All teachers loved us very much. There was only one teacher, who hated the poor children. She used to call us 'lousy kids'. Her daughter was in our class. That teacher used to tell us, 'My daughter will become somebody, whereas you will always be nothing but servants.' Years passed, I had already become a doctor, when I met her daughter in Israel and she complained that she was very badly off.

The education in this school was excellent; I took a turn for the better and became an advanced student very quickly. I didn't have any special talents, yet I achieved everything through enormous efforts, constant visits to the library and sleepless nights. I don't remember anything special about my classmates. I was quite ambitious and the informal leader of the class, so to speak.

When I finished the 3rd grade, I cried a lot that I couldn't go any further. In order to calm me, my brother, who was already working as an apprentice in a shoe shop, bought me a watch on the occasion of my successful graduation. I still remember the trademark - 'Novolis'. I held it in my hand and stared at it all night long. On the third day of my vacation my mother took me to the atelier of the tailor Zvancharova. She and Pelagia Vidinska were popular tailors in Sofia with big private studios. Zvancharova hired me as an apprentice at a very low wage. I was begging to be allowed to deliver clothes to houses because of the tips. I decided that I would be able to provide for myself and enrolled in the Maria Louisa secondary school for tailors. It was right opposite the Law Courts. I was expelled already in the second week, as I couldn't pay my tuition. I remained a simple tailor.

In the 1st grade of the Jewish junior high school I became a member of Hashomer Hatzair [8](#). Hashomer Hatzair aimed at the establishment of socialism in Israel. It was a 'progressive' organization with a strong national aspect. I organized a very big company there. We often visited the Aura community center on Opalchenska and Klementina Streets, which was regularly attended by Jews and 'progressive' Bulgarians. [Lea tends to call people with left-wing political convictions progressive. This expression was quite common in socialist times.] Mois Autiel noticed us there. We didn't know then that he was the UYW [9](#) responsible for our sector. Mois was making propaganda for this organization, which was different from Hashomer Hatzair but which had the same goal, the establishment of the socialist order. Our class was divided into two groups, 15 people each, both supporters of the UYW. Anyway, only two or three people - including me - were selected to become UYW members. Mois was the person in charge of our group. I became a member of the UYW on 5th May 1942, right after I finished the 3rd grade of the Jewish junior high school.

During the war

My future husband, Leon Beraha, was redirected to our group as a more experienced UYW member. At the age of 15 I carried out my first action with him, and at 16 we decided to be a couple. For three or four years we were only holding hands. In Iuchbunar [10](#) there was a conspiracy, a traitor within our organization and a lot of members were imprisoned. My future husband was also arrested. He simulated that he was an imbecile, he was released as an underdeveloped person and was acquitted for lack of evidence.

His second arrest was a more serious one. In fascist times [in the late 1930s - early 1940s] he worked as an electrician. At that time the newspapers wrote about the Totleben conspiracy. The gang of Totleben bandits was raging, etc. My husband and his brother electrified a hospital. In an outhouse behind that hospital they hid two outlaws. Actually the conspiracy was called this way because the hospital was on Totleben Street in Sofia. During a police action a shooting started. Anyway, the authorities never proved that it was my husband who had shot. Yet, all this resulted in his internment to the forced labor camp [11](#) in Dupnitsa. They dug trenches there. By a 'happy' coincidence my family was also interned to Dupnitsa.

I took part in the protest on 24th May 1943 [12](#) against the internment of Jews. Now they don't admit that the protest was under the leadership of the Communist Party, but we took part in it and we did and do know who led us. Heading the group were the communist leaders of Hashomer Hatzair - Vulka Goranova, Beti Danon - and our rabbi who wasn't a communist but he was a 'progressive' and conscientious man. The smallest children were also walking in front. We, the older ones, were carrying posters and chanting slogans. We had almost reached the Geshev pharmacy between Strandja and Father Paissiy Streets, where horsemen and legionaries [see Bulgarian Legions] [13](#) were waiting for us, when a big fight started.

They beat us up badly. We hid in the yards like ants. I lost my father and my little sister. I hid in the yard of an aunt of mine, though I held my peace because I didn't want her to be harmed in case of an eventual arrest. My father and my sister went home. When my father saw that I hadn't come home, he went out to search for me. I was two crossings away from home and I saw how they arrested him. I didn't dare to shout out because if they had arrested me too, there wouldn't have been anyone left to take care of my mother and the family. From the police station they took him straight to Somovit labor camp. They interned him without clothes, without food...

When he came back, he told us horrible things. Their daily food ration was 50 grams of bread only. A compatriot of ours, a Zionist and very hostile to 'progressive' people, slandered my father on being a communist. As a result the portions of my father and some other people were shortened to the minimum. My father used to dig in the garbage for scraps of food. He ate potato peels. He was set free at the time of the Bagrianov government. [This government was in office between 1 June - 2 September 1944.] He looked like death warmed up. He didn't even have enough energy to climb the stairs and was shouting from below. My mother and I carried him to the first floor. That was already in Sofia, after the internment.

When I was interned to Dupnitsa with my mother and sister, my brother was already in a labor camp. We had no contact with him whatsoever. We only knew that he was somewhere around Simitli. We didn't receive any letters. We were worried because he had a duodenal ulcer. He told us later that trains carrying Jews from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia to the concentration camps passed by them. Once they heard from a horse wagon people begging for water. My brother and

some others jumped up with their cups, but the warders beat them up badly. Finally they poured cold water on him, in order to bring him back to consciousness. Nevertheless, they made him work after that. He was set free on 9th September 1944 [14](#), like all the others.

Although the state policy was pro-fascist, generally there wasn't an anti-Semitic mood among the Bulgarian people. On the contrary, I have a very positive memory. When the internment announcement came, we immediately took out everything for sale because we didn't have any money. My father was in Somovit, my brother was in a labor camp. I was alone, only with my mother and my sister. At that time I had already started working. With my first salary I had bought a wallet as a present for my brother and a beautiful water pitcher for the whole family. We sold those as well. People gathered. A man liked the pitcher and bought it. When I handed it to him, I began to cry. When he realized that it had been bought with my first salary, he told me to keep both the money and the pitcher. Naturally I gave it to him, as we couldn't take it with us during the internment. Yet his gesture moved me deeply. The money we succeeded to collect only lasted us a very short time.

In Dupnitsa they took us in a convoy from the railway station to the school gym. We were more than a hundred people, and they separated us in families. I found a job in the candy factory. I stole sweets for my friends in the labor camps. Then we moved to some rich Jews, who accepted us under the condition that I worked as a maid for them. They had three boys aged one to two, three to four, and five to six years. I used to work there so much that my child-like hands became completely rough. My mother was already advanced in years, she was constantly ill and wasn't able to work. I was the breadwinner.

My sister was crying for food all the time. The landlords were well-to-do traders in Dupnitsa. They imported curds, butter, etc. as black marketers. My sister cried because she also wanted such things. My mother and I used to 'gag' her and hid her in the little square behind the door, which the rich Jewess had given to us. In this one square meter space we put the sack, the blankets and the clothes that we had brought from Sofia. We used to lie down crosswise like in a sty. The mattress was too short and our bare feet touched the floor.

Post-war

We returned from Dupnitsa to Sofia after the fall of fascism [after the communist takeover on 9th September 1944]. From 9th September 1944 till 1945-46 we lived in the house my mother's brother had on Slivnitsa Blvd.

After 9th September 1944 everything changed. First, there was a great tragedy - my father was ill. The misery was beyond description. Yet, the Jewish community established a tailor's cooperative named Liberation. I began to work there. I attached sleeves using a sewing machine. I also attended high school evening classes. I studied from 6 to 10 in the evening. From 10pm to 7am I worked - I only took night shifts. The cooperative was in the bazaar opposite the Law Courts and I used to walk to Odrin and Positano Streets, where we lived. We often changed our address and everywhere we lived under terrible conditions; the whole family in one room.

By 1947 I was alone. My future husband was a student in the USSR. My father died in my arms. My sister Eliza got married and left for Israel. In the beginning their family was quite badly off. Her husband used to work in a garage. Later the owner, who was childless, adopted him. Now my

nephew, their son, owns the garage. My sister was a housewife all her life. My brother Betzalel and his family followed my sister at my mother's request. She wanted him to go there and help my sister. He was a stevedore in Jaffa. His work was physically very hard - he pulled boats to the riverside. As a result of this he fell seriously ill and died in 1966.

In 1949 my mother also left for Israel. It was very hard for me. In order to escape from loneliness, I took part in two consecutive brigades [15](#). There I fell and broke my hand. I was falsely diagnosed with bone tuberculosis. Later it turned out that I had simple sciatica. From one sanatorium to another I finally reached the Workers' Academy [16](#) in Varna, where I finished my high school education. There I was put into a plaster cast and during the whole year they took me to exams on a stretcher. I gained a lot of weight and weighed some 90 kilos as a result of total immobilization. I was lucky that my husband visited me. I told him that I didn't intend to marry him because of my illness. Upon his return to Moscow my husband took my tests to the Institute for Bone and Joint Tuberculosis. The professor there concluded that I have no tuberculosis whatsoever. According to him it was more likely to be rheumatism or something of that kind. And above all he recommended that I should start moving. I stood up and fell immediately.

My wonderful, loving mother-in-law realized that I was suffering and came to see me. I lived with her for two years, before marrying my husband. We lived in one room - my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my husband's brother and his wife. We lived very well. My mother-in-law was an extraordinary woman. She still wouldn't believe that I had tuberculosis. She used to hide good food from the others. She took me out into the yard behind the house and made a huge effort to persuade me that I had to eat for the sake of my husband, who was so good-hearted and whom I loved. I loved her very much and later took care of her. She also died in my arms.

I graduated in medicine and worked for five years in the hospital in Pernik. I became a chief of the professional diseases' sector. I traveled around the mines. In 1964 I came to Sofia with my husband. First I worked in the hospital at the Ministry of the Interior. Then I applied for a job in the 4th city hospital. Out of 35 requests, only mine was accepted. I worked under the hardest system. I was in charge of seven beds in the hospital till 11am, then I was in the polyclinics until 1pm, in the tobacco factory until 2pm and finally I had house-calls. In addition I was working on my specialty degree and meanwhile I had already given birth to a child, my daughter Irina [Santurdjiyan, nee Beraha, born in 1966]. In Pernik and in Sofia we lived in lodgings. In Sofia we first lived in a small room in Lozenets quarter. Later we moved to our current apartment.

My husband came back from the USSR in 1952, after graduating in mine engineering. We married on a Sunday. On Monday he 'disappeared' - he was appointed at the mine in Pernik and got very busy. My husband was extremely modest, industrious and honest. He climbed the career ladder all by himself, without any intercessions. The newspapers wrote about him. I have a large file of press clippings. First he worked as a mining engineer in Pernik, then he was advanced to the post of mine director. Then he was in charge of the industry in Pernik - the Crystal Plant, the mines, the Lenin State Metallurgy Plant, the Cement Plant, etc. As a next step, he was promoted to a job at the Council of Ministers because they needed someone who was simultaneously a mining engineer and an economist.

In 1966 Stanko Todorov [17](#) decided to send him to Italy because meanwhile my husband had graduated from the diplomats' school in the USSR. He also worked for the Council for Mutual

Economical Support [the economic organization of the former socialist countries] as well as for UNESCO. He was regularly sent to its head office in Geneva. My husband was the ideal example that in communist times there wasn't any anti-Semitism in Bulgaria. As he was a diplomat for 28 years and traveled a lot, I used to accompany him. In Italy he was the Bulgarian embassy's first secretary. In Angola he was a minister plenipotentiary, and in Cambodia ambassador. Finally, when he got very ill, he was sent to Geneva to defend Bulgaria with regard to the Revival Process [18](#).

At that time Bulgaria still wasn't a UNO member. It was only a candidate. In Geneva there were moods for excluding the country from the group of the UNO candidates for membership because of the forced name change of the Bulgarian Turks, which was carried out at that time. My husband gave a speech on this topic that was loudly applauded and Bulgaria wasn't excluded from the group. When my husband came home, he told me that he had held a very strong trump in his hands - his passport, where it was written that he was a Jew. He was ready to take it out of his pocket at any moment and ask them how could the non-Bulgarians possibly be oppressed, if there was written proof in the official documents of a Bulgarian diplomat that his nationality was Jewish. Principally my husband didn't approve with the name change of the Bulgarian Turks, but in that case he had to defend Bulgaria before the whole world. The nation wasn't supposed to suffer because of the mistakes of a few people. My husband died of cancer shortly after the Geneva conference.

I have visited my relatives in Israel more than ten times. It was only difficult in the first years because then even letters weren't allowed. [Editor's note: Visiting Israel was not a problem for Lea's family, as they were quite high-standing in the hierarchy of the Bulgarian society of the time.] I was among the first people who visited Israel. I wasn't able to 'warn' my relatives about my arrival. They were at the cinema when it was announced that Jews from Bulgaria had arrived at the airport. They heard my name and immediately rushed to meet me. My mother hadn't seen me for seven years and she fainted at the airport.

Regarding the Israeli wars, I am definitely on Israel's side. At first I was more inclined to understand the Arabs, but it is no longer like that. I think they are intolerant in terms of politics and reaching of agreements. Maybe it's simply that a new leader should come and replace Arafat. It's a pity that young people from both sides die or become disabled for life.

My daughter Lora graduated from the College for Dental Mechanics. She is married to an Armenian and has a little daughter, Lora Edmond. She doesn't identify herself as a Jew and doesn't observe the traditions. She isn't affiliated with the Jewish community. I myself am a complete atheist, yet I buy matzah for Pesach and prepare burlikus [19](#). I visit the synagogue on Yom Kippur, but just to join our community. I don't pray there, I'm just very sensitive when it comes to the Jewish community.

I was the person in charge of the Health club at the Jewish community in the 1990s. I receive a monthly financial support of 20 leva. In winter they also give us some money for heating. If it wasn't for Joint [20](#), I would have become a beggar-doctor.

Glossary

[1](#) Expulsion of the Jews from Spain

The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews expelled from the Iberian peninsula, as a result of the 'Reconquista' in the late 15th century (Spain 1492, and Portugal 1495). The majority of the Sephardim subsequently settled in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, mainly in maritime cities (Salonika, Istanbul, Izmir, etc.) and also in the ones situated on significant overland trading routes to Central Europe (Bitola, Skopje, and Sarajevo) and to the Danube (Edirne, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Vidin).

2 Events of 1923

By a coup d'état on 9th June 1923 the government of Alexander Stamboliiski, leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, was overthrown and the power was assumed by the rightist Alexander Tsankov. This provoked riots that were quickly suppressed. The events of 1923 culminated in an uprising initiated by the communists in September 1923, which was also suppressed.

3 Baba Vida Fortress

the only medieval Bulgarian castle entirely preserved up until today. Its construction began in the second half of the 10th century on the foundation of a former Roman fortress. Most of it was built from the end of the 12th century to the late 14th century. Today, Baba Vida is a national cultural memorial.

4 Fruitas

The popular name of the Tu bi-Shevat festival among the Bulgarian Jews.

5 Boza

Brown grain drink, typical of Turkey and the Balkans.

6 Mastika

Anise liquor, popular in many places in the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East. It is principally the same as Greek Ouzo, Turkish Yeni Raki or Arabic Arak.

7 Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Simeon (1937-)

son and heir of Boris III and grandson of Ferdinand, the first King of Bulgaria. The birth of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1937 was celebrated as a national holiday. All students at school had their grades increased by one mark. After the Communist Party's rise to power on 9th September 1944 Bulgaria became a republic and the family of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was forced to leave the country. They settled in Spain with their relatives. Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha returned from exile after the fall of communism and was elected prime minister of Bulgaria in 2001 as Simeon Saksoburgotski.

8 Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement established in Bulgaria in 1932, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War

II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

9 UYW

The Union of Young Workers (also called Revolutionary Youth Union). A communist youth organization, which was legally established in 1928 as a sub-organization of the Bulgarian Communist Youth Union. After the coup d'etat in 1934, when the parties in Bulgaria were banned, it went underground and became the strongest wing of the BCYU. Some 70% of the partisans in Bulgaria were members of it. In 1947 it was renamed Dimitrov's Communist Youth Union, after Georgi Dimitrov, the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party at the time.

10 Iuchbunar

The poorest residential district in Sofia; the word is of Turkish origin and means 'the three wells'.

11 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the age of 18-50, eligible for military service, were called up. In these labor groups Jewish men were forced to work 7-8 months a year on different road constructions under very hard living and working conditions.

12 24th May 1943

Protest by a group of members of parliament led by the deputy chairman of the National Assembly, Dimitar Peshev, as well as a large section of Bulgarian society. They protested against the deportation of the Jews, which culminated in a great demonstration on 24th May 1943. Thousands of people led by members of parliament, the Eastern Orthodox Church and political parties stood out against the deportation of Bulgarian Jews. Although there was no official document banning deportation, Bulgarian Jews were saved, unlike those from Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace and Macedonia.

13 Bulgarian Legions

Union of the Bulgarian National Legions. Bulgarian fascist movement, established in 1930. Following the Italian model it aimed at building a corporate totalitarian state on the basis of military centralism. It was dismissed in 1944 after the communist take-over.

14 9th September 1944

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union unexpectedly declared war on Bulgaria. On 9th September 1944 the Fatherland Front, a broad left-wing coalition, deposed the government. Although the communists were in the minority in the Fatherland Front, they were the driving force in forming the coalition, and their position was strengthened by the presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria.

15 Brigades

A form of socially useful labor, typical of communist times. Brigades were usually teams of young people who were assembled by the authorities to build new towns, roads, industrial plants, bridges, dams, etc. as well as for fruit-gathering, harvesting, etc. This labor, which would normally be classified as very hard, was unpaid. It was completely voluntary and, especially in the beginning, had a romantic ring for many young people. The town of Dimitrovgrad, named after Georgi Dimitrov - the leader of the Communist Party - was built entirely in this way.

16 Workers' Academy

In socialist times Workers' Schools were organized throughout the entire Eastern Block, in which, using evening and correspondence class principles, all educational levels - from primary school to higher education - were taught.

17 Todorov, Stanko (1920-1996)

Bulgarian prime minister from 1971-81. He joined the Communist Party in 1943 and became a Politburo member in 1961. He held several government posts and was the longest-serving prime minister in modern Bulgarian history. He was parliament chairman from 1981-1990 and among the Communist party leaders who in November 1989 ousted long-time Communist dictator Todor Zhivkov.

18 Revival Process

The communist regime's attempt to ethnically assimilate the Bulgarian Turks by forced name change between 1984-1989.

19 Burmoelos (or burmolikos, burlikus)

A sweetmeat made from matzah, typical for Pesach. First, the matzah is put into water, then squashed and mixed with eggs. Balls are made from the mixture, they are fried and the result is something like donuts.

20 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.