

Rafael Beraha

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Ruse

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Patricia Nikolova

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Although he has difficulty walking because of his two heart attacks, Rafael Beraha is hospitable and talkative. He lives in a modest old house, near the center of Ruse, this beautiful town on the Danube. He is a very humble, kind and sensitive man. He is an ardent defender of historic and family memory. He is a keen bibliophile. Mr. Beraha's innate intelligence allows him to take interest in various problems and cultural issues (literature, art, theatre), which he investigates by himself and talks about in depth and full of emotion.



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Family background

Taking into account our family name Beraha, which translates from Hebrew as 'blessed', I think that my ancestors came from Israel through Anatolia. Most probably, they left right after the Diaspora. So, they came as far as the Bulgarian town of Kazanlak. [The Sephardim of the Balkans in fact are the descendents of the Iberian Jews; also see Expulsion of the Jews from Spain] [1](#)

My ancestors from Kazanlak are distinguished in their education and wealth. For example, my paternal great-grandmother graduated as a midwife and was very rich. It is said about her that a quarter of Kazanlak, which had some 16,000 inhabitants at that time, passed through her hands. I don't know her name. In any case, she left a big inheritance to her children: Yuda, Sarah and Emidar. I don't know anything else about them. My great-grandfather's name was Daniel Beraha. Unfortunately, I know nothing about him either. They spoke Ladino. They weren't religious.

My grandfather Yuda Daniel Beraha was born in 1848 in Kazanlak. He died in 1936 in the same town. He was the first-born son, but unfortunately, despite his high intellect – he graduated from the famous Robert College [a prestigious French college in Istanbul] – he was infamous for being a habitual drunkard. This character trait isn't typical for Jews in general. My grandfather dressed modestly. He drank away all the money he got from the many houses left to him as inheritance. They called him 'grandfather Yuda, the Don-Cossack', because he loved throwing drinking parties on cabs, to which he invited gypsies filling the streets of Kazanlak with their shrill zourias [ancient

shrill instrument similar to a whistle]. Sarina Bidjerano Beraha was the wife of my father's father. Unfortunately, I know nothing about my grandmother.

I remember a typical story about my grandfather. Once, probably because he had wasted too much money, they had to mortgage one of his houses. But Grandfather Yuda was very wild; he started chasing my father and uncle Yako with an axe, because they told him about the mortgage. He went to the mortgaged house and knocked it down with his axe – he was that angry.

My grandfather also had a fight with the rabbi in Kazanlak. My mother told me that. According to her, the rabbi allowed women to sit next to men in the synagogue and not in their assigned places; nobody knew why. Once my grandfather got very angry, although he wasn't religious at all and started beating the rabbi with his cane. He was a very bad-tempered man. I'm very happy that none of his children inherited his horrible character.

Luna Beraha was the first-born daughter of my grandfather Yuda. She was born in 1881 or 82. She escaped to Bucharest and married there, but no one knows whom. In 1942 Luna died in a concentration camp together with her six kids.

The brothers Nissim and David Beraha also escaped. My uncle Nissim went to Varna. He married a girl from the Kalo family there. Later he returned to Kazanlak, but grandfather Yuda had already wasted all his wealth in drinks. Nissim had two children: Leon and Sofka. Leon became a businessman and Sofka an artist. Now they live in Israel. Sofka is in the Ein-Shemer kibbutz; I don't know where Leon lives. Uncle Nissim also moved to Israel where he died, but I don't know when. In Israel Uncle Nissim did farm work. My uncle Davidcho went to live in Ruse in 1921 or 22 after he graduated from the junior high school in Kazanlak. He married tanti [aunt] Zheneva. Unfortunately, he died young, in 1937 as a result of an operation on peritonitis. They had three sons: Leon, Jacques and Daniel. I don't know much about them. Jacques was killed during a terrorist act in Israel. Leon lives in Ein-Shemer, and Daniel lives in a kibbutz on the coast.

In fact, only my father Yako remained in Kazanlak. He was born there in 1884. Ironically, he had no education, although he was the first-born son of an educated father. My father didn't like to talk bad things about his father, but I heard his cousins saying that if my grandfather threw up all that he had drunk, he would drown half of Kazanlak. My father's cousins were from the Catalan family. 'Catalan' means 'Catalonian'. That is, they were Spaniolit Jews [Spaniolit: a Bulgarianized word meaning in Ladino, 'from Spain' or 'of Spanish origin'] and they spoke in Ladino to each other. My father was a cobbler; later he became a master cobbler. After the war he became a merchant and worked for his cousins. He wrote without any mistake, excellently. He knew Ladino, Turkish, French, and Bulgarian.

My father was a sick man. From 1912 to 1918 he fought as a soldier in the Bulgarian army on the Macedonian front against the French and the Senegalese [who were also parts of the French Army]. That was in the years of the Balkan Wars: 1912-1913 [see First Balkan War [2](#) and Second Balkan War [3](#)] and in the years of World War I [see Bulgaria in World War I] [4](#). He came back with rheumatism from the trenches. Besides, he was wounded by a Senegalese shell on the Macedonian front. I remember very well that when my father would take his clothes off, my child's fist couldn't cover the wound, which he had got from the opening and removing of the shrapnel.

My mother Bina Iliya Beraha, nee Bidjerano, was a housewife. She was also a singer. She sang in amateur singers' groups in Kazanlak. When she was young, she took part in theater performances in the 'Iskra' [spark] community house, which was run by the famous Bulgarian writer Chudomir Chorbadzhiiski. [Dimitar Hristov Chorbadzhiiski alias Chudomir (1890-1967): famous Bulgarian humorist and artist] She sang Ladino, Bulgarian folk songs and German classics based on poems by Heinrich Heine and translated into Bulgarian. One of her favorite songs was 'Palestine, muestra santa tierra' [Ladino: 'Palestine, my holy land']: 'Palestine muestra santa tierra,/cuanto sos tu descentorada/matu ermosura me in cante/I inchi me tierpo de templor. [Palestine, our holy land, how unhappy you are, your beauty fills me with sorrow]. The song based on Heine's poems went like this: 'A maiden slept in her room/the moon is shining outside/quiet sounds reach her in her sleep/She gets up, looks from the window/who wakes her up - she wants to know/a skeleton is playing the guitar there/noisily he plays and dances...'

My mother was an interesting woman. She had five brothers: Bohor, Chelebon, Yako, Daniel and Rafael. Two of my uncles - Bohor, the eldest, and Rafael, the youngest, after whom I'm named - died in the Odrin battles in 1912, during the First Balkan War. In fact, Rafael died of cholera near Odrin. They were in the 23rd Shipka Division. Their names are written on the memorial in Kazanlak. My uncle Chelebon, the second-born, was very poor. He had three daughters: Estreya, Sarina, Solchi and one son, Iliya. Estreya and Solchi married in Stara Zagora. Later, Solchi left for Israel. Sarina married in Sofia. I can't remember anything else about them. My uncle Chelebon was a leather worker. He made tsarvuli [a type of sandals]. He lived in Kazanlak. He died at the beginning of the 1940s.

Uncle Daniel lived in Sliven. He had two children: Iliya and Sarina. His wife's name was Mazal, she came to visit us in Kazanlak. I know nothing else about her. Uncle Yako chaired the club of the Bnai Brith lodge in Ruse. [Bnai Brith: a Masonic organization, whose members are only the rich and influential Jews in society; its primary aim is a charity one]. It was a masonic and a charity one, a kind of center of the local aristocracy. That's why only the rich Jews gathered there and all the others weren't allowed. Uncle Yako immigrated to Israel in 1949 and died there later, but I don't know when exactly. He also had three children: Sarina, Marchi and Mois. Mois lived in Yavne. I know nothing else about them.

It's interesting to note that my mother was an active social democrat. She was present at the congresses organized by Emil Vanderveld [a famous Belgian social democrat who came to Bulgaria and organized a congress of social democrats here]. She knew personally the famous communist Dimitar Blagoev and the social democrats Konstantin Bozveliev, Yanko Sakazov, Krastyo Pastuhov and others. My mother was very active until 1922. In 1922 she took part in a manifestation organized by the workers in protest to I don't know what exactly. And Krastyo Pastuhov, who was Minister of the Interior in the government of Alexander Stamboliiski [5](#), turned the manifestation into bloodshed. Then my mother left the Social Democratic Party. She always said to me, 'Don't believe social democrats...' She was very angry that they allowed a Minister of the Interior to turn a workers' manifestation into bloodshed.

My parents met in Kazanlak. They got married in the Kazanlak synagogue in 1909 or 10. My mother led a rich spiritual life, in contrast to my father. He was more narrow-minded, a silent man and very kind. They even left people with the impression that she bossed him around. His kindness was so great that it even affected his health - later he got sick, because of his worries about my mother's

decision to sell our house.

My eldest brother, Leon was born in 1912. Leon was an officer – he graduated from the officers' school in the town of Radomir. He had a college education, specializing in pedagogic. He studied at the Free University in Sofia. He played a number of musical instruments very well, the 'kaval' [a kind of wooden flute] in particular. He was the most intelligent in the family, but he killed himself when he was 23 years old, in 1935. His wife's name was Sofka Catalan and they had a son named Leon. I know nothing else about them.

My second brother, Iliya was born in 1914. He was a clerk. He has a college education in trade, which he completed in Svishtov. He lived in Ruse from 1937 until 1949 when he immigrated to Israel. He had two children: Bina and Arie. He died in Kfar Hitim in 1987.

Before she married, Bina was a parachutist. She immigrated to Israel where she married Uzi – I don't know his family name – a Polish Jew, one of the long-distance racers of Israel. I also remember that he sang very well. Bina and Uzi had four children: Gal, Renat and Shoshana; I don't remember the name of the fourth one. They also had a farm on the border between Israel and Jordan where they grew roses and avocados.

Arie lives on the Golan Heights. He had a model farm there. He looked after 40 cows: 30 milk cows and ten for trade. He is married to a Romanian Jew. I know nothing else about them.

My third brother, Izak, was born in 1919. He lived in Ruse from 1937 until 1948. He was a clerk. He didn't complete his secondary education; he studied only in Kazanlak. He immigrated to Israel one year before Iliya – during the Mass Aliyah [6](#) in 1948. He had three children: Bina, Yako and Matilda. Izak died in 1993 or 94 in Israel, but I don't remember exactly where.

Bina has four children: Zako, Nick and two more, whose names I don't remember. Matilda has three children: Isak, Albert and a girl, whose name I don't know. She is married to Haim – I don't know his surname – who is a Moroccan Jew. Yako also has a family with children, but I don't know them.

All my brothers were communists. Leon even took part in the Lenin conspiracy. [The Lenin conspiracy happened in 1934-35 when a group of 36 young communists decided to escape to the Soviet Union. Their meeting point was in the village of Elino, near Kazanlak and their path from there on was not known. They came back to Bulgaria on 9th September 1944.] The participants in this conspiracy killed six policemen on a ridge in Stara Planina [Balkan Mountains] and escaped.

My brothers loved books. I also share that passion. We read mainly progressive literature. It was mainly social and politically active literature, sympathizing with the left, that is the communist ideas. From the magazines we read 'Priroda' [Nature], 'Hiperion', 'Borba Sreshtu Alkoholizma' [Fight against Alcoholism], the so-called 'Vazrozhdenska Chitanka' [The Reading Book on Abstinence] and from the newspapers we read 'Zarya' [Sunrise]. These newspapers and magazines were dailies or weeklies, but they were oriented to the left, the communist ideas. Their goal was to educate the youth in the so-called 'communist virtues' such as solidarity, unity of thought and equality, abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes, rational and 'fanatic' temperance in everything. From the novels we read 'The Quiet Don' by Sholokhov [7](#) and '18th Year' by Alexey Tolstoy. We also read a lot of Zionist literature – for example, the reader 'The Jewish State' published by Theodor Herzl [8](#). We kept them in the attic later on.

Growing up

I was born in 1925 in Kazanlak. I spent my childhood playing near my mother. I didn't go to a kindergarten. I graduated from the technical school in Ruse. We studied various technical disciplines. Mine were related to ship construction in the town of Ruse. Before that I studied in the Jewish school in Kazanlak. Our teacher in Ivrit there was Eshua Baruh, who lived in Kazanlak. My favorite subjects were maths and natural sciences: physics and chemistry. There were no subjects I hated though. My hobby was woodcarving. I made my most beautiful sculpture in junior high school – I made most of them at that time. It was a small house made of wood. My elder brother Leon motivated me to that; he was very good at it. He even had an exhibition of wood-carved art in Kazanlak.

I was a member only of the abstinence association 'Trezvei' ['Sober'], after I started studying in the technical school in Ruse. My motives were related to the progressive attitudes at that time, that is the communist youth had to fight smoking, alcoholism and other vices that corrupt society. I was a member of Hashomer Hatzair [9](#) in Ruse, but for a short time only. Leon, my first cousin, the son of Uncle David, took me there. I remember that we, the children in Ruse, liked to play in the gym of Maccabi [10](#) built in 1937. There were horizontal bars, beams and other gymnastics equipment there. We played volleyball in the yard. By the way, the yard of my present-day home in Ruse is in the former yard of Maccabi and the former gym is now a car repair workshop.

I didn't go to the synagogue very often, because my parents weren't religious. But when we were young, we were obliged to go. Adon [Mister in Ivrit] Heskiya, the rabbi, made us go. He taught us Judaism and he was a wonderful cantor. He recited the Torah in Ladino. It was interesting. Then he gathered us in the synagogue and all of us read the Tannakh together. Heskiya sang wonderfully there. Later, we, the children, rebelled against it, influenced by the left ideas. My childhood friends were Albert Heskiya, who was one year younger than me and lives in Israel now, Isak Heskiya and Jacques Madjar, whom we called 'the Bolshevik'. Later the English authorities exiled him to somewhere in Africa, because he struggled against them. According to my mother's memories, they called him 'the Bolshevik', because at the beginning of the 1930s the people in Kazanlak had to vote who should govern the town – the democrats or the communists. He insisted on the communists and organized a group to vote for them. Before 1948 most of the young Jews were against the English, who, in turn, were against making aliyah to Israel. The struggle of people like Jacques Madjar took the form of small, but decisive activities, such as the publishing of angry articles in the local newspapers etc. I suppose he also carried a gun, but I cannot be sure, because I don't know concrete details about his life.

My parents were humble people. They didn't dress lavishly. Our house in Kazanlak was a modest one, although it was two-storied. It was built just when I was born. There was electricity and running water. We had five rooms: three on the upper floor and two on the first one. During the winter we heated the rooms with wood. There was only one bakery, which baked bread. But only the richer families bought it: Karageorgievs, Raynovs, Klisurski, Dochevs, etc. My mother had to use lots of whole-meal flour, because we would buy around 600 kilos of potatoes. She mixed the flour with the potatoes – that was how we prepared the bread back then. We didn't have any animals, except two lambs, which always followed my grandfather Yuda, but they were at his house.

It's interesting that my mother was some kind of relative to my bad-tempered grandfather Yuda – at that time all Jews in Kazanlak were cousins of the third or fourth degree. My mother was a bossy woman. She valued family relations very much. Her mother was also like her. I vaguely remember grandmother Sara [Bidjerano], since I was only four or five years old, when she died. We lived with her in Kazanlak. She had a strong organizational talent – I remember that she bossed around the whole yard. We lived in a strong matriarchate. Lots of Saras, Sarini and Solchitas [all these names are derivatives of the name Sara] in our kin are named after her. Their families have dispersed in Kazanlak, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Pleven and other towns. When my grandmother died, I remember that the yard went quiet. My grandfather Iliya [Bidjerano] from Kazanlak, whom I remember only from one photo, owned a small wood in the village of Skobeleva, which he sold.

As I said, my mother valued family relations very much and especially those with our uncles, her brothers. And this contributed to the hard financial situation of our family to a great extent. She made our father mortgage our house in Kazanlak so that he would stand surety for his nephew Iliya [son of Chelibon Bidjerano] for 4,000 leva. At that time this wasn't a small sum of money. And Iliya, after staying for a while in Kazanlak, escaped to Plovdiv. But my father was extremely honest, and had to mortgage the house to repay the loan; we had no savings. This was a very hard period for him. When we left for Ruse later, my father asked his cousin Shabat Moskona to sell our house. He sold the house, but kept a big part of the money for himself. My father died in the year we moved to Ruse, in 1939. The worries, because of the sale of the house and the everyday problems brought my father down and he died. I cannot say anything more about that. What his cousin did also affected him badly.

Decades later I met my cousin Iliya in Tel Aviv. He seemed to have become very rich. He felt guilty, because he knew very well what my father did because of him. He even suggested writing me a check in British pounds. I rejected that straight away. What was the use of doing that now when my father had been so crushed by it that he died?

In Kazanlak my family lived in the Karenska neighborhood at the end of the town. The Jewish houses were there. There was no anti-Semitism in our neighborhood. We were very united, surrounded by Bulgarians and Gypsies. In addition, Kazanlak was a town of military servicemen – the armory, the aviation and some infantry departments were stationed there. There were a lot of officers. And anti-Semitism was instilled among them. I remember that as a child I witnessed the argument between an officer and a villager. The officer mentioned that Jews were cowards. And the villager, who was a little older than the officer, said, 'Have you been to war? No, you haven't. And do you know what the Jews did during the war?' I remember how the villager disproved the officer's words and he blushed all over. That impressed me very much.

There was this opinion going around that Jews were cowards. For example, I know a story which I always tell with pleasure – about the three feats of Leon Krudo ['krudo' means 'raw' in Ladino] This great Bulgarian Jew, a volunteer in the Russian-Turkish War [11](#) in 1877, made sure that our soldiers kept their position in an uneven battle with a Turkish army of 30-40,000 soldiers. It happened in August. These are the events on Shipka Mount, when three volunteer bands defended Orlovo Gnezdo [Eagle's Nest in Bulgarian: a popular figurative expression for the Shipka Mount, at which a glorious and strategically important victory was won by the Bulgarian Volunteer Force under the leadership of General Stoilev]. Three volunteer bands! When they saw that the position would fall, because the Turks fortified themselves behind a redoubt and fired, killing Bulgarian soldiers, Leon

Krudo took a grenade and stormed the enemy, shouting, 'Ahead, comrades, we will die sooner or later!' They stormed the fortifications and drove the Turks away. This was his first feat. Later, during the hottest August days – 20th, 21st and 22nd August – the situation became critical. The Turks were advancing against five Russian and three Bulgarian volunteer bands. Leon Krudo stood behind a rock and since he was a trumpeter and knew perfectly the Turkish signals, he sounded their signal for retreat. And when the Turks heard it, they backed away. And his third feat was when he saw that the situation was almost hopeless; Krudo tore away the collars of a mule, mounted it and rode to Gabrovo. Radetsky was there. [A Russian general in command of the third (Shipka) contingent during the Russian-Turkish Liberation War, who supported the Bulgarian Volunteer Force in the most decisive moment of the Shipka-battle thus leading it to victory.]

In 1939, the year when my family moved to Kazanlak from Ruse, I started studying in the technical school in Ruse. I passed the admission exam, but there was one problem. Since it was a private school and owned by the industrial chamber in Ruse, I had to pay 2,500 levs per year as a tuition fee. Even orphans, and I was already an orphan, because of the early death of my father, were not exempt from that fee. My brother Iliya started supporting me. He worked as the director of a transport company. Before that, he had graduated from the secondary trade school in Svishtov. He was known as an excellent accountant and stenographer – one of the best in Bulgaria. Later he worked as a stenographer in the People's Court.

I was working while I was studying. I started work in 1940/41 as a turner in the factory owned by Avram Ventura – 'Zhiti', a factory for iron and wire products. They produced nails, bolts and nuts. In 1942 and 43 I was already working in 'Rekolta' [harvest] bureau, producing and exporting pulp for Germany. Of course, I worked only during my vacations and studied the rest of the time. Later, I completed my university education in Sofia – machine engineering in the State Polytechnic University.

I remember clearly that one year before I was admitted to the technical school in Ruse, I experienced the first anti-Semitic action towards me. That happened in Kazanlak. In 1937 the heir of King Boris III [12](#), Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha [13](#) was born and in 1938 I remember the King's maneuvers performed by the soldiers in the local barracks in Kazanlak – these were lavish military parades and demonstrations. There was a campaign against the ethnic groups – they often beat Gypsies and Jews in a fit of 'patriotic feelings'. By the way, I was among the welcoming people in 1938. Naturally, there were some hooligans there. They saw me and probably they knew me from somewhere – after all, the town was not very big – and they ran after me to beat me up. A classmate of mine, who was around, saved me. 'Don't touch him!' he said. He was quite big and that helped. I was impressed that I wasn't harassed by Ratniks [14](#) or by Legionaries [see Bulgarian Legions] [15](#) after the Law for the Protection of the Nation [16](#) was passed. In Kazanlak there wasn't much of an anti-Semitic attitude. And Ruse was a conservative town, because it was rich.

After the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed groups such as the Branniks [17](#) and Legionaries were immediately organized in Ruse. I was the only Jew in the class. I remember when we were given the yellow stars, the Branniks and the Legionaries who were in the technical school started harassing us, the Jews in Ruse. But, fortunately, I had some kind of protectors – some of my classmates. A classmate of mine Gavrail Zahariev regularly protected me, although his uncle was a fascist minister at that time; I've forgotten his name. He was my bodyguard. It was very difficult to instill hatred in the Bulgarian people towards the people whom they see every day and who are

their friends.

During the war

I will never forget the Brannik leader, Simeon Tonchev, who was also in our school. When on 7th March 1943 we learned that we had to leave for Poland – and we had to leave on 9th March – he came to my house to say goodbye, since everyone knew that there was no return from there... Because, when the Germans would show to my classmates soap, 'Seife von Juden' [Soap of Jews], everyone knew very well what the situation was and we abandoned all hope. I remember the Germans standing in line and selling cheap watches along the alley towards the Technical School, where the students often gathered. One of them took out the soap in question and showed it. By the way, Serbian prisoners of war were daily led along this alley in the center of Ruse during World War II.

Some people asked us during the war: 'Why aren't you rebelling?' I said, 'How can you rebel against an organized army? This means to speed your death.' Well, at that time we were lucky to be sent only to labor camps and to obey the anti-Jewish regulations.

I was sent to a forced labor camp [18](#), right after I finished school in 1944. At that time the children who finished secondary school were mobilized right away. So was I. I was not 19 years old yet at that time, but I worked for three months and a half in Jewish labor camps – in the villages Smyadovo and Vesselinovo [they are near the town of Shumen]. We repaired the Smyadovo-Vesselinovo road. It was very difficult – we had to break very hard stones made from syenite in the Shumen Mountains. I still have a deformation of my fingers from the work. At that time my family was supported by relatives thanks to the fact that my brothers and I worked for the brothers of my aunt – tanti [aunt] Zheneva, the wife of uncle Davidcho. They were big commissioners. We worked for them in the winter and in the labor camps in the summer.

There is an interesting story involving my brother Zako from the time he worked in the labor camp 'Sveti Vrach' in 1943. At that time the wagons full of Jews from the Aegean Thrace and Macedonia going to the death camps passed through their camp. [The Jews in the Bulgarian occupied lands in Yugoslavia and Greece were deported to death camps.] My brother wrote a letter to his wife describing the miserable condition of these people – stuffed like animals in the wagons with no food or water. He described the whole tragedy. But the authorities took hold of that letter and imprisoned my brother. We had to give the sum from the sale of our house in Kazanlak to the authorities in order to save him. Otherwise, he would have been sentenced and would have died.

Of course, there was a difference between the Jewish communities in Kazanlak and Ruse. In Kazanlak there was a community of more than 250 Jews, who were all some distant cousins. There were more Jews in Ruse – 2,500, some of whom didn't even know each other. But there were some families of intellectuals with very famous family names. The world-famous writer, Nobel laureate Elias Canetti [19](#), was born in Ruse. So were the great Bulgarian director Leon Daniel and many others. There was also a Bnai Brith lodge. That was a Masonic lodge, which had its club. That club was run by my uncle Yako Bidjerano – my mother's third brother. I must say that he was only an organizer and not a member of the club. So, I didn't know what its activities were. It wasn't a charity one. In any case, only rich Jews gathered there, for example the families Lazar, Aron, Uziel, Ventura – the father of Ana Ventura, who was a factory owner –, Iskovich, Levi and Mizrahi, who owned the socks factory 'Fazan'. To be honest, they were the color of Ruse. They helped us: for

example I worked in the factory owned by Ventura, 'Zhiti'. But their help wasn't motivated by principles, valued by the members of the Bnai Brith lodge. While in Kazanlak there were only one or two rich families and they were something like the local aristocrats.

Both Ruse and Kazanlak had their Jewish neighborhoods. The typical Jewish professions at that time were those related to trade. The market of Kazanlak was in the center of the town – around the so-called 'Tsarska Cheshma' [King's Fountain], which was built on the occasion of the visit of King Ferdinand to the town. Usually the vendors coming from the villages were arranged in a line. It was very interesting for me to watch the famous Bulgarian writer Chudomir Chorbadzhiski, who went around and took down in shorthand what the village women were saying to each other. His wife was my teacher in drawing. In Ruse there were a number of markets. We went to the one closest to the Jewish neighborhood. It wasn't much different from the other markets in the country.

There was only one synagogue in Kazanlak, while there were two in Ruse – a Sephardi [20](#) one and an Ashkenazi one. But there was a wonderful rabbi, Heskiya, the father of Zako Heskiya [a famous Bulgarian film director], in Kazanlak. I don't know about Ruse, because I wasn't from a religious family and I didn't go to the synagogue. But I know that the Sepharadi synagogue is very interesting, because its dome is built without supporting beams. However, the Jews in Ruse sold it to an Evangelic sect [a neo-protestant church] at the beginning of the 1990s. Of course, the Evangelists renovated it, with the help of an American foundation.

Post-war

2nd June 1946 is a remarkable date in my life, because then I met my wife: Ganka Penova Pashkova. I was a soldier in the Military Command Office. I saw her by accident. Opposite the office there was a small park [now the American market – this small and tidy market is called this way by the locals, but nobody knows why – and the synagogue are there]. I saw three or four girls sitting on a bench reading. Later I found out that they were just finishing their last year of high school in Oriahovo. I went closer to them. There were roses around. I said to myself, 'I like this girl' and picked a rose. It was then that I noticed that they were reading the philosophy dictionary of Rosenthal and Yudin. [M.Rosenthal & P.Yudin: 'A Short Dictionary of Philosophy', translated and published in Bulgaria in 1946] My first thought was that she was 'a girl of ours', a Jew. After all, she was reading the famous dialectical and historical materialism of Rosenthal and Yudin. I gave her the rose in front of her friends. We started talking; I showed them around town because they were from Oriahovo. They had come on an excursion. Then Ganka and I started writing letters to each other.

Later, I visited her in Oriahovo to help her with her graduation exam, because I had already graduated two years before. We continued to write letters to each other for three more years. All the time I wanted to tell her that my brothers and some friends were leaving for Israel, while I wanted to stay here and study to become an engineer. That was my childhood dream. In the end I wrote her a sincere letter, saying, 'Bear in mind that I am poor. I have no money so think carefully whether you want our relationship to continue. You must know my situation.' At that time we no longer had a house, because we had sold our house in Kazanlak. But she agreed. 'You might be just a porter, but I love you.' We exchanged letters for three years, then I went to Burgas where she was studying at university, we got engaged and after two or three months we got married. We married on 14th January 1949 in Ruse. Then I went to study at university in Sofia.

My wife was born on 8th February 1927 in the village of Galiche, Vratsa region. She isn't Jewish. Her grandfather Garto Pashkov died in the Balkan War in 1913. My wife lived in Oriahovo. She finished her secondary education there. After that she graduated from the Pedagogic College in Burgas. Her specialty was Bulgarian philology. She worked as junior high school teacher, but when she came to Ruse, she decided to train for a new job. She started work as a lab chemist in the lab of the Ruse plant for agricultural machines named after Georgi Dimitrov [21](#). She worked there for 35 years. She became a shock worker of the socialist labor.

My wife had a sister, Pavlina Penova Karaslavova, born in 1929, and a brother, Todor Penov Pashkov, born in 1937. Both were born in Galiche. Her sister Pavlina lived in Kazanlak. She retired there as a teacher in Bulgarian language and literature. Her brother graduated from the secondary technical school in Ruse. He worked as a technologist in ship construction.

In 1954 I returned from my studies. I studied the first year in Ruse and then in Sofia, in the State Polytechnic University 'Stalin'. In this period I wore glasses, because I worked during the night from 11 o'clock until 5 o'clock in the morning. The whole factory was dark at that time, except my cutting machine, an instrument processing metal and giving much productivity to the processed material. I made shafts, which I milled. I came home after 5am, and my wife woke me up at 7am every morning so that I would go to lectures. My eyesight got worse at that time.

We have two sons: Vladimir Rafael Beraha and Ilya Yakov Beraha. We raised them to feel Jewish. Vladimir was born on 30th May 1951 in Sofia. He graduated in machine engineering from the Higher Institute on Mechanization and Electrification of Agriculture in Ruse. Before that he was a labor service man in Svishtov, where he got a severe form of colitis, which he still has. Vladimir has been in Israel with his family for eight years now. They live in the Bulgarian colony in Bat Yam, the suburb in Tel Aviv. My son's wife is Bulgarian. Her name is Rumiana Beraha, nee Stefanova. She is an engineer. She was born in Lom and my son and she met in the school for ship construction in Ruse, where they both studied. They married in 1979 or 1980. They have two sons: Rossen and Avishay. Avishay is a student, who is now twelve years old.

When Vladimir's first son was born, he asked me whether they should name him Rossen Vladimir Rafailov, instead of Rossen Vladimir Beraha. This question is very important for every father and son: to take the family name – in this case Beraha – or Rafailov, after me, for the continuation of the kin. I chose the family name, of course, because I strongly believe that the family name should be preserved. It should be known so that our heirs know where they come from. Rossen was born in 1981 and Avishay in 1991. At the moment he is a student of the sixth grade, he studies in a high school in Israel. Every summer Avishay comes to Ruse for the vacation to spend it with his grandparents.

My son Ilya was born on 20th August 1962 in Ruse. He graduated in English philology in Sofia. He has been living with his family in New York for three years. Ilya's wife is Bulgarian. Her name is Zornitsa Beraha, nee Vladimirova. She was born 28 years ago, in 1975. She is an economist. At the moment she works as a clerk in a bank in Manhattan. They have one daughter named Niya, who studies in art school in New York.

After 1944 I remained in Bulgaria to serve the ideas of socialist labor. I could have moved to Israel like my brothers, but I didn't want to. I worked as an engineer in machine construction and ship construction in Ruse, Shumen, Vratsa and Sopot [the military plants]. At that time there was ship

construction in Bulgaria; now the economy has been destroyed.

I must say that during the totalitarian regime in Bulgaria I was repressed. I took part in the illegal 'Gorunya Plot' in 1965. Ivan Todorov, nicknamed Gorunya ['gorunya' is an old Bulgarian word meaning a strong and resilient tree, used metaphorically in this case] initiated the legendary attempt for a coup d'état against Todor Zhivkov [22](#). Ivan Todorov-Gorunya was a member of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and head of the department 'Marine Farming' in the Ministry of Agriculture. Before that he had been a partisan leader. His disagreement with the policy of the head of state Todor Zhivkov led to his decision to organize this [unsuccessful] coup d'état, commonly known as the 'Gorunya Plot'. I was also involved in a political scandal by my colleagues, but I want to emphasize that my Jewish origin has nothing to do with these events. I had two sentences. But I wasn't in prison. I will try to explain in short the reasons for that.

In Ruse I taught in the Technical University. Suddenly they decided to change the profile of the institute – they wanted to make it an agricultural institute, which sparked the protests of the teachers. I, personally, wrote a letter to Politburo [Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party] saying that it wasn't expedient now that we had a technical profile to turn it into an agricultural one. But the party thought otherwise. That's why they sent me to Sofia with some members from the academic circles to defend our ideas and try to keep the institute as it was. The rector Atanas Ganev, who is an agronomist – at the moment he chairs the agricultural cooperatives in Ruse – insisted on that transformation. His driver also came with us to Sofia. It happened so that his driver and I were in one room. He stole my letter. I hadn't sent it in advance, because I was told that the Academic Council had already prepared such a letter. So, it was meaningless to repeat one and the same thing. But then the big act of treachery took place – the District Committee of the Party sent my stolen letter to the party organization to review it. I was also a member of the Communist Party then. The party bureau gathered and the party secretary, who was one of the obedient ones, said that the letter he had received wasn't coordinated with the Party. Although I still also had the right to reply, after all! In addition, the academic council had also written a protest letter similar to mine. And I did not even send mine...and I told them, 'Let's see if I've written anything wrong in it.'

They started bullying me: that didn't matter, what was important was to say that I had made my colleagues think like me... I told them, 'I've discussed this issue with no one else.' But they didn't believe me. They wanted me to make a written confession. Then I realized that my letter had been stolen and I got very angry. I grabbed a chair and hit the party secretary Krastyo Petrov, who was just about to write, on the hand. It seemed that I cracked the bone between the elbow and the wrist of his right hand. They decided to form a conspiracy. I and some colleagues of mine were separated, like an anti-party group. It was easier for them to say that I was supported by colleagues of mine – political prisoners before 9th September 1944 [24](#): Tsviatko Lilov and Sabetay Levi, Donka Grancharova and some others.

I was put on trial, accused of hitting the party secretary on the head with the intention of killing him. So, they made up a sentence. But the judge, Lilyana Atanasova was a smart woman and saw what it was all about. She decided to sentence me to three years on probation, because I had to be sentenced in some way – the Central Committee of the Communist Party had ordered so. But the district chief Petar Danailov said at a meeting, 'How is this possible? How is this possible?' Meaning, how was it possible for me to receive such a light sentence. But my defenders were a district

advisor to the Party, Maximov and a very good lawyer, Markaryan, an Armenian. He was a bit timid, but he defended me well. Maximov also defended me well. After the defense Danailov got very angry and said that he would file an objection in the Supreme Court. So, they filed it. The Supreme Court reviewed the case and sentenced me to three years in prison; the sentence was suspended.

In 1963 I was released from the institute and I was sent to work in the SPATSP [State Plant for Auto, Tractor and Spare Parts]. I worked there for one year and I was the chief technologist in the plant. Then I went to work in the ship construction company in Ruse, where a university colleague of mine, Dicho Petrov Dichev, worked. He is also an engineer; he graduated in ship construction in Varna. Dichev was a very close friend of my lawyer Markaryan. And he told him, 'Listen, this man has two children. How could you put him on trial! Do you know what will happen to his wife and two children?' Markaryan thought about it and it seems that he realized that they had gone too far. Then he went to the presidium and said, 'Let's put right what happened.' He told our director, 'And you write a clemency appeal.' But I didn't want to be pardoned and insisted on that. But I also didn't want to go to a socialist prison. Dichev and Markaryan wrote an appeal, which they gave to me to sign. I told them, 'I don't want to and I will not sign!' But in the end they convinced me and I signed it. So, they saved me. They arranged a pardon for me. That happened in 1963.

As I mentioned earlier, I joined the so-called 'Gorunya Plot' aiming to depose Todor Zhivkov from power by an army coup d'état. I, personally, wasn't among these 140 people most directly involved in the coup, because I'm senior lieutenant by rank – one of the non-commissioned officer ranks. [Most of the 140 people were generals, senior and superior officers. The senior officers had ranks higher than a mayor and the superior officers higher than a colonel.] But I was the only Jew taking part in the plot. Yet, most of us were military servicemen. However, the authorities uncovered the plot. Thus, I received my second sentence. Yet, they didn't dare to sentence me. They didn't even call me as a prosecutor's witness. Because something happened before that.

I had to go to Sofia to collect materials for a report to be used in the education of welders throughout the country. I went to the welding institute, but they came and took me straight to the central prison. General Spassov from the Ministry of Internal Affairs awaited me there. He was assigned the investigation on the 'Gorunya' plot. He asked me, 'Why did you take part?' And I said, 'The world was created to be changed.' I wasn't scared. I had already become inured to everything. 'What? Don't you quote Marx on me!' And I said, 'Why shouldn't I quote him? He is your guiding light!' They kept me there a day and a half... But I told them nothing. In the end, Todor Zhivkov said that he wouldn't sentence all participants in the plot. In order to avoid news of the incident spreading around, they sentenced only the leader of the group in Ruse – Avram Chernev and lieutenant-colonel Blagoy Mavrodiev. Both have already passed away. We, the other participants, were not harmed, because that would have meant a big trial in court. But I was under surveillance for 27 years.

Although I took part in the illegal plot against Todor Zhivkov, I definitely think that nothing positive came out of the changes after 10th November 1989 [24](#). Yes, I was against Todor Zhivkov, but he was a man who valued Bulgaria. And the people who have come after him do not value Bulgaria at all. They would sell even their mothers, if they had the chance. They are selling their country. These are people, who... I have always said that, I can also give you something I wrote: 'Bulgarians, preserve your land!' I have a whole article, which has been reprinted four times now. I published it in the local paper Utro [Morning] in Ruse.

Of course, I have received money from Switzerland. What's more, we really depend on them, because my sons in Bulgaria were unemployed, although one was an engineer and the other a philologist. I couldn't support them with my pension. And they had to emigrate in order to find work, although they both have university education. We keep in touch with our relatives in Israel – by phone or by letters.

Glossary

1 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain

The Sephardi population of the Balkans originates from the Jews who were 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 First Balkan War (1912-1913)

Started by an alliance made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. It was a response to the Turkish nationalistic policy maintained by the Young Turks in Istanbul. The Balkan League aimed at the liberation of the rest of the Balkans still under Ottoman rule. In October, 1912 the allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire and were soon successful: the Ottomans retreated to defend Istanbul and Albania, Epirus, Macedonia and Thrace fell into the hands of the allies. The war ended on the 30th May 1913 with the Treaty of London, which gave most of European Turkey to the allies and also created the Albanian state.

3 Second Balkan War (1913)

The victorious countries of the First Balkan War (Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia) were unable to settle their territorial claims over the newly acquired Macedonia by peaceful means. Serbia and Greece formed an alliance against Bulgaria and the war began on 29th June 1913 with a Bulgarian attack on Serbian and Greek troops in Macedonia. Bulgaria's northern neighbor, Romania, also joined the allies and Bulgaria was defeated. The Treaty of Bucharest was signed on 10th August 1913. As a result, most of Macedonia was divided up between Greece and Serbia, leaving only a small part to Bulgaria (Pirin Macedonia). Romania also acquired the previously Bulgarian region of southern Dobrudzha.

4 Bulgaria in World War I

Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front

deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

5 Stamboliiski, Alexander (1879-1923)

Leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union and prime minister of Bulgaria. He studied in Germany and founded the Agrarian Union in 1899. He became a member of parliament in 1908. Stamboliiski maintained anti-war activities during World War I. After the war he held various posts in ministries, and in 1920 he headed the agrarian government and was also Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religions; Minister of Trade, Industry and Labor. As prime minister Stamboliiski was forced to sign the Treaty of Neuilly as part of the Paris peace treaty after World War I, which was a hard blow to Bulgaria. Besides the great territorial losses Bulgaria was placed in international isolation. In order to bring the country back out of it and stabilize its international situation Alexander Stamboliiski made intensive diplomatic efforts in a number of European states and introduced extensive land reforms in the country. On 9th June 1923 the officers' organization 'Military Alliance' performed a coup d'etat. Stamboliiski tried to organize a counter coup d'etat, but failed; he was captured by the participants in the coup and brutally murdered.

6 Mass Aliyah

Between September 1944 and October 1948, 7,000 Bulgarian Jews left for Palestine. The exodus was due to deep-rooted Zionist sentiments, relative alienation from Bulgarian intellectual and political life, and depressed economic conditions. Bulgarian policies toward national minorities were also a factor that motivated emigration. In the late 1940s Bulgaria was anxious to rid itself of national minority groups, such as Armenians and Turks, and thus make its population more homogeneous. More people were allowed to depart in the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949. The mass exodus continued between 1949 and 1951: 44,267 Jews immigrated to Israel until only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

7 Sholokhov, Mikhail Aleksandrovich (1905-1984)

Russian novelist, whose multi-volume novel *The Quiet Don* is considered one of the most important literary works published since the Revolution of 1917. This masterpiece depicts the conflicting loyalties among the Don Cossacks during the Revolution and sold millions of copies in Russia and abroad. Sholokhov was elected to the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body of the nation and received the Order of Lenin in 1929. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1965.

8 Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904)

Jewish journalist and writer, the founder of modern political Zionism. Born in Budapest, Hungary, Herzl settled in Vienna, Austria, where he received legal education. However, he devoted himself to journalism and literature. He was a correspondent for the *Neue Freie Presse* in Paris between 1891-1895, and in his articles he closely followed French society and politics at the time of the Dreyfuss

affair. It was this court case which made him interested in his Jewishness and in the fate of Jews. Beginning in 1896, when the English translation of his *Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) appeared, his career and reputation changed. He became the founder and one of the most indefatigable promoters of modern political Zionism. In addition to his literary activity for the cause of Zionism, he traveled all over Europe to meet and negotiate with politicians, public figures and monarchs. He set up the first Zionist world congress and was active in organizing several subsequent ones.

9 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.

10 Maccabi World Union

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

11 Russian-Turkish War (1877-78)

After the loss of the Crimean War (1856) the Russian Empire made a second attempt in 1877 to secure its outlet from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean by conquering the strategic straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) and strengthening its position in the Balkans. The pretext of the war declaration was pan-Slavism: protecting the fellow Christian Orthodox and Slavic speaking population of the Ottoman controlled South Eastern Europe. From the Russian controlled Bessarabia the Russian army entered Romania and attacked the Ottomans south of the Danube. With enthusiastic Bulgarian support the Russians won the decisive battles at Plevna (Pleven) and the Shipka straight in the Balkan Mountains. They took Adrianople (Edirne) in 1878 and reached San Stefano (Yesilkoy), an Istanbul suburb, where they signed a treaty with the Porte. This provided for an autonomous Bulgarian state, under Russian protection, bordering the Black and the Aegean seas, including also most of historic Thrace and Macedonia. Britain (safeguarding status quo on the European continent) and Austria-Hungary (having strategic interests in the region) initiated a joint Great Power decision to limit Russian dominance in the Balkans. Their diplomatic efforts were successful and resulted in the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. According to this Bulgaria was made much smaller and large populations of Bulgarians remained outside the new frontiers. Eastern Rumelia as an autonomous Ottoman province was created. In Berlin the Romanian, the Serbian and the Montenegrin states were internationally recognized and Austria-Hungary was given the right to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina to restore order.

12 King Boris III: The Third Bulgarian Kingdom was a constitutional monarchy with democratic

constitution. Although pro-German, Bulgaria did not take part in World War II with its armed forces. King Boris III (who reigned from 1918-1943) joined the Axis to prevent an imminent German invasion in Bulgaria, but he refused to send Bulgarian troops to German aid on the Eastern front. He died suddenly after a meeting with Hitler and there have been speculations that he was actually poisoned by the Nazi dictator who wanted a more obedient Bulgaria. Most Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust (over 50,000 people) regard King Boris III as their savior.

13 Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Simeon (b

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.

14 Ratniks

The Ratniks, like the Branniks, were also members of a nationalist organization. They advocated a return to national values. The word 'rat' comes from the Old Bulgarian root meaning 'battle', i.e. 'Ratniks' fighters, soldiers.

15 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.

16 Law for the Protection of the Nation

A comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation in Bulgaria was introduced after the outbreak of World War II. The 'Law for the Protection of the Nation' was officially promulgated in January 1941. According to this law, Jews did not have the right to own shops and factories. Jews had to wear the distinctive yellow star; Jewish houses had to display a special sign identifying it as being Jewish; Jews were dismissed from all posts in schools and universities. The internment of Jews in certain designated towns was legalized and all Jews were expelled from Sofia in 1943. Jews were only allowed to go out into the streets for one or two hours a day. They were prohibited from using the main streets, from entering certain business establishments, and from attending places of entertainment. Their radios, automobiles, bicycles and other valuables were confiscated. From 1941 on Jewish males were sent to forced labor battalions and ordered to do extremely hard work in mountains, forests and road construction. In the Bulgarian-occupied Yugoslav (Macedonia) and Greek (Aegean Thrace) territories the Bulgarian army and administration introduced extreme measures. The Jews from these areas were deported to concentration camps, while the plans for the deportation of Jews from Bulgaria proper were halted by a protest movement launched by the vice-chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

17 Brannik

Pro-fascist youth organization. It started functioning after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed in 1941 and the Bulgarian government forged its pro-German policy. The Branniks regularly maltreated Jews.

18 Forced labor camps in Bulgaria

Established under the Council of Ministers' Act in 1941. All Jewish men between the ages 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.

19 Canetti, Elias (1905-1994)

Born to a family of Sephardi Jews in Bulgaria, Canetti immigrated to England with his family at the age of 6. After his father's death he moved to Vienna, lived and studied in Austria, Germany and Switzerland and earned his doctorate in chemistry from the University of Vienna in 1929. In 1938 he moved to France and later to England. His first and only novel was 'Die Blendung', published in 1935 (tr. Tower of Babel, 1947). In 1960 he completed the nonfiction masterwork 'Masse und Macht' (tr. Crowds and Power, 1962). Canetti's work defies national categorization, is original and extremely attentive to sounds and meanings of language. In 1981 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, the first Bulgarian to be so honored.

20 Sephardi Jewry

Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

21 Dimitrov, Georgi (1882-1949)

A Bulgarian revolutionary, who was the head of the Comintern from 1936 through its dissolution in 1943, secretary general of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1945 to 1949, and prime minister of Bulgaria from 1946 to 1949. He rose to international fame as the principal defendant in the Leipzig Fire Trial in 1933. Dimitrov put up such a consummate defense that the judicial authorities had to release him.

22 Zhivkov, Todor (1911-1998)

First Secretary of the Central Committee of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (1954-1989) and the leader of Bulgaria (1971-1989). His 35 years as Bulgaria's ruler made him the longest-serving

leader in any of the Soviet-block nations of Eastern Europe. When communist governments across Eastern Europe began to collapse in 1989, the aged Zhivkov resigned from all his posts. He was placed under arrest in January 1990. Zhivkov was convicted of embezzlement in 1992 and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He was allowed to serve his sentence under house arrest.

23 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.

24 10th November 1989

After 35 years of rule, Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov was replaced by the hitherto Prime Minister Peter Mladenov who changed the Bulgarian Communist Party's name to Socialist Party. On 17th November 1989 Mladenov became head of state, as successor of Zhivkov. Massive opposition demonstrations in Sofia with hundreds of thousands of participants calling for democratic reforms followed from 18th November to December 1989. On 7th December the 'Union of Democratic Forces' (SDS) was formed consisting of different political organizations and groups.