

# Sofi Eshua Danon-Moshe

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Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Svetlana Avdala

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I met Sofi Eshua Danon-Moshe for the first time at a concert and we started talking immediately. It's not difficult to establish contact with her. We didn't like the performers and I started wondering why they had been invited. 'Oh, Svetla, Svetla, nowadays everything is being done for the profit; there's a hidden purpose even when you're greeting somebody.' During the concert she started crying several times. Even the bad performances managed to awake some memories. At another occasion she started talking to me with the knowledge of a biochemist; she started talking about the biochemistry of human relationships, i.e. about love and sex, and in the end she concluded, 'This is how we Jews are: we like to make love in the open, under the street lamps.' and I would say that this is how Sofi, or Sofka, as everybody calls her, is. You can't put her in a framework. She's here and there, determined; she's ready to infect people by her example, to sweep them along. She always does her best, no matter what the occasion is; she's a combination of gullibility, sensitivity, and sensuality with the addition of common sense and philosophical profoundness. She cried several times during the interview. Her thoughts ran over one another, the things she was talking about intertwined. She had so many things to tell me at the same time that she started choking. Nonetheless, it wasn't difficult to understand her because her stories were full of life; you could even feel the taste or hear the things she was talking about. And they consisted not only of descriptions but also attitudes, actions, speculations. I can hardly fully present my impressions in the text below because of the requirements for completeness of the evidence.



While processing the material I tried to 'comb' my thoughts on several occasions; I separated them and tried to organize them into a number of topics, but that wasn't Sofka, something was missing. In Bulgaria we have the saying 'an owl in a bag' which means that the person is always up to something. This can be applied to Sofka even now when she's 83. You can always meet her in the Jewish Center or in the synagogue. You will hear her hoarse voice. She's involved in all the clubs; her whole self is employed in the public activities and no matter what, she manages to be in all the places at the same time. She has remained at the same work place and with the same husband. And in the final interview I found out that she hasn't received any compensations or money for the things she has been doing although everything nowadays is being done 'for the profit.'

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## My family background

My name is Sofi [Simha] Eshua Danon, nee Moshe. I was born in Pazardzhik on 28th July 1923 [In the past this town was known as Tatar Pazardzhik until 1934 when only the name Pazardzhik remained. The population in 1989 was 77,340 people]. I have a degree in medicine, specialty: microbiology. I worked at the Institute of Hygiene where I had the academic rank of senior research associate. I speak Russian, Hebrew, and French.

I have two brothers: Shimon, born in 1927, and Shemuel, born in 1943. Shimon is a lawyer, whereas Shemuel is a medical statistician. My husband's name was Shemuel Yosif Moshe [1922 – 1996] and he used to be the director of the machine-tool laboratory at the Higher Institute of Machines, Electricity and Technology [HIMET].

I have a son, Yosif, and three grandsons: Petar, Shemuel and Yosif.

My father told me that his kin had come from Odrin [Edirne, Turkey]. His predecessors went there after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain [1](#). They moved through Northern Africa and Southern Europe and settled down temporarily in the Ottoman Empire. There were big Jewish communities around Salonika [Greece] and Istanbul [Turkey]. My kin moved from Istanbul to Odrin and from there separated and settled down in different places: most of them in the towns of Gorna Dzhumaya and Pazardzhik, which was a major market center at the time. [Gorna Dzhumaya was renamed to Blagoevgrad in 1950 with decree No. 209. The adjacent villages of Gramada and Strumsko became part of the town the same year. According to the statistics up to 1987 the population of the town was 64,882 people.]

I know a few things about my paternal grandparents. They were already dead when I was born. I only recall some of my father's stories about them. My grandfather, Shimon Danon, was a very tall man. He was neither a good merchant, nor laborious and persistent, nor strict enough with his children. He could spend a whole day sitting on a bench in front of his house, looking at a watch and trying to understand how its mechanism worked.

My grandmother, Sonhula Danon [Simha], had the most wonderful personality in the world. And I believe that my father cherished the dream of having such a woman until his death: a woman of soft personality who would make every person in the family feel comfortable, like a hen with her chickens. That was what she did for my grandfather and their children: my father, his two brothers, David and Samuel, and his two sisters, Roza and Matilda. Later my father told me that he used to work while he was still a child: he used to buy walnuts, break them and sell the nuts. So he had some money put aside. Once, when the family was without money my grandmother asked him to give her the money he had saved. She wanted to give it to her husband so that he could buy something. And my father asked his mother when she would return the money. She didn't say anything but one day she went to him and told him, 'Eshua, I heard that your father was distributing money and he said aloud that he owes you money, which means that he will pay you back, don't worry.' But my father was convinced that his father would never return that money. And he was right.

After my father had completed his military service, he fought in three wars: First and Second Balkan War [2](#) [3](#) and World War I [4](#), and then he wanted to get married. He and his brother David decided to make a list of all the unmarried young women from the Jewish municipalities and started visiting them. When they went to Plovdiv [the second-largest city in Bulgaria located in the central part of South Bulgaria, 125km from Sofia], his brother David liked my mother Ester and, as a matter of fact, chose her as my father's future wife.

I don't know exactly what the origin of my kin on my mother's side is, but I can draw some conclusions from the things my mother told me when I was a child. My grandmother, Dudu Nissim Assa, was a very bright and energetic woman. When they wanted to marry her she said that she would get married only on the condition that she had the chance to visit Brusa: a town in Southern Turkey [Editor's note: the city's name is actually Bursa]. And she set off with her father. They got on some caravans and went to the town. Only after that did she marry Grandfather Nissim Assa. I think that her strong desire to visit Brusa didn't happen by chance; it probably was dictated by some childhood memories or something.

Grandmother Dudu wasn't only a bright, energetic and curious woman, but she also took the conditions into account and knew well that when a Jewish woman got married she had to settle down into the house, because she had to be a housewife first of all, who'd take care of the home and the children and wouldn't have the chance to travel so much.

Grandfather Nissim and his brothers Yako, Haim, Rafael, Dudichi, Haimochi, my uncles Shemuel, Yosif and Leon and my mother's sisters Matilda and Liza, used to live in Plovdiv. My mother Ester used to send me there every holiday. And I would go, with a little suitcase but my mother always made sure I had some relatively new dresses. In Plovdiv my relatives would meet me with the words, 'Your mother has overestimated you again. She gave you bigger shoes so that you can wear them next year, too.' And I replied, 'No, you're not right, because they're nice.' 'Of course, they're nice, you look like a doll in a shop window.' And I would always ask, 'Grandfather Nissim, when will you put me in the shop window?' And he would say, 'It's Sunday today – impossible!'

Their house in Plovdiv was in the Jewish quarter, in the very center of the quarter, and they didn't have a garden. They used to communicate exclusively with the other Jews whose houses surrounded us on all sides.

My grandparents used to speak Ladino [5](#). I think that their food was kosher and they kept all the holidays and rituals, much more than we did later in Pazardzhik. I remember there was a church next to our house. It was called 'Sveti Georgi' [St. George]. And when the local people came out of their houses during Easter with burning candles in their hands I was very curious and used to lift the curtain a little so that I could see them. Their silhouettes were extremely beautiful. My grandmother didn't allow me to look at them; she used to tell me that they were in fact looking for a Jewish child. So she instilled negative feelings in me while I was still a child. As a matter of fact, my grandmother's main task was to instill fear in me because she was the one who was afraid. She was afraid that the Christians would harm me because they had condemned the Jews for crucifying Jesus Christ. Actually, I started feeling somehow different at that time.

There was a patriarchal order in my kin's home in Plovdiv. I remember that there were two families living in the house: Grandfather Nissim's and his brother Yako's. They were 'dzhamdzhi' [glaziers]: they delivered the 'dzhams' [window-glass] but didn't have their own shop. I remember that they

lived in one enormous living room. I can't describe how big it was: in one part of it slept Grandfather Nissim's family, in another Yako's. The families followed a particular order depending on superiority: my grandfather was first, then my grandmother, their children and so on. There wasn't a screen of any kind in the living room. There were some rather big closets in which the mattresses, the quilts and the pillows were put. They were hidden there during the day and in the evenings they were arranged on the floor.

Grandmother Dudu, my mother's mother, had suffered from Spanish influenza. As a consequence she got Parkinson's disease. Her sons, Leon and Yosif, had made a special chair with a little opening in the bottom so that she could be attended to easily as she wasn't able to stand up and walk. My mother used to send me to Plovdiv during my holidays so that I could sit next to her, to help her and make her feel better. She was practically immobile but she was full of energy, and she was sociable and liked to entertain guests. And whenever her friends came to her place I hid under the table. They were gossip queens. They would make coffee and when some of our lady neighbors appeared on the doorstep, they would start making comments about her immediately. It was a pleasure for me to listen to their chat. Once I even told my grandmother, 'You meet her in such a good way but I heard what you were saying about her.'

Irrespective of the fact that she couldn't move, she was aware of the order in the house, which she had created, and wanted everybody to stick to it. At home she was the queen, and the housekeeper. She often told me, 'Go to the wardrobe over there, in the right part of the top shelf there's a kerchief with embroidery at the ends. Bring it to me.' What does that mean? She was present at the ironing of the linen and she observed how her daughters and daughters-in-law did it. She gave instructions while they were doing it and told them where to put it. Yes, she used to know everything, even the exact places of the plates.

She was a woman of order and common sense, respected by all the people she knew not only because she was able to put the household in order but also because she could put in order the relationships between people. She could put everybody in their place, she showed the people their shortcomings but with a lot of tact, without quarreling with anybody. Take for example my grandfather who liked reading the Bible very much and knew a lot of stories from the Old Testament. He would sit next to her to tell her one story or another but the train of his thought was often broken. At such an occasion she would say, 'Come on, go to the kitchen and read it once again and come back to tell me the story because you have forgotten it a little.'

My grandmother had a reasonable attitude towards everybody. My mother, for example, had been the naughtiest of all the kids. She wouldn't stay at home, ignoring my grandmother's warnings, and she always stayed at the neighbor's. Once she wanted to be photographed and borrowed a dress from a neighbor who had typhus. Afterwards she caught typhus, too, and spent three months in hospital. That's the way things go, every waywardness is punished!

## Growing up

Grandfather Nissim, who was a glazier, used to be a strong man who cared for a delicious meal. I'll never forget his pickled vegetables; he used to personally put them in a tin. At Pesach, in the spring, he opened the tin for me and gave me tomatoes from there, but not green tomatoes, tomatoes that had just started to go red; pink ones. Those were my favorite pickles. My grandfather definitely had a special attitude towards food. In fact, I started eating regularly in

Plovdiv because of those pickles, otherwise I was very choosy. My mother used all means possible to make me eat. She used to always give me high-calorie food so that I would grow up and gain more weight because I was rather small.

I remember that when we were living in Pazardzhik she would always follow me around with a bottle of cod-liver oil pills but I invariably threw them away. Every time I went to Plovdiv an inseparable part of my luggage was the bottle of cod-liver oil but I would always find a way to forget it on the train. And once in Plovdiv, I didn't need it anymore. My mother's cooking was rather good, and when Grandfather Nissim came to visit us after my grandmother's death, my mother served him food and he always claimed that she was giving my father better parts of the dish.

I learned manners at the table for the first time in my grandparents' house. My mother had never explained to me what I should do at the table. I saw in their house for the first time that the bread shouldn't be put in the middle of the table but everybody was given some slices they were supposed to eat. In our house in Pazardzhik we were used to breaking up the bread, putting it into a bread-basket so that everybody could take a piece from it and return the basket in the middle afterwards. There wasn't anything like that in Plovdiv.

At that time and with my grandparents I learned to use a fork and a knife while eating. In Pazardzhik my mother used to look after her two children: me and my brother Shimon, who's four years younger than me. I was born in 1927, and my other brother Shemuel was born much later in 1943, and everything we did had to take place very quickly. My mother was always trying to feed me with a spoon whereas in Plovdiv nobody paid attention to me. Here's the knife, here's the fork, you would eat, it doesn't matter how.

My father, Eshua Shimon Danon, was born in Odrin in 1885. He died in Pazardzhik in 1947. He had finished his elementary education in Alliance Francaise [6](#) and, apart from Ladino, he spoke French. He wasn't very tall but was quite slim and very agile. My son bears a great resemblance to him. He didn't wear a beard or mustache. Those weren't fashionable at the time. He liked to wear smart clothes, and had nice ties. At that time a tie was a symbol of elegance. He not only wanted to dress smartly but he also insisted on having beauty around himself. He wanted us, the children: Sofi, Shimon and my mother, to look good. I even remember that he used to buy her Epsom salts so that she could lose weight because she was pretty plump and he was ready to set the example by drinking it with her but my mother didn't care that much about her appearance or about her attire and she often refused to support him in such initiatives.

He was also a merchant: he used to sell textiles to the peasants, kerchiefs to the harvesters and had rice-fields on a sharecrop basis. He took me for rice harvest on many occasions. Some Bulgarian peasant women used to work there. He used to buy kerchiefs and mastic for them. First he used to take a large quantity of mastic from somewhere, mastic in grains – 'sakus.' After that he used to separate it into portions and give a portion to each of them. It was such a joy for the girls who were gathering the crops. Later, when they got married he used to sell them kerchiefs and gold coins. The peasant women liked him very much. Afterwards, during the Holocaust, those same peasants would bring us grapes, cheese, lumps of butter, pullets. They would sneak them in secretly and bring us supplies.

My father liked having fun, singing, and he had an artistic talent. In the evening, after work, he asked the girls to sing and to tell poems. He used to tell me, 'Come on, my Sofi will tell a poem and



you too.’ And do you know what happened once? We were visiting a family in the villages Bushulya, Karabounar or Vetren, I can’t remember, but the rice fields were near those villages. One of the sons of the family stood up and started singing, ‘And the flag, the red flag...’ ‘Hey, we’ll be sent to jail because of you,’ my father said. ‘We’ll be hanged because of you’. That was a communist song. I know that before I was born, until 1923 [7](#), he had been a member of the Party but he didn’t restore his membership afterwards. I don’t know why. After we were born he became extremely religious and started looking for the roots of communism in religion. He used to say they had a lot in common.

My father went to work in the morning. He came back home to have lunch and went back to work for two or three hours. Afterwards he went to the café for a while and then he came home. He always said, ‘Oh, you can go wherever you want but you have to be back for dinner so that we can all sit together at the table.’ And he didn’t allow my mother to complain about us at dinner. And she replied, ‘Then when should I complain?’ ‘No,’ he said ‘when we’re at the table, you’re going to talk about something else. Let’s have fun now.’

My father liked songs very much. He had also told me in a song the story of our Tsar Ferdinand’s family [8](#): how he was invited to become our tsar and how he married Maria Luisa, and how their children were born and how Maria Luisa died when one of their daughters was born. I learned this story from the song, not from the books. He used to sing songs like that. He didn’t sing in a choir, he was just a romantic. He liked to have fun, and everything to be nice. Even when my friends visited me he would say, ‘Come on now, each one of you is going to recite a poem.’ They were embarrassed by that. I wasn’t embarrassed but just imagine when friends come to visit you and somebody makes them recite poems. He liked to make our meetings more refreshing through the arts and to make us familiar with interesting things through them.

Yes indeed, he was romantic and sentimental. He probably took part in some amateur organizations while he was young. Afterwards, until the age of thirty he fought in different wars. I don’t know what he did in the intervals. All I know is that he didn’t have much time. He was decorated with the military cross because he had saved a battery. He took part in the three wars: First Balkan War, Second Balkan War and World War I. He used to often talk about that occasion but I don’t know during which war it actually took place. While his division was retreating, he saw some abandoned weapons and without having any military rank, being just an ordinary soldier, he gave command to his division, ‘Stand still! Take the weapons!’ and that’s how they saved the weapons. When they returned he was congratulated on his actions.

He told me what they ate in the army. They lived in great misery, in freezing temperatures. He once told me how our army was freezing on 31st January and how close he was to freezing himself. But they formed pairs and succeeded in warming one another with their breath. And I remember how he was saying that it wasn’t cold all the time: on 1st February suddenly everything melted and there appeared rivers of water, and so everything melted. So it was an incidental, momentous freezing of our whole army. And how they waited for a truce, do you understand? They go to war and wait for a truce between the sides so that they could go home. And he sang, he sang a lot: ‘We fought bravely at Bulair, killed a lot of Turkish scum. Now we’re coming back, back...home.’ [Battle of Bulair: a heroic battle that took place on 26th January 1913 between the Bulgarian Seventh Rila Infantry Division and the Ottoman 27th Infantry Division. The Bulgarian army was victorious.] He used to sing that song after falling into a particularly sentimental mood. And when he sang it I

understood what a dream, what a yearning it was for them. My father had made some real friends in the army, Bulgarians. I remember that every Easter, our Pesach, some Bulgarians visited, they were his friends, but I can't remember their names.

My mother, Ester Nissim Assa, was born in Plovdiv in 1898 and died in Sofia in 1968. She had elementary education; she spoke Ladino, was quite religious and was a wonderful housewife. What did it mean to be a good housewife at that time? It meant complete lack of free time, no free day, not even a free hour. She cooked, did the washing, and the shopping. My father used to help her with the shopping from time to time. Additionally, she knitted whole curtains with applications of peacocks on them. Firstly, a kind of network was done: she used to leave some holes that later were embroidered by hand with the help of a framework. I know that she used to have a lot of such curtains. She embroidered with white Japanese silk that was known as DMC. She used a model; our lady neighbors gave her some pictures but there were some magazines as well.

I recall that my mother had a subscription for a women's magazine. I can't remember its name. There were recipes in it, and knitting patterns, too. She knitted a lot. How come I didn't get the knack of it from her! She knitted and used to boast about a pullover she had made for her husband to every neighbor. At first she knitted a gray pullover for him, and then a white one, which was as white as snow. Yes, she used to knit a lot, embroider a lot, and cook a lot. At that time homemade tarts were gaining popularity and were taking their place on our menu. The very first tart she prepared, I recall, was with biscuits and vanilla cream. She first put a layer of biscuits and then poured cream on top. And then she decorated it with cocoa and chocolate.

Apart from our Jewish relatives my mother used to have some Bulgarian friends as well. She liked to meet with them not only in our quarter. She invited them regularly to pickled vegetables, and salads. I recall that one of them was very puzzled when my mother advised her to put some grains of sugar in the green salad in order to suppress its somewhat sharp taste. As a matter of fact she recommended putting some sugar in all kinds of salads, they gave it a try and liked the result. She liked to communicate with some of our neighbors in the other quarters. I told you that the Jewish community was quite reticent, but she kept in touch with some Bulgarians. My mother's cooking was very delicious and she used to do a lot of other things as well. She believed that I had to be like her in every respect but I wasn't a very skillful follower.

At the basis of her upbringing methods laid the belief that every Jewish girl shouldn't only be well educated but that she should also be able to make and have an idea about lots of other things so that she would be capable of meeting the various needs of her family and manage the household. In that respect my father bought me a piano in 1936 and I had to learn to play it, not only read novels. I started taking private lessons but I was good for nothing. Now, I'm really sorry that I had the opportunity and I didn't take advantage of it. At that time I was doing a lot of things: novels, social work, etc. Why didn't I take advantage of that opportunity that other people didn't have?

We had different sweet things for the different holidays. At Purim, for example, we used to eat a lot of sweet things and really sweet they were because that holiday symbolizes the physical salvation of the Jews whereas at Chanukkah we celebrated the spiritual salvation. You know that we had a tsarina [queen] whose name was Ester who saved the Jewish people. And you start drinking at Purim out of joy and you drink so much that in the end you can't tell who the villain is and who the savior is; that's how drunk you are. And out of joy you feast on sweets: this is the sweetness from

the joy of the physical salvation in that historical moment. The best sweet thing at Purim is called 'tishpishti.' I think the name is of Arab origin. It's two layers of dough with a stuffing of walnuts and orange peel in between. It's baked and syrup is poured onto it. It rises like a Turkish baklava and it's very delicious, it melts in the mouth because the ingredients are only oil, butter, flour and the stuffing of walnuts. It's very sweet indeed.

My mother used to also prepare other sweets from biscuit dough and walnut stuffing inside called 'ahashu.' They are round and are also called 'roskhas de ahashu.' The stuffing is made of walnuts again with orange or lemon peel, some people used to put in vanilla but my mum avoided it. 'Haman' is the lord who wanted to exterminate the Jews and as we don't want to meet any more Haman's in our lifetime we prepare 'orezha de haman' – Haman's ears and Haman's hair. These are boiled, drained noodles sprayed with lemon and oil. It makes a very good appetizer for 'rakia' [9](#) and can be served with eggs, which we usually bake, and pickled gherkins.

There are symbolic dishes for Rosh Hashanah as well. It's at the beginning of the year and in order to guarantee a wealthy new year my mother used to put in a plate of a carrot cut into coins. We would also buy and put a pomegranate on the table so that our virtues would be innumerable like the seeds of the pomegranate. At Rosh Hashanah we used to make leek balls. My father had explained to me that all these earthly plants like leeks and beet symbolize the eradication, the extermination of the enemies: that is, to eradicate our enemies and to make them separate like the leeks, you know how its layers separate. We looked for symbolism in each vegetable or fruit.

At Fruitas [10](#), for example, we didn't use to eat so many sweets, we ate more fruits. My father and I would go buy the fruits first thing in the morning. That was the best part of the holiday. We would also go to the shops together with my brother. There was a big shop for tropical fruits in Pazardzhik. I can't remember if we used to buy fruit from there during the year but at Fruitas we would invariably go to buy raisins, figs, dates, oranges or tangerines. We used to buy lemons during the year as well. From there we would also take hazelnuts and walnuts, and we roasted them. At Pesach we used to put them in water and afterwards they tasted like fresh walnuts. At Fruitas we used to roast them a little. They become very delicious. Even now when I eat raw walnuts I start thinking how a little roasting would improve the taste. And when we roasted them a little bit more we used the soot that appeared on the nuts to paint our eyebrows.

We also got some hard flat loaves called 'boyo' made of flour, water and a little salt, without yeast or leaven. We used to eat them instead of bread. And on returning from the market with two bags full of those tropical fruits and walnuts we would add apples and Jerusalem artichokes to them. My mother put all the fruit in a baking plate with the Jerusalem artichokes in the middle. When my mother got older and her teeth weren't so good anymore she would cut a slice of Jerusalem artichoke and eat it with the help of a spoon.

At Pesach we used to buy matzah that was delivered from Sofia. It was ordered by the Jewish community in Pazardzhik. We used to put water in a pot with a sieve. We put the boyo on the sieve covered with a cloth in order to let it become softer. At Pesach we would also buy matzah delivered from Sofia so that my mother could make 'burmolikos' [11](#): round pieces of fried dough. She put the matzah into water in the evening so that it was soft in the morning. The matzah we were used to was hard, not soft like the one they give nowadays in the synagogue at Pesach. After that the matzah was drained from the water, made into dough, eggs and salt were added and then the



doughnuts were fried. And every time, absolutely every time, before Pesach, my mother would fry these so-called doughnuts in the morning before us getting up. They were served in a number of ways, like with salt, but we didn't like them that way. We preferred them sprayed with sugar powder. That was the best way. Some people preferred them with sugar syrup. In the morning before we washed our eyes there was this smell of 'burmolikos' that had pervaded the house. We were motivated to wake up earlier because we were attracted by the scent. That was the tradition. I don't know whether it should be called a religious or traditional practice.

In my family all the holidays were kept but not so much according to religion. The aim was to create a holiday atmosphere. Afterwards while playing in the street we would ask each other, 'Did your mother make that cake for the holiday? Or did they buy you new clothes for the occasion?' We got presents for the holidays.

Every six months or once a year our parents bought us a pair of leather shoes with a button on a strap. They were made in Czechoslovakia. We were used to wearing leather shoes and white socks but the socks very quickly turned gray because we used them all the time to wipe the dust from the shoes. We had to wipe the leather all the time so that the gloss wouldn't disappear. Afterwards at school we used our caps for that purpose. We didn't like wearing hats at all and used the cap to wipe our boots. That's what I recall.

My father built our new house around 1930. I remember how my parents carried whitewash and bricks. Before that we had lived in a ramshackle house that was in the same place. It was used after the new house was built by my father as an instrument shed. Our new house was very beautiful, one of the most beautiful in the town. Then, while it was being built, my brother was three years old and according to the belief his jerry had to be thrown in the basement so that the house would be strong. When the jerry was thrown my mother fell down and broke her head. Blood started dripping and it's believed that our house was so beautiful because of the blood at its base.

It was a storey and a half. There was also a big cellar where my father liked keeping wine and watermelons until Fruitas, which was usually at the end of January or the beginning of February. And it was known by all the people in Pazardzhik that watermelons could be preserved and kept fresh in our cellar for a long time. And at Fruitas, when the fruits were given out, he would also give out slices of watermelon.

It was a high cellar that we used instead of a fridge. There were cupboards covered with net to prevent draught. There we used to keep our cheese, yellow cheese, the cooked dishes because there were no fridges at the time. We used to cook on burning coal. Apart from the fireplace in the kitchen we also had some little braziers. And we used to cook on them. And above the cellar was the storey with the rooms for living: a hall, a big room in the middle, two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen. The toilet was outside. Apart from the cellar we also had a room at the top with a little terrace: an attic. I prepared for all my exams in this little room in the attic. It was a place for relaxation. A piece of paradise where you could be alone. And there was this beautiful staircase that led from the entrance to the hall.

In the hall there was a straw table and two straw armchairs. When the interned people came from Sofia [12](#) and we accepted them they said that one of the most beautifully furnished houses was ours. After the hall you entered the big living room, a sitting room with a big table in the middle, and a massive square table with big greenish oilcloth chairs. They were covered with oilcloth, not

with upholstery. And I was made to wipe the dust every day. There was a lot of dust in Pazardzhik. On two sides of the living room there were doors: one to my parents' bedroom and the other to the children's bedroom. My father had that dream. After returning from the war he got married and bought, maybe two second-hand beds. They were made of metal, dark-red in color. In the bedroom there was also a dressing table with three mirrors that could be folded and a wardrobe and a cabinet that were red, too. In the living room, apart from the table and the chairs, there was also a sofa covered with oilcloth, like the chairs, and a dark-red cabinet. That color that was as dark as wine and reminded me of velvet. That's how I remember it.

After some years had elapsed I know that my father went to Plovdiv to buy linoleum for the floor because it was made of boards. My mother took great pains to clean it; she rubbed the boards with a roof-tile in order to preserve the light color. So my father covered them with very beautiful linoleum. People visited us just to see it. Its edges were covered with typical Bulgarian embroidery. The children's bedroom was opposite. There were two beds opposite each other and a table between them. There were also some chairs and a wardrobe where we kept our linen and underwear.

We used a stove on coal for heating. Sometimes my father bought anthracite coal, which burned energetically and didn't produce so much ash because my mother had to clean the ashes every day. It was a difficult life.

We also had a maid: a girl my age, the daughter of a soldier, who knew my father from the Second Balkan War. She was from a nearby village. She used to help with the shopping and the washing.

There was a garden around the house. At a certain time we kept some hens but later we got rid of those animals. But, on the other hand, the garden was full of roses. My mother was known to be a great gardener. We had orchard trees and a lot of quinces. We were known for our quinces as well; they looked like apples and you could eat them immediately after picking them from the tree. They were very nice and juicy. And the trees were all over the garden. Half of the garden was tiled; the other half was left with the earth. And we used to light fires in the earth part of the garden to boil the tomato sauce, and the jams for the winter. My mother used to have some of those very big pots called 'payla.' It wasn't something that all our neighbors owned. Our neighbors next door waited for my mother to finish cooking to borrow it. That was how they rotated the 'payla' to one another. The last one to use it washed it and returned it afterwards.

Our house was the only one, which was painted in red. We were surrounded by Jews. There were little doors in the fences between the houses and we could move freely from one house to another, but there were ordinary wooden doors to the street. We didn't even lock them. The neighbors could just press the handle and enter. We kept in touch mainly with my father's relatives.

His two sisters, Matilda and Roza, and his brother David, used to live in Pazardzhik as well. David was our next-door neighbor. There was a little door that connected our houses and we used to be on friendly terms. We, the children, were very happy when Aunt Matilda, who used to live nearby, too, visited us because we always had fun together. My father and she started recalling their youth, the 'chitalishte' [13](#) and the activities they had organized there, the theater they had organized, the lectures, the topics they had discussed, different events which had taken place there, they talked about all sorts of things. And we were extremely interested because, you know, children are always interested in the events from the past. We stood at the windows, and waited for her and when we

saw her we started shouting, 'Tanti [Auntie], come and see us tonight, come and see us tonight.' If she agreed, we started jumping out of joy.

As a matter of fact I can't remember if our cousins ever visited us. They probably did but it didn't stick in my memory because, on the one hand, I was attracted by the stories of the elderly people about the past and the history and, on the other hand, I was involved in the public life at school and in the Jewish organizations.

In the 1930s the father of Uncle Bohor, Aunt Roza's husband, bought a gramophone with a diamond stylus. I remember that my father envied him a lot. Later, Uncle Bohor bought a radio, placed an aerial on the top of the house and sold the gramophone to my father. We used to listen to a lot of opera records at home and my father always told us off for breaking the records.

My parents sent me to the Jewish kindergarten even though my other brothers could have looked after me and they had the financial means to hire a governess.

The Jews in Pazardzhik had taken on a girl who knew Hebrew; I don't know where she had learned it. They had also rented a room in an old house. That was the place where the parents left their children to attend kindergarten so that the kids could be prepared for school. There we were taught some songs, some customs, some plays, like what they do now in the kindergartens, and some poems. And afterwards the children didn't consider school as a burden but as a continuation of the kindergarten.

At the Jewish school we studied all the subjects like Natural Science, Bulgarian Geography but we also had religion - Pentateuch. We studied at the Jewish school until the third grade: four forms and three grades. At the end we took an exam because it was a private school whereby our parents transferred money to the Jewish community [14](#) and the community financed the school. I think that was the way things happened and at the exams there was always a state commission to test our knowledge. And, I want to tell you that they were always worried by the fact that they had to put an excellent mark for every student.

The school and the synagogue were in one and the same yard and there I spent my childhood. We were at school until noon, we usually had four hours a day, and we then quickly went back home to have something to eat, we left our school bags, and ran back to school. Afterwards our real life started, in the big gym and in the yard. We waited at the iron gates to be let in but they wouldn't open them until 3pm and we begged, 'Tanti Rivka, come on, open the door, please...' And then we started playing.

The Zionist organizations had already been created by that time. Only very few were members of Hashomer Hatzair [15](#), there was also Betar [16](#); only boys were accepted in it. My mother was a member of the women's organization WIZO [17](#). There was another charity: its members gathered and visited ill people. Its name was Bikur Cholim [18](#). Very often they helped poor girls by preparing their dowry or buying a sewing machine so that the girl could prepare the dowry herself. That was the most precious gift, to buy a poor girl a sewing machine; she could prepare her dowry and that also gave her the chance to practice a craft. There's a famous sentence, 'You shouldn't go to bed with a light heart if you are aware that a brother of yours is going to bed hungry.' This was valid for the Jewish community and is still valid today.

After finishing the fourth grade I was accepted in Maccabi [19](#). All the children in it were divided into groups according to their age: Maccabi bands. Our mothers would sew the uniforms for us: white shirts with pleated skirts and sailor's hats. Maccabi was a Zionist, sports organization, which means that it encouraged the desire to found a Jewish state and at the same time our slogan was: sound mind in a sound body. The members of Maccabi were always in a dispute with the boys from Betar who believed that the Jewish homeland should be won by fight and war whereas we raised money because we believed the right thing to do was to buy the Palestine lands. We had some blue money-boxes [20](#), which were used for collecting the donations for that purpose. Every week we went from shop to shop, from house to house, to raise funds.

Magazines issued at the time, like Ashofar, for example, contributed to the raising of those Zionist spirits. There were a lot of songs and books devoted to that topic. I recall a title, 'We're Building Erez Israel' – there was such a leaflet, yes. I also remember a slogan from that time, 'We have to resurrect the biblical language – the Hebrew language, and we have to!' And there was a meeting of the young people where we had to talk only in Hebrew. We had a symbolic hoop that was given to a person who switched on to some other language besides Hebrew. The person who had the hoop on Friday evening had to pay two levs. That was a stimulus to study and revive that language. Even nowadays I believe that was a triumph of the Jewish state: to turn a biblical, dead language into living speech and modern language. Because the Jews understood that having their own language meant having a state, a nation.

My brother was a member of Maccabi, too. We talked a lot with him there, not so much at home but in the organization. I can say he was extremely active. He was very good at sports and always got awards for that. And there we had something common to talk about; otherwise we didn't communicate so much with each other. He was four years younger than me and was a boy and I was already a grown-up girl. He was a little jealous when I went out with boys. He never liked the boys I went out with. My parents didn't like those boys either. They somewhat overestimated me.

At Maccabi we used to put on stage literature trials. For example, for the novel 'Martin Eden,' a novel by Jack London. The protagonist commits suicide at the end of the novel. We appointed a judge, a prosecutor and a defending lawyer. There was an audience. And the prosecutor started settling the case by asking, 'Is it power or weakness to commit suicide?' The defender started defending. The audience expressed their opinions. And at the end the judge returned a verdict of 'guilty' or 'not guilty.'

We staged plays. For example, the Ukrainian play, I can't remember the author, 'It's hard to be a Jew.' [The author of the play 'Shver tsu zayn a yid' (Hard to be a Jew, 1914) was Sholem Aleichem.] I was an old woman. Can you imagine me, a midget of a girl, playing an old woman? We were somewhere on the square, I entered and said, 'Listen, people – defeat.' And the audience started laughing instead of crying. I was a girl wearing the clothes of an old woman and was shouting. I wasn't much of an actress.

We performed Bulgarian and Jewish characters. We not only played hand in hand but also tried to touch the young men with our shoulders. It was important to be next to some boy... it was important who you were standing next to, to hold hands.

I had a boyfriend while I was still in the sixth grade. He was a member of Maccabi, too, and his name was Miko Kalev. My friend Liska Natan also had a beloved. His name was Mishel Pamoukov

and he died on the ship, which set off for the Promised Land because it was overcrowded which means that a lot of people wanted to go to Palestine. That happened in 1942. The name of the ship was 'San Salvador' and it was a real tragedy [21](#). Mishel Pamoukov tried to save people but he couldn't swim. It was a tragedy for everybody because there were people who had set off for their Jewish homeland and they believed that God would be with them whatever might have happened. It was such a tragedy. They read the names of the dead in front of the school. We had gathered in front of the school and they informed us on the phone, 'One more dead body, one more dead body' and the lists of names.

I can't say I was indifferent to the Bulgarian boys but my parents didn't allow me to contact and be friends with them. They believed that they would ruin a Jewish girl. In general, my mother wanted me to be extremely sensible as far as boys were concerned. No contacts, but we were friends and communicated a lot in the organization.

We played, sang, there were a lot of organized activities. We didn't have free time to walk aimlessly on the promenade. Every year Maccabi games were organized which meant that from all towns - Ruse [city in Northeastern Bulgaria, 251km from Sofia], Plovdiv, Sofia - members of Maccabi came to Pazardzhik because it was a Zionist center at the time. At that time, before the Holocaust, there were about a thousand people in the Jewish community but that wasn't all, the Jews in Pazardzhik were very learned, convinced Zionists. It was known that Herzl [22](#) had visited Pazardzhik before going to the Turkish Sultan. That was the rumor among the Jews in the community.

All the participants in the Maccabi games had to present their exercises. We used to make pyramids, took part in different competitions, for example, we had to put our feet in sacks, to have a thread and a needle in your hand and while jumping with the sack you had to put the thread through the ear of the needle. Or we had to run with the sacks holding a raw egg on a spoon. We had to run and were trying to come first. We used to jump on a vaulting horse, on parallel bars, we made some exercises with very beautiful figures: we all moved to the left or to the right and as a result we achieved some very beautiful tableaux.

We also paraded on the streets of Pazardzhik with our blue and white flag. One of us was holding the national flag, another, our flag. And when we were passing, the people watching us said that we had our own holiday. Nobody tried to stop us; there were such parades in Pazardzhik between 1935 and 1939. And I never felt a certain attitude towards me being a Jew, even when I went to the Bulgarian high school. They liked us very much and knew that we had been prepared well in the Jewish school.

I recall that when my friend Liska Natan and I went to the school yard on the first school day there were all the students from the fourth grades, which we were supposed to join, standing in rows and I heard some voices saying, 'I hope they won't be in our class because they are very good students, very serious competition.' That was the reason they didn't want us. So they didn't know anything about us, they had seen us but that didn't mean that they had a different attitude towards us. On the contrary, very soon both teachers and students started liking us. There were two of us, Jews, in the class; the rest of my classmates went to other classes or to vocational schools of economics.



I started liking some subjects and teachers more here at high school. I can't say that at elementary school I had developed a special liking for any of the subjects. But at high school I used to like Chemistry, Natural Science. In the sixth grade we studied Psychology, in the seventh, Logics, in the eighth, Ethics. They were part of our training in Philosophy. I was keen on it because it was the subject that could explain the world and provide answers to my questions. And additionally, those subjects gave you the chance to analyze things and didn't give us ready-made answers. Just the opposite, they gave you the chance to analyze different things in a variety of ways. That appeals to children very much: you find the answer to your personal 'why.' I had a favorite teacher: my class teacher whose subject was Chemistry.

The principal, Hadzhitodorov, liked me very much, too, maybe because he taught Psychology, Logics and Ethics. Our Literature teacher liked me very much, too. Just imagine the situation: I'm in the fourth grade, into the classroom comes the Literature teacher, Lyuba Voivodova, known by the whole of Pazardzhik. She gave us the following task, 'For the next time I want you to write down an essay entitled 'Sweet Grapes,' or 'A September Night in Pazardzhik.' That was how they taught us, not by following patterns and clichés. And during the lesson, I probably made an impression, a little girl with glowing and intelligent eyes. 'Who wants to read?' and I raised my hand immediately and said 'I, I...' 'Ok, the girl in the red blouse.' At that time we still didn't have uniforms. And I started liking this teacher right away because she accepted me, because she praised me for the nice, sensual way in which I had described the grapes, with the little drops of dew on every grape, how I imagined how it melted on the tongue and it felt as if a bee had brought her a drop of honey. And afterwards not only the teachers started accepting me but the students as well.

In high school I made friends with Bulgarians for the first time. It happened like that. I sat at the same desk with the girls but I don't think we spent our free time together, by visiting each other or anything like that. Those were our contacts. I went to one of them to take the translation in Latin, later she came to me to take the essays in French and that was how we started sharing our lives, we had things to talk about but we didn't meet after school, didn't visit each other. We became closer after a trip to the Bachkovski cloister, which was organized by the school. There we felt more at ease. Our teachers even said that they had started knowing us better since that trip.

We visited each other more after finishing high school. Later, during the Holocaust we weren't allowed to continue our education whereas my Bulgarian classmates went to university [23](#). And do you know what a tragedy that was for me? After the first semester, after they returned from Sofia and started telling stories about their life as students. That was a dream for us – to go to university, but we could only listen to them and our hearts bled.

At that time, before the Holocaust, the Jewish community in Pazardzhik was quite big – about 1,000 people whereas Pazardzhik, when I studied Geography, had a population of 14,000, then 19,000 and 25,000 overall because the town was a market center. There were people moving to the town from the villages all the time.

The synagogue was in the center of the Jewish quarter. They were in one and the same yard with the school.

What I recall very well about the synagogue was that we were there every Friday evening. It was quite a big synagogue. At least, it looked very big in my eyes. The women stood on the balcony, the men were on the first floor, and we, the children in the rearmost part where there was

something like a sofa, something that was stuck to the walls made of wood and we cried and laughed a lot. When it's forbidden to make noise you always find something to be noisy about. We either looked at the tips of our shoes or at something that was near us and all we were capable of doing was laughing. And the shammash passed by us like a real Napoleon and looked at the kids and if we were laughing too much, an announcement was made, 'Eshua Danon's daughter, be quiet!' And you can imagine what happened at home when we returned with my father.

We didn't have a rabbi at the synagogue. One didn't come from Plovdiv either. There was only a chazzan and I can't remember his name, and a shochet whose name was Ben Avram. They were both very intelligent.

In the synagogue there was a little, how shall I put it, a little structure called midrash. When there wasn't a mass, the Jews could go there, to read. There were a lot of books, extraordinarily many books, and perhaps they were used by the people who wanted to study Judaism or religion. Later, a Jewish club was founded. Our house was near it. Our parents, after dinner, used to go there to meet friends. There were separate tables where different groups of people could sit. They drank coffee and ate a type of jam called white jam. People from different communities, Bulgarians, were invited to the club to read lectures. My parents were very excited by the lectures. They explained all kinds of issues to them, they discussed political and health subjects and for weeks on end they commented on how eloquent and convincing the lecturer had been.

There wasn't a Jewish chitalishte in the Jewish quarter, but there used to be a town chitalishte called 'Videlina.' My parents would go there when there were concerts or some other performances. A little further from the Jewish quarter was Varosha: the garden in front of the Boys' High School where every week there was a brass band concert. My father liked to take walks there with us very much – with mum and the children. I remember how slowly we walked in it. And we passed by some people, greeted them, like in the movies, stopping for a minute or two, moved on and, most importantly, we listened to the brass band, which was the special entertainment once a week.

There were also some confectioneries on the main street where my dad used to take us every Sunday morning but we sometimes went there alone.

I remember the cinema very well: Charlie Chaplin, Krachoun and Malcho, 'Tarzan.' [Krachoun and Malcho were the Danish predecessors of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. The actors' real names were Harald MADSEN and Carl SCHENSTRØM. In Europe they were known as Pat and Patachon, in Bulgaria as Krachoun and Malcho (lit. the tall one and the short one).] My mother liked the cinema very much, too, and when she met her friends she would ask them, 'Have you seen that movie? Is there 'gorchichka' in it?' 'Gorchichka' means a sentimental element, for example, a poor miserable girl who can't meet her love or something like that, something like the modern serial films [soap operas] from Latin America. I remember that during the Holocaust and a little before that we boycotted the German movies. We didn't go to see them; not a single young man went to see them.

Every holiday my mother, brother, father and I went to the mountain, to Chepino or Strelcha areas most often, but my father never stayed the whole time. We didn't go to the seaside. My mother was concerned about the fact that my brother and I were very choosy about food and believed that the fresh mountain air would whet our appetite. But what happened in the end? When we returned

the neighbors would say, 'Look at you, how good you look with some weight on, but Sofia is still very thin.' And my mother would be angry because she remained plump whereas I was short and thin.

It was quite a spectacle, the preparation for the trip. In the evening we would put the luggage on a horse cart: mattresses, quilts, linen, cutlery. The maid would come with us with the cart and on the following morning we would take the train. My father was always joking, 'Holiday, ah! Put the pots under the bed and, oh, you have a holiday!' There in the pine woods my mother cooked all day long: she roasted peppers, and made bread. When my father was with us he would go out for walks, to Kleptouza area for example, and my mother would go to the mineral baths.

### During the war

I was aware of Hitler's outrage in Germany from 1933 until 1935. We studied about that at the Jewish school. I recall that a teacher told us about that, I recall an essay of mine, which ended like, 'It's difficult to be a Jew, especially in Germany.' I also remember that we studied religion and the focus was on anti-Semitism in other countries throughout the history of the Jewish people.

The war broke out in 1939 [24](#). I graduated from the Jewish school in 1937 so in that time I was already at high school.

In 1941, the decree that obliged us to go to the municipality to buy the so-called badges [25](#) was introduced. And they weren't that cheap. [No documents could be found on the purchase of Jewish badges. In the literature and most of all in the State Newspaper decree No. 212 was published concerning the wearing of the yellow star.] And this wasn't the only thing we had to do. There was supposed to be a star sewn on each piece of clothing, and so we had to buy badges for all our clothes and sew them on. And we found a way: we stuck them on the clothes with a piece of wire. Nobody was brave enough to go out without a badge. The people who knew you started shouting, 'Hey, where is your badge!' Especially some of the young boys; the so-called legionaries [26](#) and Branniks [27](#). They made sure that we wore the badges.

And a little later they started breaking the windows of our houses. My father was forced to make shutters. And they succeeded in breaking the windows through the shutters. We calmed ourselves down with the words, 'Maybe a glazier is breaking the windows so that we would go and order new windows from him.' But in fact we were perfectly aware that those were bands of young men who roamed the streets at night to throw stones. And it was easy for them because all the Jews lived in the same quarter. They walked around carrying tens of stones in the evening. They didn't break windows during the day. And you can imagine, we went to bed shaking because we were scared that they would come into the house. And on hearing a noise we knew the attack was beginning.

My father couldn't practice his job anymore. It was impossible to own land, or to own a shop. This was the end to our rice-growing. We paid 25 percent taxes all the time on our property. [This wasn't due to the Law for the Protection of the Nation but another law, which was passed in 1941. Its exact name was a Law for One-off Taxation on the Property of the Individuals from Jewish Origin and it was published in the official gazette, issue 151 from 14th August 1941. In general, throughout 1941 the 25th National Assembly voted and passed laws which in their essence were aimed at the economic restriction of the Jews.] We wrote declarations all the time where we declared our properties so that we could be taxed. We paid a thousand types of taxes on the

houses as well. We were extremely suppressed.

There were job restrictions, too, because there was a law: in order to hire a Jew at a certain place there had to work at least three Bulgarians. So the proportion Bulgarians – Jews was supposed to be three – one. Where could you find such a working place in Pazardzhik? Who was brave enough to hire a Jew? There were parts of the town where Jews weren't allowed at all.

The Germans came in 1941 and they were stationed in the building of our high school. We moved to the other buildings. Some of my classmates and I dared to pass by the high school and even entered the schoolyard. There we saw how the Germans squeezed either their toothpaste tubes or their tubes containing yellow cheese, something that looked like our spread cheese. They had loaves of black bread, they squeezed the tubes on the bread and started eating and our soldiers, good heavens... there was no other food for them apart from beans and lentils. Whereas the Germans – toothpaste! Hitler was looking after them very well. They were stalwart, with green uniforms, while ours wore uniforms that were beige in color and boots that weren't very representative. I was very envious and was indignant all the time, 'How is it possible...'

I, by chance, talked to some Germans who were stationed in the school. They were young handsome boys, very handsome. I told them I was a Jew, I wasn't scared, and I wasn't hiding the fact. And one of them told me that Jews weren't nice people. 'How come?' I asked. 'Take Einstein, for example, and everything that he thought of.' And they told me in reply that it wasn't Einstein who discovered those things, it was the Germans who did and he stole the results from them.

The Gypsy [Roma] children in Pazardzhik had found out that the Germans were persecuting Jews. They had shoe-cream boxes and the Germans went there to have their boots polished. In order to show that the time for paying had come the Gypsy child would tap its brush on the box which was the signal for 'Come on, it's time to pay.' The German would often show that he didn't have any intention to pay. And do you know what the Gypsy would reply, 'Come on, man, do I look like a Jew?' The fact that the Jews were unwanted and persecuted was well known. Those words meant, 'I'm not a Jew whom you don't pay, who you torture, who you persecute...'

There were Armenians, Jews, and Gypsies in Pazardzhik. Some Armenians, but not a lot, the wealthier ones who owned shoe and watchmaker's shops in the main street, ingratiated themselves with the Germans and tried to show their solidarity. They tried very hard because Armenia was part of the USSR and they had to show that they had nothing to do with the Soviet Union.

The principal of our school, Hadzhitodorov, was very liberal. I was his favorite student. At that time it was a custom to organize balls. My first ball was in the sixth grade. It took place in the building of the Girls' High School. There were only girls. But when we were finishing school in 1942 the principal decided to make one single farewell ball for the Boys' and the Girls' High Schools. It took place in the 'chitalishte.' Jews weren't allowed to walk on the street that was leading to the 'chitalishte.' That was a main street and in the big hall of the 'chitalishte' there were drama performances, concerts and we were forbidden to attend all those events. But I asked the principal, 'Shall I come to the farewell ball?' and he said, 'But, of course.'

I needed a beautiful dress. I didn't want to go in my flannelette dress and the black apron. My mother managed to make my dress from some of her slips, which she used to wear under her silk

dresses because those were usually transparent. Those slips were made of morocco. Now I know that the name of the fabric, morocco, comes from the name of the country. That fabric was a little rough, dark blue in color.

My mother sewed a dark blue dress for me with a silk ribbon that was blue, too, and a white belt. That was my ball dress. Of course, I had to put on the badge. I went to the 'chitalishte' with my friends. At a certain point I noticed that the boys from the Boys' High School had gathered in a corner and were pointing at me. I slowly made my way to the principal and told him, 'Something's happening, Mr. Principal.' 'It's nothing. Stay here next to me.' And the boys, all of them together, started coming in my direction and said, 'Hey, you, the Jew, get out of here!' The principal whispered in my ear, 'Don't move from here!' And I remained there.

A police officer came in five or ten minutes. He came into the room and immediately moved in my direction. He was wearing a cloak and had a sword. He was so tall and was coming towards me in giant steps. 'Are you a Jew? Come on, go out!' And the principal couldn't say anything, poor man. The police officer just told him, 'She doesn't have the right to be here.' And the principal replied, 'But how is that possible? She's a student of mine.'

And we went out and walked down the main street. I will never forget that. Imagine a short, thin girl, a midget of a girl, and two steps behind the guy with the cloak and the sword. And people turned to look at us. They didn't know what was going on; was I some kind of a criminal or what? And he walked with me as far as my house. And you can imagine how my parents met me. I only managed to reach the bed and fall on it.

Thank God that we can forget, thank God our memory is structured like that: to forget the bad things. Do you know what kind of stress that is – it remains hidden somewhere. And it decides to come out all of a sudden. It isn't completely wiped out. It influences the formation of one's character. It transforms everything into fear, there's always that fear, that neurosis that something bad would happen, that the person who's looking at you has something bad on his mind.

Yes, I have probably started feeling different since then and I have always wanted to leave for Israel. It was a matter of life and death to have our Jewish center. I even want to tell you that in 1941 they closed all the Jewish organizations and someone from the central direction of UYW [28](#) came to inform us that if we became members of UYW we would help the anti-fascist movement. And we all started assisting that movement: we collected clothes, money, and food, in order to help the partisans and the political prisoners. And I moved from Maccabi to UYW.

After that the interned citizens of Sofia came to Pazardzhik. We had to accommodate them in our houses. Some of them slept in the school on bunks. There were some ill people among them. My mother, father and brother slept in one room. I and one of the daughters of Mois Farhi, one of the interned families, slept in another room. The third room we gave to the mother, father and her brother. The living room, through which all of us passed, was used by another family also from Sofia: a man, his wife and two children. I can't remember their names. We also gave out the room in the attic. I still can't believe that all we had gathered through the years - rice, flour, sugar - was what we had to share with those people from Sofia.

In the beginning we didn't have the right to go out after nine o'clock. All of us had to be home by 9.05pm but the time for staying out was gradually reduced; we could stay out for only two hours a



day. Some of the peasants brought us food but we organized a soup kitchen for the people from Sofia. One of the women did the cooking: something like a soup with a few potatoes, beans; a meal with lots of water, that we poured into mugs with a ladle. I was one of the first to give out the food. We had job restrictions, we didn't have food coupons, and so we weren't allowed to attend cultural events. We were attacked on all sides. They said all the time, 'The Jews in Pazardzhik became too many.'

I met my husband Shemuel Yosif Moshe [1922 – 1996] at that time. He was the son of one of the interned families that rented a room in the house opposite us. I often tried to peep into their little room through the windows. I could see a book on the table: 'The Trade Union Movements in the World' and I was very impressed because I didn't know anything about these trade union movements. How was that possible? We, the young Jewish people, didn't stop studying with the end of school, we were always curious about things. There wasn't a single book by [Louis] Bromfield or [John] Galsworthy that we hadn't read. And if somebody mentioned 'The Forsyte Saga' and I hadn't read it, I would go to the library and do my best to find it and read it. We couldn't afford to be lagging behind. There has always been this desire in the young Jewish people to succeed, to be first. Because that was our slogan: 'you have to be a head taller in order to break through. If you are as good as the others, you won't succeed, you have to be better.'

At the beginning Shemuel was in a forced labor camp [29](#). No man from our family was mobilized into a labor camp. My brother was too young and my father was too old.

I first met my future husband's sister. Her name was Miriam, she was a year younger than me and she said she had a brother in the labor camps, and another brother called Benzhamen. Their mother died in 1932.

Shemuel came back from the camp in the winter, in December, because that was the routine. They were allowed to go home in December or January and returned to the camp in February or March. It turned out that my beloved from Maccabi, Miko Kalev, was with my husband-to-be in the same labor group in Saranevo and when they returned in December I went on walks with Miko. Shemuel met us, they greeted each other and Miko introduced us. Some time had elapsed; Shemuel saw me in the street and asked me, 'Why aren't you greeting me?' 'It's not true – I'm greeting you!' A belt of mine was missing and years later he admitted that he had stolen it from me. That was how our love started – with the theft of my belt. At first I didn't want to start a relationship with him because it seemed as a betrayal but later Miko went to Sofia to study, he became a student and his life took him in another direction.

Even today I can't say what I liked in Miko and also in Shemuel. They both had their good sides. At that time all the girls on the Jewish street had a boyfriend. I had to have one, too. I was very attracted to intelligent men. They arouse in me the interest towards the things I wasn't familiar with. For example, in the labor corps around Pazardzhik there were a lot of students from Sofia. One of them came to the dentist in Pazardzhik and we, three girls, immediately fell in love with him because he was a second-year student of medicine. He knew so many things. And my friends and I decided to spend the night together, reading the books we had, so that we could make a brilliant display of our knowledge.

Irrespective of the restrictions, we found a way to keep our morale high because life had to go on. When there was a ban on our going out, we sneaked through the doors between the houses and

managed to share the news. The code our fathers used to share the news about the events was very funny. They called the Englishmen, for example, 'algouzha' – a needle. When Tripoli fell, a very important battle, because of the liberation of Africa, they didn't say Tripoli fell but said, 'Las tres fustas fell' 'Fustas' means skirts and 'Las tres fustas' literally means 'the three skirts fell' [a pun]. That was how the news was announced. They listened to Radio London, and Radio Moscow. And all the news was shared the following day.

One of the girls we accommodated in our house got engaged. Her name was Ginche Farhi. We prepared the sweets, and guests came. The fiancé of that girl, whose name I can't remember, had ordered a lot of 'mavlacheta:' hard sweets like lollipops and they were delivered by a courier. The whole house was decorated with them because on that day we celebrated Purim as well. The wedding took place later. One of my classmates, a Bulgarian and a communist, even told me, 'I can't understand you! You are laughing, there are celebrations, noise.' Yes, life was going on in spite of everything but people were finding it strange and were restricting us even further that way. We were young, we were persecuted but so what – we were forbidden to laugh aloud or what?

At that time, during the Holocaust, my mother got pregnant with my youngest brother Shemuel. She believed for a long time that she had gotten some illness but in the end she found out that she was pregnant. I was eavesdropping once and heard her telling my father off for not being careful. The times weren't suitable for raising children. So, my brother Shemuel was born on 19th October 1943 and, of course, raising him under the conditions in which we were living was a difficult task. My mother hadn't expected to get pregnant at the age of 45 and had given out the diapers and the baby clothes to the people accommodated in the school because there were babies among them. Her labor-pains started in the yard. We took her to the maternity ward right away but she was of age and her loose muscles weren't able to throw away the placenta. So we took her to the hospital where they managed to push out the placenta.

Afterwards the Brit ritual was performed where all the relatives were present. During the Holocaust several people had learnt to perform Brit at home. In order to sedate the baby and to make the procedure less painful all the people had to dip a finger in wine and the baby licked it. The next morning the baby started vomiting a lot because our relatives were overzealous and each of them gave the baby two fingers of wine to lick instead of one, because they wanted to reduce the pain. The diapers were a problem as we had to tear and sew anew, nobody gave us anything. It was such a whirlpool; we were in quite a scary situation.

Nonetheless we found a way to stay cheerful and in a good mood – you know, a Jew may look miserable but his spirits are always high. We relied on religion. We believed that God wouldn't punish us but he did very many times. We believed that the Englishmen would support us, that the Americans would intervene because there were a lot of rich Jews in the USA and they were respected there. Yes, we believed, but what happened: six million Jews perished. And one more example: we were to be interned on 10th March 1943. We were on the deportation list. We were gathered in the school but in the afternoon they told us it had been canceled. I can't remember any protests from the population of Pazardzhik.

That was a strange feeling. You don't think I realized they were gathering us to kill us, do you? There wasn't anything like that. We knew we were being sent to Poland to work but we wouldn't be killed in Poland, how was it possible to kill us. We had the feeling this all was happening to

someone else.

The men were in labor camps, most of the women were alone and it's a hard job to look after children alone. Thank God we are able to forget. Otherwise there would be only burning coal in our souls.

On the nights of 7th and 8th September 1944, the first thing was to meet the political prisoners. My friend Stela Almah and I went to the prison gates. And all the men who came out of there were carried on hands. And the two of us, short little girls, when we saw that Luka Vakarelov was coming out, we ran to him to lift him in our hands. We tried but the three of us fell on the ground. And together with the former prisoners we went to the square in the center of the town. They stood on a table there and gave speeches about the Liberation [29](#) and the Fatherland Front [30](#).

The next day, 9th September 1944, we met the partisans and my future husband came with them. He had escaped from the labor camps. I had lost my voice and hardly managed to go home. They started reproaching me at home, 'Are you a tramp or what? You were outside all day long!' Both my parents weren't pleased, irrespective of the fact that they realized a new time had come. My father's political beliefs were leftist but the things that were taking place made him reserved; he was waiting to see what was to happen and didn't become a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party [31](#). He didn't join the ranks of the Party. I don't know why but he accepted things with reservations. My parents had already started accepting things less excitedly because they wanted to make sense of the events. And he was right to be more reserved about the new developments.

My father was a wealthy man. Great people who had leftist orientation like Zhak Natan [32](#) and Armand Baruh [33](#) joined the Fatherland Front. And I remember that when I arrived in Sofia in October 1944 one of the first articles in the 'Evreiski Novini' [Jewish News] newspaper contained an appeal to the Jews to dig out the buried treasures and to donate them for the development of the Fatherland Front. That put the Jews off. And they weren't interested in the reasons why out of 50,000 Jews 48,000 left the country after the establishment of the Jewish state, why everybody left [34](#). There were so many communists among them, so many idealists who on the Israel border expressed their contempt for their red membership books. May be that was one of the reasons. They were out of a prison, out of the camps. And they were telling them to give money, give your money so that we could develop the Fatherland Front.

After the Holocaust my father didn't get his shop back, nor did he retrieve his rice fields. Later, other families were accommodated in our house with us because our house was believed to be very big. The financial situation of my family, of my mother and father changed significantly, a lot of time passed before they were able to get over it.

## Post-war

I left for Sofia immediately after 9th September. I went to the railway station. There weren't regular trains at the time, and I waited and waited until late at night. I found myself in Sofia without knowing the city at all. I had been there only once. Firstly, I had to enroll into a university. I had submitted my documents before the Holocaust but they were returned because the Jews didn't have the right to go to universities. But I had a number on my application form and had preserved it. I had left with it. And I enrolled into the medicine course without admittance exams. Then I returned to Pazardzhik.

My parents were very happy when I told them that I was going to study and they started preparing linen, quilts. I lived in the rented rooms of a person from Sofia who had been interned to Pazardzhik during the Holocaust and he used to live next to our house at the time. My future husband was mobilized into the army when we declared war on Germany. From the labor camps he went to the army. I cried a lot when we were seeing them off at the station. The youngsters weren't trained soldiers.

Before that some communists had come to the synagogue and made a propaganda that everybody had to volunteer. And a lot of them died. Two or three of them returned disabled. They made them do that. Immediately after 9th September my brother had some social work to do in Pazardzhik. He came to Sofia in 1949 or 1950 to study law at the university and later stayed there to work. My father died in 1947. We buried him in accordance with the Jewish traditions: with a seven-day ritual, with the relatives sitting on the floor. We observed all the traditions.

Some years had passed and some guests came from Israel. We took them to the cemetery, and strangely enough, my father's grave had been moved. I couldn't find his gravestone. I don't want to tell you how I felt, not to be able to see your father's grave. And what was the story? In Pazardzhik the son of the undertaker of the Jewish cemetery, Lyubcho, was a partisan. He died and they wanted to erect a memorial for him in the place of my father's grave but nobody informed us. We presented the case to the mayor of Pazardzhik. My brother, who was a prosecutor in Sofia at the time, intervened, too. We dug the cemetery and found my dad's skull; my brother recognized him by the teeth. They collected the bones in a bag and buried the remnants in another grave in the cemetery in Pazardzhik. The same year my father died I got engaged to my future husband.

We had a big house in Pazardzhik and right away, as early as 1948 or 1949, they accommodated some other people there who didn't pay anything. At that time my little brother was three years old. They gave my mother only a small room that faced north. How many times did she, poor thing, complain that they would go rotten there with that little child.

All the relatives of my future husband: his father, sister and brother, to whom I was already engaged, had left for Israel. He stayed in Bulgaria because of me. I couldn't leave my mother and little brother alone. My older brother had already taken a position in the management of the Bulgarian Communist Party and remained a firm communist. When the war was over and my husband was demobilized we got married in a very interesting way. I was a third-year student and my husband had started work in Superior Chitalishte Council [35](#). One afternoon we simply went and registered our marriage. No relative was present. My mother was in Pazardzhik with my little brother, who was often ill. We went to the municipality. As a witness on his side was his boss, Boyan Balabanov [36](#). On my side were my colleagues Zhak and Adela Alkali who had already gotten married. We put our signatures and I declared that I couldn't have a first nuptial night, nor a nuptial afternoon. We went back home and consumed the marriage, without a proper wedding, or reception in a restaurant; that was all. More important was to find a place to live in. We found a place: a room on 'Tsar Boris' Street. But all the owners had immigrated to Israel and as the house belonged to Jews a judge threw us out, made us move out and gave us an apartment in 'Hadzhi Dimitar' quarter on the outskirts of the town as compensation and we were left with nothing. For my entire life I only managed to save money to buy a one-room apartment in 'Hadzhi Dimitar' quarter where we are afraid to go out when it became dark – I was robbed in broad daylight.

I was pregnant when I graduated and was immediately hired in Sofia, at the Institute of National Health [37](#), which was on 'Vladimir Zaimov' Street. I had always wanted to study there and often, on passing it while I was still a student, I used to think about the things they were doing there behind the thick walls. After that we moved to the Center of Hygiene. I've never worked at any other place. After retiring I worked as a microbiologist for four or five years in Pernik [a city in Southwestern Bulgaria, 25km from Sofia].

My son, Yosif, was born after my graduation in 1951. When he was born my husband was still studying at the Institute of Technology. I was worrying all the time about how I was going to raise that child because I had already started work. I knew that I had to commit myself to my job but who was going to look after my child? Then my mother came and together we returned to Pazardzhik for three months so that my husband could take his final exam without anyone in his way. Our life in Pazardzhik was extremely hard because my son and I, my mother and my little brother were living in the same room. We didn't have money.

After the third month had passed I had to start work. My mother made a great sacrifice: she moved to Sofia with my little brother in order to help me. Sami [Shemuel] started going to school. I started work. My mother, who was helping me and was busy with my child, couldn't take care of her own child. We found out from some of his schoolmates that Sami wasn't going to school. And my mother said that we would go wrong with the upbringing of the child.

He turned into the black sheep of the family and my mother decided to go back to Pazardzhik again. I decided to call upon some women to help me in the house. My son was often ill and I couldn't send him to kindergarten. I begged my husband a lot to take some days off from time to time but he always said, 'It's the mothers who are praised in the novels, not the fathers.' And that was the motto of our marriage. You can't understand what that meant; I was somehow trying to move on. I sometimes had to do the night shift at the Institute. I had a lot of public activities to complete: I conducted different groups on Marxism-Leninism, on revolutionary poetry, etc. It seemed to me I was moving backwards and that thought was a torture.

My husband's job was very nice. He was the head of a laboratory at the Polytechnics dealing with machine tools. The ideal wife for him was the one who stayed at home, the housewife. He was very happy when I was at home, completing different chores. And I did my best: I did the washing, cleaning, cooking but he often used to remark, 'You pay more attention to the microbes and cook for them; you don't pay so much attention to the microorganism.' Because I prepared universal food for the microbes, I invented, read, combined and tried to find the suitable nutrient ambient for them. He was happy with my success but he was happier with my success in the kitchen. And I was so good at making tarts at home; I used to like cooking so much. In 1955 my mother moved to Sofia. We sold the house in Pazardzhik and bought an apartment right opposite the Courts of Justice.

After the Holocaust we didn't obey the Jewish traditions so much. I haven't been to the synagogue. I was mainly focused on my career. And I knew that I had to develop, to show what I was made of. That was my biggest ambition. I had to become better every single day. My husband's relatives had gone to Israel, my aunts and uncles and their children, too. They tried to persuade him to leave; they claimed that I would be treated with a lot of respect there. And they started thinking that I was the one to blame for making him stay in Bulgaria. That was true, by the way.



I had embraced the Zionist idea and considered it to be most sacred. I'm convinced even today that Jews need their own fatherland, which, in my opinion, can be achieved through purchasing the Jewish lands. They considered Zionism to be a reactionary ideology. That's not right. The very word Zion means a Jewish state. So Zionism comes from that. The Jews should return to their original fatherland, not to chase the population away. Let them live together. We were talking of a bi-national state. We weren't talking of chasing somebody away. But they wouldn't accept exiles. They just didn't accept them. And we studied about the Zionist fight in Palestine. We had information that when somebody had settled somewhere the locals would bury the place under pyramids of stones at night. They were killing them, didn't accept them at all. They considered them to be conquerors. It hurt us a lot that the official Bulgarian policy was against Israel although there was an official decision that the UN and the Soviet Union had given its consent for the creation of a Jewish state on a small strip of land [38](#).

And what happened when the Arabs attacked Israel – the USSR supported the Arabs by giving them weapons. So Stalin believed that the new State of Israel would be pro-Soviet because he thought that after coming out of the labor camps the Jews would be people weakened by suffering, financially weak and that they would embrace socialism. But they chose the USA. All that and the official Bulgarian policy were making me feel bad, very bad. Nonetheless, my husband continued his correspondence with his relatives in Israel. The letters were real horror. My father-in-law was reprimanding him because I came from a communist family: my brother was a person of firm communist convictions. It turned out that all that had gone wrong was my fault, even the communist outrage in Israel, because there was a communist party in Israel, which was pro-Arab. My husband's relatives wrote that those were their enemies and they knew that I was going to read that. At the meetings at my work place there were also speeches against Israel and the Jews.

Yes, especially during the first war between France, England and Israel for Suez [39](#) – oh, good heavens! Do you know what words were spoken – 'Why didn't Hitler kill all the Jews? They wouldn't be giving us trouble now!' Upon my word! Can you imagine somebody saying that to you – a colleague who you see every day, in front of an audience, at a meeting?

It seems to me that the fact I'm Jewish had put its stamp on my development. I was late. The ones who had to promote me, my superiors, were just waiting, slowing things down. And as procrastinating became impossible, they promoted me with a colleague of mine who was lagging behind me in his work so that both of us could be presented. I wasn't a member of the Party; that was of significance as well. I was conducting a group on Marxism-Leninism. My bosses were always trying to stop it, to put somebody else in my place to be more precise, and I used to tell them, 'I can take a higher position only if there is no concierge.' And irrespective of the fact that I wasn't a member of the Party I became an official representative of Bulgaria in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance where I suggested a new method of unified microbiology of external environment.

I have been to Israel three times. My husband went first in 1958. Four years later, in 1962 I left, too, on the insistence of my relatives. They knew that all my Zionist desires would be awakened when I saw Israel. And I saw some institutes, met some colleagues, I found out that I could realize my potential there. When we returned to Bulgaria I offered to my husband to immigrate to Israel but he refused. My third visit was after the war in Iraq, I think, in 1993.

My life was turning into a complete mess. My mother died in 1968. We buried her in Sofia sticking to all the Jewish rites. At that time my youngest brother Shemuel, who was 25 and who was considered to bring luck as he was the youngest in the family, had already married Bozhidara, a Bulgarian, and had a daughter, Eva. We believed that when he was a child, he wasn't very studious and would be the 'black sheep' in the family but he studied Economics at university and later became deputy General Manager of the Oncology Hospital. He's a medical statistician. My other brother had been married for a very long time to my colleague, Doctor Anna Haim Danon. They also had a daughter, Raia.

My son, who was an excellent student at the French Language School and later at the Higher Institute of Medicine, specialty Pediatrics and Pulmology, was divorcing his wife Maya after the birth of our first grandson, Yosif. When he grew up, my grandson Yosif learned five languages, became a student of International Management and at the moment he is studying in Magdeburg, Germany.

My son got married for the second time to someone called Natasha. They had twins: Shemuel and Petar. I was involved a lot in their upbringing. Shemuel and Petar graduated from the Ecclesiastical Seminary but nowadays they live in Israel and are tennis instructors. Later my son divorced his second wife as well. I didn't know how we would get out of that situation.

I don't recall the fall of the regime in 1989 in a special way [39](#). I didn't accept what happened afterwards with a lot of enthusiasm. I wasn't gullible. I had lost my faith that things were going to change for the better. I didn't believe in the word democracy. In general I was suspicious of all ideologies claiming there could be equality between people. And if you ask me about my political convictions I would say leftist: based on justice, on democracy.

We didn't keep the Jewish traditions until the democracy. But after that, after 1989, they remembered me and called me to the first management team after the changes. Together with Eddie Schvartz we were in the first management team. The first thing we did with Marko Isakov was the new regulations. That's how we started and I was gradually becoming familiar with things. My husband died in 1996. Now my emotions are focused on the activities in the Jewish Cultural Center. I'm very excited by the revival of the Jewish traditions. I'm a member of Bnai Brith [41](#) of the clubs 'Health,' 'Golden Age,' 'Ladino' and 'Roh Hodesh,' women who gather once a month to observe the holidays of the month, so the holidays are kept and there are discussions and stories told. [All these are clubs at the organization of the Jews in Bulgaria 'Shalom,' which gather representatives of the golden age and middle-aged people] I'm also a member of the Spiritual Council [the Israelite Spiritual Council].

It was my idea to tell stories from the Bible twice a week. In the beginning it was formal and quite stagnant but gradually, with joined forces, we revived certain traditions. For example, every Friday, when the prayer is over, we greet each other and shake hands. Every Saturday morning we used to drink coffee but I went to Horkhe [Jorge Diener – director of American Joint for Bulgaria and Hungary] and I managed to obtain meals at which Jewish dishes are served. We have to convene, to talk about the traditions, about the past of our families. When people are at the table there's always fun and dynamics. It helps people relax. We also invited Lika who sings some Jewish songs. [Lika Ashkenazi – a singer who collects and releases discs of typical Sephardi songs with her band 'Dulse Canto.'] We join her and we assisted her in her conquests and helped her with our

experience. It's nice!

And even the other night, when I finished with the Ladino, I was exhausted because I put in a lot of effort. There I'm very active because it's important for me to instill nostalgia to the father's home, to the mother's house, to the mother's knitting, gastronomy. I was tired, but I couldn't leave right away and so I stayed. I saw that there were women in the hall, they were dancing, singing. [Dance Club where Jewish women and wives of Jews gather every Monday and Tuesday to learn Jewish dances. The club is organized by Mati Samouilova.] It seemed to me that I was young again and I was back in Pazardzhik, in Maccabi, in the yard of the Jewish school. I can see that nowadays women with children come to dance here – they feel united together. It's not important whether they are Jews or not but they feel well together when they sing and dance. This gives me great pleasure.

I have read lectures to young children in the children's camp in Kovachevtsi. [A Jewish summer camp for children founded by 'Shalom,' American Joint and 'Ronald S. Lauder' Foundation. Children of Jewish origin from all parts of Bulgaria have been gathering there for ten years during their summer holidays in order to be together.] I have also read lectures to adults. I could see the rise of their Jewish consciousness; they want to be Jews. His grandmother was a Jew, and now he's coming to the Jewish Center; his grandfather was a Jew and he wants to be a Jew, too. It seems to me that there's a unification of the community on every level. When I visited the children's camp in Kovavhevtsi I said to myself, 'My goodness, how many Jewish children there are!' A boy came to me and said, 'I'm not a proper Jew; my grandfather was Bulgarian. Don't you have a bad attitude towards me?' 'Of course not.' I didn't receive any compensation from the Swiss aid. I didn't get a single cent for anything.

When I was given the 'Shofar' award, somebody asked me if there was a financial award as well. I replied, 'No, there isn't.' [The 'Shofar' is an award given by the organization of the Jews in Bulgaria 'Shalom' which was created three years ago (2003) with the aim of popularizing the activities of the Jews. Sofi Danon got the first 'Shofar' for her voluntary work. Among the awards there's a division for Ethnic and Religious Tolerance. The award is given to non-Jews: journalists and public activists who had proven their ethnic and religious tolerance.]

## Glossary

### **1 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain**

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. There were more and more false blood libels, and the polemics, which were opportunities for interchange of views between the Christian and the Jewish intellectuals before, gradually condemned the Jews more and more, and the middle class in the rising started to be hostile with the competitor. The Jews were gradually marginalized. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. Many Jews were forced to leave their faith. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed

heresy of new Christians, who were accused of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. At the end of July 1492 even the last Jews left Spain, who openly professed their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (Source: Jean-Christophe Attias - Esther Benbassa: Dictionnaire de civilisation juive, Paris, 1997)

## **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 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 Ladino**

Also known as Judeo-Spanish, it is the spoken and written Hispanic language of Jews of Spanish and

Portuguese origin. Ladino did not become a specifically Jewish language until after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 (and Portugal in 1495) - it was merely the language of their province. It is also known as Judezmo, Dzhudezmo, or Spaniolit. When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal they were cut off from the further development of the language, but they continued to speak it in the communities and countries to which they emigrated. Ladino therefore reflects the grammar and vocabulary of 15th-century Spanish. In Amsterdam, England and Italy, those Jews who continued to speak 'Ladino' were in constant contact with Spain and therefore they basically continued to speak the Castilian Spanish of the time. Ladino was nowhere near as diverse as the various forms of Yiddish, but there were still two different dialects, which corresponded to the different origins of the speakers: 'Oriental' Ladino was spoken in Turkey and Rhodes and reflected Castilian Spanish, whereas 'Western' Ladino was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia and Romania, and preserved the characteristics of northern Spanish and Portuguese. The vocabulary of Ladino includes hundreds of archaic Spanish words, and also includes many words from different languages: mainly from Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, French, and to a lesser extent from Italian. In the Ladino spoken in Israel, several words have been borrowed from Yiddish. For most of its lifetime, Ladino was written in the Hebrew alphabet, in Rashi script, or in Solitreo. It was only in the late 19th century that Ladino was ever written using the Latin alphabet. At various times Ladino has been spoken in North Africa, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, France, Israel, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States and Latin America.

## **6 Alliance Francaise**

A cultural and educational association founded in 1904 in Sofia as a branch of the French cultural and educational association Alliance Francaise in Paris. Its goal is to popularize French language and culture in Bulgaria.

## **7 September Rebellion of 1923**

Organized and led by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), together with the leftist forces of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, with the aim of taking down the government of the right-leaning Alexander Tsankov, which was in office after the coup d'etat of 9th June 1923. Leaders of the rebellion were Vassil Kolarov, Georgi Dimitrov and Gavril Genov. The rebellion started in the town of Muglitzh, in the region of the towns of Stara Zagora and Nova Zagora. The beginning of the rebellion was declared during the night of 23rd September in the town of Ferdinand (now Montana). In the next days it spread to the whole territory of Northwestern Bulgaria. Sofia and other big cities did not take part in the rebellion. The shortage of weapons turned out to be fatal and by the end of September the rebellion was over without having achieved any success. Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov immigrated to Yugoslavia, followed by hundreds of other participants in the rebellion. Some of those who remained were killed, others - put in jail. At the beginning of 1924 the Parliament passed the Law for the Protection of the Nation which officially banned the BCP.

## **8 The dynasty of the tsar Ferdinand I Saxe-Coburg-Gotha**

Ferdinand I Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1861 - 1948), Prince Regnant and later King of Bulgaria (1908-1918). Born in Vienna to Prince August of Saxe-Coburg-Kohary and his wife Clémentine of Orléans, daughter of King Louis Philippe I of the French. Married Princess Marie Louise of Bourbon-Parma, daughter of Roberto I of Parma in 1893 at the Villa Pianore in Lucca in Italy, producing four



children: Boris III (1894-1943), Kyril (1895-1945), Eudoxia (1898-1985) and Nadejda (1899-1958). Following Maria Luisa's death (in 1899), Ferdinand married Eleonore Caroline Gasparine Louise, Princess Reuss-Köstritz, in 1908, but did not have children from this marriage. After Ferdinand's abdication in 1918 Boris III came to the Bulgarian throne. In 1930 Boris married Giovanna of Italy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel III of Italy. The marriage produced a daughter, Maria Louisa, in January 1933, and a son and heir to the throne, Simeon, in 1937. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris\\_III\\_of\\_Bulgaria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_III_of_Bulgaria) and others)

## **9 Rakia**

Strong liquor, typical in the Balkan region. It is made from different kinds of fruit (grape, plum, apricot etc.) by distillation.

## **10 Fruitas**

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

## **11 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.

## **12 Internment of Jews in Bulgaria**

Although Jews living in Bulgaria were not deported to concentration camps abroad or to death camps, many were interned to different locations within Bulgaria. In accordance with the Law for the Protection of the Nation, the comprehensive anti-Jewish legislation initiated after the outbreak of WWII, males were sent to forced labor battalions in different locations of the country, and had to engage in hard work. There were plans to deport Bulgarian Jews to Nazi Death Camps, but these plans were not realized. Preparations had been made at certain points along the Danube, such as at Somovit and Lom. In fact, in 1943 the port at Lom was used to deport Jews from the Aegean Thrace and from Macedonia, but in the end, the Jews from Bulgaria proper were spared.

## **13 Chitalishte**

Literally 'a place to read'; a community and an institution for public enlightenment carrying a supply of books, holding discussions and lectures, performances etc. The first such organizations were set up during the period of the Bulgarian National Revival (18th and 19th century) and were gradually transformed into cultural centers in Bulgaria. Unlike in the 1930s, when the chitalishte network could maintain its activities for the most part through its own income, today, as during the communist regime, they are mainly supported by the state. There are over 3,000 chitalishtes in Bulgaria today, although they have become less popular.

## **14 Jewish communities in Bulgaria**

Since the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878, Jewish communities were formed if there were 20 Jewish families in a town. The community was headed by a synagogue board, which

took care of charity and religious matters. Its mandate was three years and it included 5-6 people. There was also a school board selected in accordance with the Law on Education and the municipality council. The specific thing about Jewish communities was that they were not only religious, but also answered the educational, cultural, national and social needs of the Jews. In 1936 Bulgaria had 33 Jewish communities. The largest one was in Sofia, followed by Plovdiv, Kyustendil, Vidin, Dupnitsa, etc. Most of the Bulgarian Jews are Sephardim from Spain and Portugal and Ashkenazim from Western Europe. Both communities believe in Judaism. The Jewish communities were supported by: 1) a religious tax - araha; 2) fees for various services and rituals; 3) fees for the issuing of documents. In the period of World War II and more specifically after the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was created in Bulgaria in 1942, Article 7 of its statute says: 'The Jewish communities are governed by the Commissariat on Jewish Affairs. The Jewish communities are governed by consistories, consisting of a chairman and 4-6 Jewish members, all of them appointed by the Commissar on Jewish Affairs. Each consistory has a delegate appointed by the Commissar on Jewish Affairs. The delegate can be an official. In Sofia there is a central consistory consisting of a chairman and six Jewish members and a delegate of the Commissar. The orders of the delegate are obligatory for the consistory; they can be appealed by the consistory in front of the delegate of the central consistory, respectively, in front of the Commissar on Jewish Affairs. The Jewish communities are defined and act in accordance with regulations and instructions developed by the council on Jewish Affairs.

The task of the Jewish communities is to prepare the Jewish population for deportation. All Jewish non-profit initiatives such as synagogues, schools, charitable and sociable events for Jews, etc. are now under the supervision of the Jewish municipalities and their responsibility.'

In this way, from 1941 onwards, with the adoption of the Law for the Protection of the Nation and the Commissariat on Jewish Affairs, whose goal was to prepare the Jews for deportation, the function and the definition of the Jewish community in Bulgaria was changed. Before 1940 it had a social function; afterwards it was used as an organizational structure implementing the anti-Jewish laws.

## **15 Hashomer Hatzair in Bulgaria**

('The Young Watchman') Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

## **16 Betar in Bulgaria**

Brith Trumpedor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpedor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpedor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the

revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups. In Bulgaria the organization started publishing its newspaper in 1934.

## **17 WIZO**

Women's International Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920 with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. A network of health, social and educational institutions was created in Palestine between 1921 and 1933, along with numerous local groups worldwide. After WWII its office was moved to Tel Aviv. WIZO became an advisory organ to the UN after WWII (similar to UNICEF or ECOSOC). Today it operates on a voluntary basis, as a party-neutral, non-profit organization, with about 250,000 members in 50 countries (2003).

## **18 Bikur Cholim**

Health department linked to the local branches of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria, Shalom. Bikur Cholim in Bulgaria provides nurses for sick and lonely poor Jews.

## **19 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.

## **20 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K**

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people. After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the 'blue box.' They threw in at least one lei each day, while on Sabbath and high holidays they threw in as many lei as candles they lit for that holiday. This is how they partly used to collect the necessary funds. Now these boxes are known worldwide as a symbol of Zionism.

## **21 Jewish immigration to Palestine during WWII**

During World War II a lot of Jews in Europe left for Palestine by ship illegally. While the Law for the

Protection of the Nation was still under discussion the Jewish Emigration Committee organized a ship but it sank in the Sea of Marmara. According to the information from 'Stefany' Agency the shipwreck took place on 12th December 1940 and as a result two hundred Jews died. Another ship set off in 1941 - the 'Struma', followed by 'Roudnichar,' 'Shipka' and 'Maritsa.' A typical occurrence was the illegal arrival of Jews in Bulgaria who then set off to Palestine. What happened with 'San Salvador' was a tragedy - the name of the captain was Anton Proudkin. The ship was said to be overcrowded - the lists of the passengers contain more than 300 names and those people had a large amount of luggage. The ports of Constance - until the end of 1940, Varna - until the end of the war, and Istanbul were used for the illegal transportation of Jews.

## **22 Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904)**

Hungarian-born Jewish playwright, journalist and founder of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). His thought of realizing the idea of political Zionism was inspired by among other things the so-called Dreyfus affair. In the polemical essay The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat, 1896) he declares that Jews aren't only a community of believers, but also a nation with the right to its own territory and state. He was of the opinion that in the anti-Jewish mood extant in Europe, it was not possible to solve the Jewish question via either civic emancipation or cultural assimilation. After a significant diplomatic effort he succeeded in the calling of the 1st International Jewish Congress in Basil on 29-31st August 1897. The congress accepted the "Basel Program" and elected Herzl as its first president. Herzl wasn't the first to long for the return of the Jews to Palestine. He was, however, able to not only support the idea, but also to promote it politically; without his efforts the creation of the new state of Israel in the Palestine on 14th May 1948 would not have been possible. Theodor Herzl died in 1904 at the age of 44 and was buried in a Jewish cemetery in Vienna. In 1949 his remains were transported to Jerusalem, where they were laid to rest on a mountain that today carries his name (Mount Herzl).

## **23 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.

## **24 German Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

## **25 Yellow star in Bulgaria**

According to a governmental decree all Bulgarian Jews were forced to wear distinctive yellow stars after 24th September 1942. Contrary to the German-occupied countries the stars in Bulgaria were made of yellow plastic or textile and were also smaller. Volunteers in previous wars, the war-disabled, orphans and widows of victims of wars, and those awarded the military cross were given the privilege to wear the star in the form of a button. Jews who converted to Christianity and their families were totally exempt. The discriminatory measures and persecutions ended with the cancellation of the Law for the Protection of the Nation on 17th August 1944.

## **26 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.

## **27 Brannik**

Pro-fascist youth organization. It started operating 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.

## **28 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 (BCYU). After the coup d'etat in 1934, when 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.

## **29 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.

### **30 9th September 1944**

The day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria. In September 1944 the Soviet Union 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.

### **31 Fatherland Front**

A broad left wing umbrella organization, created in 1942, with the purpose to lead the Communist Party to power.

### **31 Bulgarian Communist Party [up to 1990]**

A new party founded in April 1990 and initially named Party of the Working People. At an internal party referendum in the spring of 1990 the name of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) was changed to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The more hard-line Party of the Working People then took over the name Bulgarian Communist Party. The majority of the members are Marxist-oriented old time BCP members.

### **32 Natan, Zhak - Primo (1902 - 1974)**

An economist, specialist in the history of economics, a party activist, an academician, a corresponding member of the Bulgarian Science Academy. Born in Sofia. A member of the Bulgarian Komsomol Youth Union and the Bulgarian Communist Party since 1925. In 1926 he left for the Soviet Union where he graduated from the International Lenin School, subject - political economics. He was arrested for his party activities and spent two years in jail. After 9th September 1944 he took a number of state positions - director of 'Partizdat' Publishing House, director of the Institute of Economics at the Bulgarian Science Academy, he was also a teacher of Political Economics at the Sofia University 'Kliment Ohridski', and a rector of the Higher Institute of Economics in Sofia. He was one of the founders of the Scientific Workers Union. His scientific research was in the field of the economic history of Bulgaria.

### **33 Armand Baruh Sabat**

Born on 15th August 1908 in Sofia. A Bulgarian fiction writer. He became a member of BCP in 1934. Among his books are 'Carnations and Shoes,' 'Looking for Happiness,' 'A Heart,' 'Ralevi.' After 9th September 1944 he was an editor of the 'Evreiski Novini' [Jewish News] newspaper and deputy editor-in-chief of the 'Literaturen Vestnik' [Literature Newspaper]. He translated 'War and Peace' by Tolstoy into Bulgarian.

### **34 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.

### **35 Superior Chitalishte Council**

On 14th April 1911 a constituent assembly was held and as a result the General Union of the National Chitalishte was founded. After 9th September 1944, at the 21st Congress it was renamed to Superior Chitalishte Council. Its main goals were to work in the sphere of ideological upbringing and the re-focusing of the chitalishte activities in a different direction in order to be transformed into cultural and educational units of the Fatherland Front authority. In 1948 a national lecture group was formed at the Superior Council which was joined by a lot of Bulgarian writers and public and political activists such as Zhak Natan, Lyudmil Stoyanov, Todor Pavlov, Sava Genovsky. In 1950 the union was renamed to Union of the National Chitalishte in Bulgaria and in 1954 it merged with the National Council of the Fatherland Front. After 10th November 1989 the Superior Chitalishte Union resumed its activities. Mr. Stoyan Denchev is its present chairman.

### **36 Balabanov, Boyan (1912)**

Bulgarian writer, poet and playwright, nicknamed Balbo Italo. Born on 5th November 1912 in the village of Treklyano, Kyustendil region, he studied law at Sofia University and diplomacy at the Free University. After 9th September 1944 he became a member of the editorial team of the 'Literaturen Front' [Literature Front] newspaper. He was a counselor on cultural issues at the Ministry of the Interior, a chairperson of the Superior Chitalishte Union. He is the author of 'Fatherland,' 'The Miraculous Tale,' 'The Engineer Raydovsky,' 'The Director' and 'Birds Always Fly in Two.'

### **37 Institute of National Health**

Founded in 1909 as Hygiene Institute. In 1927 it was named Central Hygiene Institute and in 1931 it was renamed to Institute of National Health. The aim of the institute was to work in the sphere of hygiene and labor safety. After 9th September 1944 it was transformed to a Directorate of the Institutes of National Health and its main goal was to monitor the central institutes and laboratories for microbiology, chemistry, serums, vaccines, etc in the whole country.

### **38 Severing the diplomatic ties between the Eastern Block and Israel**

After the 1967 Six-Day-War, the Soviet Union cut all diplomatic ties with Israel, under the pretext of Israel being the aggressor and the neighboring Arab states the victims of Israeli imperialism. The Soviet-occupied Eastern European countries (Eastern Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria) conformed to the verdict of the Kremlin and followed the Soviet example. Diplomatic relations between Israel and the ex-Communist countries resumed after the fall of communism.

### **39 Suez Crisis**

In 1956 the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the strategically crucial and since its construction international Suez Canal and it was followed by a joint British, French and Israeli military action. On 29th October Israel attacked Egypt and within a few days occupied the Gaza Strip and most of the Sinai Peninsula, while Britain and France invaded the area of the Suez Canal. As a result of strong American, Soviet and UN pressure they withdrew from Egyptian territory and UN forces were sent to the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip to keep peace between Israel and Egypt. (Information for this entry culled from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez\\_Crisis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez_Crisis) and other sources)

### **40 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.

### **41 B'nai B'rith**

(Hebrew for 'Sons of the Covenant') Network of Jewish organizations modeled upon Masonic lodges, its members being the elites of the Jewish nation. Its statutory goal was caring for the 'preservation and renewal of the Jewish soul,' which in practice meant welfare and educational activities. Founded in New York in 1843. In 1911, the voyage to the Orient of Siegmund Bergel of Berlin was a catalyst for the order. While traveling southward, Bergel founded lodges at Belgrade, Sofia, Adrianople, Constantinople, Salonica, Smyrna, Alexandria, and Cairo, and on returning he founded lodges at Zichron-Jacob and at Beyrouth. The common language of the lodges was French.