

## The Alhalel Family With Their Great-Grandchildren



This photo was taken in a restaurant in Vidin on the occasion of my husband Mayer Rafael Alhalel's 80th anniversary in 2003. It shows my husband, our great-grandchildren and me. From right to left our three great-grandchildren are: Konstantin Punchev, son of our grandson Lyubomir and his wife Daniela; Viara, daughter of Yanita; and Mihaela Puncheva (daughter of Lyubomir). The children on the photo are 2 years old (the first child on the right) and the other two are each 1 year old.

My grandchildren are part of the Jewish community in Vidin [port city on the right bank of the Danube in Bulgaria, 220 km. away from Sofia]. Unfortunately, the Jewish community in Vidin includes only 26 people, counting the mixed marriages. The truth is that only 9-10 Jews of pure blood live in Vidin. The rest are either children of mixed marriages or they immigrated to Israel a long time ago - with the Mass Aliyah in the end of the 1940s or in the beginning of the 1990s. The Jews of pure blood are my husband and I, our two daughters Streya and Sheli, our long-time family friend Marko Primov, his son, Jacques Moshe, the chairman of the Regional Organization of Jews 'Shalom' - Vidin, his brother and sister and Lili Stambolieva who married a Bulgarian. From these 26 people we usually gather no more than 10-12, because all the others are either ill, or at work. We gather once a month and I like those meetings. I am happy that they exist, considering how small our community is. We celebrate most Jewish holidays, and always Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Purim, Chanukkah, Yom Hashoah [the Day of the Holocaust] and Yom Hatsmaut [the Day of Independence, national holiday of Israel since 1948]. We organize the meetings in our newly-built club because we do not have our own real estates. What's left of our Jewish buildings is a crumpled synagogue, a former Jewish school, now destroyed, and a cemetery plundered by thieves. A heap of stones from the life we had. They are still here around the Baba Vida fortress, in the old Jewish neighborhood Kale, where I still live with my family.

After 10th November 1989 [on this date 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], during the political and social changes in Bulgaria, my husband and I were already retired. We retired in 1985. But after that my husband worked a year more. Our pensions were neither small, nor big. But they were enough so that we could afford to go on holiday twice a year. Usually in the autumn we went to the seaside in the city of Varna, and in spring we went to the mountains in the town of Bansko. But now the situation is different. We have very little money, and despite the help of our grandson, who is director of Bulbank - Sofia, we cannot afford to go on holiday even once a year.