

Gitli Alhalel During The Celebration Of The Purim Holiday In The Shalom Home In Vidin



This is a photo of me during the celebration of the Purim holiday in the Shalom Home - Vidin [port city on the right bank of the Danube in Bulgaria, 220 km. away from Sofia]. It was taken in 2000. Roza Marinova (nee Solomon), a friend of mine, is first from right in the second row. She is a sister of Zhak Solomon, chairman of the Regional Organization of Jews 'Shalom' in Vidin and now she works as a clerk.

You can see here part of the Vidin community, which has been getting smaller and smaller due to the two big aliyahs (immigrant waves) in 1947-8 and 1991. In fact our community now is no more than 20 people, most of whom are half-Jews from mixed marriages. The only 'pure' Jews, as we call ourselves proudly, are I, my husband Mayer Alhalel, our daughters Streya Puncheva (1949) and Sheli Vladeva (1954), the elder lawyer Marco Primo and the chairman of the Regional Organization of Jews in Bulgaria Jacques Solomon, a relatively young and energetic man. These people are also my closest friends and relatives. As for the activity of our organization, it is as small as our resources. Unfortunately, until recently we did not even have a Jewish club to meet and celebrate holidays together. At the moment we have such a club, run by Jacques Solomon and his family. But our synagogue is almost in ruins and even if we raise money for its renovation, it is doubtful that it would be able to function as such, because after us only the Jews of mixed origin will remain and they will not be so interested in preserving the Jewish traditions. The most they can do is turn the synagogue into a concert or exhibition hall as they did with the synagogue in Bourgas. Vidin is like a small Jerusalem, in the center of the town you can see a large Christian temple, a mosque and our beautiful synagogue.

At the end of the previous century Vidin was quite a modest and small town. About 19 000 people lived there. The Jews were around 8 000 (significantly more than they are today). [According to the first census of the population, lands and cattle in the newly-liberated from Turkish rule Bulgaria - a

census done by the temporary Russian authority over the Bulgarian lands (1878-1879) the overall number of Jews living in Vidin region was more than 2000.

The Jewish community in Vidin celebrated a variety of Jewish holidays. For example, in the past on Yom Kippur, the day of absolution, we had to fast all day. But in the evening a hen was slaughtered, after which all Jewish families gathered in the synagogue. On Sukkot, the holiday celebrating the gathering of the harvest, we made tents in the synagogue. On Pesach we always put a white blanket and special dishes, which my mother took out only for the holiday, the so-called 'lalos' in Ladino. On Chanukkah we still light candles. When I was in my second grade, we celebrated Chanukkah in the cinema hall in the neighborhood. We had prepared a scene to act. I was playing the second candle and my mother had bought for me a black velvet dress with a white collar. I was followed on stage by the third candle; we were seven candles altogether.