

# Leon Kalaora

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Sofia

Bulgaria

Interviewer: Patricia Nikolova

Date of interview: September 2004

Leon Kalaora is a pleasant and a dedicated person to talk with. The clarity with which he remembers small details from the past complements his skill to describe unique situations, images and faces. His precise language and insight into the events from the past show the delicate nature of Leon Avramov Kalaora. That is why the wealth of his humble home in the very center of Sofia – very close to the Bulgarian Parliament – is in the spiritual comfort of the books and the warmth of its inhabitants.



[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the War](#)

[After the War](#)

[Glossary](#)

## **My family background**

My ancestors came from Spain [1](#). They came from a village with the melodious name of Kalaora, which still exists today, but I do not know if its name is still the same. [Editor's note: Calahorra is in La Rioja administrative division and Calahorra de Boedo is in Castilla y Leon.] In order to reach Bulgaria my ancestors firstly passed along the north coast of the Mediterranean Sea, then through Greece and Turkey. [Editor's note: Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria were all parts of the Ottoman Empire during the Sephardi migration.]

They settled here, in Bulgaria, because they loved the nature and the people. They also liked one typical trait of Bulgarians – the tolerance towards every one regardless of their religion, language or ethnicity. Unfortunately, I cannot say what my ancestors did for a living, neither what clothes they wore, nor what habits they had.

What I know is mostly about the parents of my parents. But I never met my father's parents and thus didn't know them. The only thing I know about them is that they lived in Turkey, but without the father in the family, so my father had to work from an early age to support his mother, who could not earn any money.

My father, Avram Avramov Kalaora, came to Bulgaria with his mother Sara Avram Kalaora when he was 16-17 years old [1900/1901]. He was born in 1884 in Istanbul. I do not know why they moved to Bulgaria. He always lived in great misery. From an early age he had to be the head of the family. In northeast Bulgaria, Varna, he worked for merchants and craftsmen, but he earned only enough money to buy some bread.

I remember that my father was always very kind to people and liked to joke. He spoke Ladino [2](#) at home, but he also knew Turkish and Greek, and Bulgarian, of course. Besides, the Jewish religion was very dear to him – he observed the Jewish holidays and kashrut. He never ate pork. He observed the kashrut as best he could, because it was not always possible to find kosher food in northeast Bulgaria. He had a tallit and a kippah. He went regularly to the synagogue.

It is interesting that my father never said anything about doing any military service. So, I think that he never served in the army, neither in Bulgaria, nor in Turkey.

My mother, Donna Avramova Kalaora, nee Farhi, was born in 1888 in Shumen. When she was a child, my mother worked a lot as a maid in Jewish homes in order to earn some money. Gradually her brothers Avram and Isak overcame the financial crisis and they started living a little better. Avram was an anatomist pathologist and Isak was a driver.

My mother was very sociable and kind. She was the perfect example of how people should treat each other. What was most special about her, was her readiness to help people. For example, she visited sick people and did their laundry – and there were no washing machines at that time –, cooked them food, and if she could afford it, she brought them some food from home. I saw all that with my own eyes.

My father and mother met through friends when they had both lost their first wife and husband. My father's first wife – unfortunately I do not know her name – died of some illness. And my mother's first husband, Moshe Davidov, died in World War I [3](#).

The mother of the beautician Visa – the woman who told me how my parents met – now she lives in Israel and I know nothing else about her – once told her husband, 'This woman is alone and has a son. She is a healthy, nice and honest woman and she is also hard working. Let's arrange a meeting between her and bai [uncle] Avram – that's how they called my father then!'

And so they invited them to their home together with other guests. They introduced my mother to my father and left them alone to talk in private. She could not tell me what they had talked about. But in the end, they gradually became friends and decided to marry. That happened most probably in 1917 or 1918, because I was born in 1919.

The most interesting family story which my parents have told me involves my father. I was still a child when he told me and my brothers about some murders which happened years ago. Today we link this story to the Armenians. I do not remember the concrete date, but it must have been before 1921. [The Armenian Genocide took place in 1915, during World War I.] When my father was a seven-year-old child in Turkey, he collected fezzes from murdered Armenians, which he sold to buy bread for his mother, who was alone and poor.

My father and my mother spoke Ladino to each other and to us, too. So, they did not speak much Bulgarian at home and we studied it at school. By the way, my parents spoke a kind of Bulgarian,

which immediately showed that they were not native Bulgarians. They dressed very modestly.

My father worked all the time and cared a lot for the family. For example, one summer he worked in a grocery store and got up at 2am to go to the market in Varna and buy vegetables for the store. So, he did not sleep more than four to five hours a day. But he did not own the store. My father also liked to drink, but no more than 50 grams of rakia [4](#) and always at home – never in a tavern.

My parents got along very well with their neighbors. Their friends were Jews and the neighbors – both Bulgarians and Jews. Some of my father's friends were Greeks and Turks. But I cannot remember any concrete names or people. I remember only that the relations between them were excellent. For example, we lived in a house with a yard, but neither the door of the yard or that of the house were ever locked. Such were the relations between the people – pure, peaceful and nice.

## Growing up

I was born in 1919 in the Bulgarian seaside town of Varna. I have five brothers and one sister. They are Yosif Avramov Kalaora [1907-1953], Jacques Avramov Kalaora [1910-1974], David Avramov Kalaora [1911-2003], Izak Avramov Kalaora [1915-1966], Perets Avramov Kalaora [ 1915-1997], Sara Avramova Lazarova, nee Kalaora [1992-2001].

My family was very united. I remember that my brothers often read the Varna dailies at home, as well as the 'Echo' newspaper, which was progressive, that is, presenting left, communist ideas. I remember that when I was young, in order to make me go and buy them the newspaper one of my brothers would tell me, 'I will spit right here on the pavement, let's see if you can come back before it gets dry. Come on!' And so I ran. I remember that my brother Perets read the works of Maxim Gorky [5](#), 'Mother' and others. Jacques and David read mostly 'leftist' books.

David worked very much. He gave all his salary to our mother. My other brothers would always find some work to do on Sundays. For example, people hired them to build the electrical installation in their houses. I also helped them when they laid the pipes in the walls.

David and I had the same mother, but different fathers. When the Law for the Protection of the Nation [6](#) was passed David changed his name. He adopted his father's name, who was killed in World War I. His name was David Moshe Davidov. Also, during the time of the Law of Protection of the Nation my brother did not wear a yellow star [7](#) like all Jews in Bulgaria, but one yellow button. It showed that he was a war orphan, but did not entail any other rights.

I remember David Kalaora as a caring husband and brother.

The fate of my brother Perets Kalaora during World War II was very interesting. At first he studied industrial chemistry in Brno [Czechoslovakia]. But after the German invasion [cf. Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia] [8](#), he had to save himself. He went to study industrial chemistry in Paris. But the Germans showed up there, too. He went to finish his education in Bordeaux; Marshal Petain [1856-1951] governed this part of France, who was known to be a servant of Hitler's. The French government did not shoot down Perets only because he was too young.

At the same time in Bulgaria King Boris III [9](#) issued a special decree and ordered his foreign minister to tell the German government that all Jewish Bulgarian citizens in the territories occupied

by Germany and in the allied countries must be treated in the same way as the local Jews. That is, they could be arrested, harassed and, all in all, included in that group of six million killed Jews. At that time my brother was in Bordeaux.

One day, as usual, he studied for some exam with a fellow student in his rented apartment. It was a late, rainy and cold autumn day. The evening was drawing near. Perets went outside to see his friend off. They started talking at the front door when two Gestapo officials approached them and asked, 'Sirs, do you know if Mr. Pierre Kalaora lives here? They meant Perets. And my brother obligingly informed them, 'Yes, he lives here. Go to the third floor...' and he showed them his door.

The moment the men entered the building, he and his friend ran away. He ran into one direction, and his friend in the opposite one. Naturally, my brother never passed through that street or that neighborhood again. I was told this story by fellow students of my brother, but I do not remember their names. He did not like to talk about it, even in front of his relatives.

A few months after that incident, he went to the city hall in Bordeaux to change some documents. The clerk there told him to come back after two or three hours and everything would be ready. But Perets started wondering whether the clerk wanted him to come back later so that he would have time to call the Gestapo, or he was just paranoid. So he stopped 100 meters from the building and looked around for any Gestapo officials or suspicious civilian people.

Then he went to the clerk, who, to his great surprise, gave him not one but two sets of documents. One of the sets contained the real documents, and the other - fake ones. And the clerk said, 'Sir, I feel for you and I want to help you...' It turned out he was a man from the Resistance. After 9th September 1944 [10](#) Perets returned to Bulgaria for a short period to try to find and thank this man, but he could not find him.

All my brothers had interesting lives. Yosif moved to Argentina in 1930. He died in Buenos Aires in 1953. David emigrated to France in 1929 and lived in Paris. Perets also lived in France and died there in 1997. Jacques and Izak emigrated to Israel in 1948. My parents also moved there after 1953.

So, only my sister and I remained in Bulgaria. She died in Sofia in 2001. She worked in the trade business. She had two children: a son and a daughter. Her son is Yosif Eliyau Lazarov. Before 10th November 1989 [11](#) he headed a department in a clothes manufacturing company. He died in 2002. Her daughter is Dolya Eliyau Doncheva, nee Lazarova.

Our home was in the old Varna district Kadar baba. It was not a Jewish neighborhood and its name is Turkish. I don't know what it means exactly. We lived in a small old house with a little garden. Its floor was made of soil and covered with straw mattresses.

Everything was primitive, there was no running water, no electricity. We only had a big room and a kitchen, which was also very big. The toilet was made of ordinary boards and there was a hole in the middle of them. It was in the yard. I remember that we also had a small cellar with a wooden door, which opened inwards.

Despite all this misery, I keep very nice memories from my childhood. But I don't remember my parents taking us to a resort or even to the sea; and Varna is a seaside town, after all.

Varna was the seaside center of Bulgaria. There were around 70,000 citizens in the town, of whom 2,500 were Jews. The Jews were mainly employed in trade or worked in private companies. For example, I remember very well the place where I lived at some point – a two-storey house right next to the synagogue, on 2 Prezviter Kozma Street. Two brothers, who worked as tinsmiths, let out the two floors. There were also rich Jews in the town, but not many. Most of them were craftsmen, workers or a few of them were merchants.

The typical market day in Varna was no different from the market days in the other Bulgarian towns. Villagers with donkey, horse or ox carts came carrying products. They were very poor, because the land they owned was parceled out in pieces of 10 decares, 20 decares, 30 decares. Villagers with larger parcels of land were rare. And if they had more land, they had to hire workers.

My friends Marin Bankiev – he became an ambassador to Cyprus – and Lasko Marinov and I went to work for the landowners so that we earned some money for the community home of the village. There I could see the complete misery of the villagers in the Varna region – people who were dressed and ate poorly. My friends and I worked for people who had 27 decares of land, but had a family of eight people and lived poorly.

Varna was a beautiful town, visited by many merchant and passenger ships, although its infrastructure was not as good as it is now. The most famous neighborhood was Kadar baba. A very well organized Jewish community lived there, though it wasn't a specifically Jewish neighborhood. The district had a Turkish name like most of the districts in Varna at that time. Although it was a Bulgarian city, there were many Turkish people living in it and in fact almost all people in the city spoke Turkish.

We had various organizations: Maccabi [12](#), Hashomer Hatzair [13](#), Bikur Cholim [14](#), WIZO [Women's International Zionist Organization] [15](#). Some of the organizations were political: left Zionists – Poalei Zion [16](#) and general [right] Zionists – Betar [17](#). There were differences between them. For example, the members of Betar were the richer Jews. Poalei Zion was considered more leftist, that is more communist and its members were people of the lower social strata.

I was a member of Maccabi first, then of Hashomer Hatzair, in which I was even in the leadership. In Maccabi we often did gymnastics. I was responsible for the technical matters related to the organization of the events, etc.

There was a nice synagogue in Varna. Our landlord was haribi [rabbi] Nissim; I cannot remember his family name. He had two sons. They both became chazzanim. One of them, his younger son, buried my mother while I was in Israel in 1965. Unfortunately we did not have the chance to meet again after that. I was devastated after my mother's death and was not myself for ten days.

I remember that as a child my favorite holidays were Fruits [18](#) and Pesach. I loved Fruits, because of the nice fruit that we ate then. When I was a child, my father taught me and my brothers how to take part in the prayers when we went to the synagogue. He taught us what answer should be said and when; this is a tradition from antiquity and resembling very much classical Greek dramas, in which the choir is personified as a single entity and has its unique role. But our father did not make us always answer the chazzan.

I remember that I always stayed late for slichot. I remember that we all went to the synagogue with our fishing rods so that we would go fishing to the sea early the next morning. This had nothing to do with the religious holiday, we just used the occasion to do something we liked.

As a child I studied in the local Jewish school, which included a kindergarten, and the first four classes. The teachers there were very educated and excellent pedagogues. My favorite teacher was Formoza, but I do not remember her family name. She taught students from the first to the fourth class.

We had an interesting teacher, haribi Aron Dekalo, who taught us Ivrit. He was much respected and tried to teach us the literary Ivrit. When I was in Israel in 1965, I was asked in Ivrit, 'Will you leave for Bulgaria this week?' and I answered, 'Eineni yodeah,' while they say 'Lo yodeah.' And they would ask me right away, 'How come you speak such a literary Ivrit?' And I would say, 'Haribi Aron taught me in this way.' He was a very conscientious man.

Unfortunately, I felt anti-Semitic attitudes as early as high school. I studied in the 1st Men's high school, where all boys from Varna went. But at the beginning of the 1940s the school was full of Branniks [19](#) and Ratniks [20](#). I had a classmate, his surname was Avdjiev, but I do not remember his first name. He always showed off his expensive and fashionable clothes – for example, broad trousers, and he boasted about his knowledge of Spanish. He got on my nerves.

In our class we were also separated into 'we' and 'you.' 'Our' group, that is, the group of students with communist beliefs included the majority of the students in the class, but I do not remember their names. I, for example, was the deputy chairman of the temperance society in the high school, and its members were mostly communists. Then I had to be appointed chairman, because the former one graduated from high school.

The Branniks and Ratniks came with sticks and leather belts, showing them off. Our teacher, also a communist, cancelled the meeting. We held it another time. They could have beaten us, although the director of the high school, Mister Arahchiev, was in constant contact with the police.

In contrast to the present Bulgarian high school, besides our classes at school our teachers insisted very much on extra-curriculum activities in the so-called 'societies.' The more popular societies were the temperance one, the history one, the geography one etc. We also had a literary society. I was a member of the history society and the temperance one. Every student was a member of such a society. In these societies we wrote papers of three to five pages on some issues and we had to make an effort to get higher marks at school.

We were teenagers at that time, so we were old enough to hold a political view. Those of us sharing the communist idea, had high marks and served as an example for the others. We even persuaded some of our classmates who previously held the opposite political view, to join us.

I will never forget a classmate of ours Petko Petkov, who was a member of Otets Paisii [21](#). One day in our last year at high school he suddenly disappeared. We looked for him along the sea beach, in case he had drowned, but we did not find any trace of him. After 9th September 1944 we found out that he had become a partisan and he survived.

The concrete story related to anti-Semitism in high school that I remember took place on the holiday of Slavic script and culture – 24th May 1936 [22](#). At that time Hitler was already in power.



The cruelties against the Jews in Europe had already started. The school building was decorated in green, with green twigs along the windows outside and inside. It was a real holiday, not like nowadays.

All the students and teachers gathered in the school yard. There were loudspeakers and the teacher of literature was standing in front of a microphone. I hated him because of the following reason. Once I had to be absent from school for ten months. I was down with some severe illness. There were not such good medicines at that time, which could cure you in five days.

When I came back to school, the teacher in literature decided to test me. He asked me to analyze a poem by Yavorov [23](#). I said, 'Mr. Karagyozev, this is my first day at school, I haven't been to school for ten months.' 'I'm giving you a poor mark,' said he. That is why I hated him.

So, on this day, 24th May 1936 he had a report to read. He had a beard, he looked dignified. And he said, 'In our country and in the countries of the Slavic people, we, the Slavs, will never become compost for the Aryan! What the West is speaking and dreaming about now!' He did not mention Germany, but everybody knew that only Hitler spoke and thought like that.

Everybody cheered. Only the students from 'Otet Paisii' did not. And he continued, 'No, we should not cheer, but act. Every one of us, Slavs, must act! We should stand up to prove that we, the Slavs, are people!' And from this moment on he became my idol.

I came to Sofia for the first time on 1st August 1940. And naturally, I started to work straight away for my brothers Jacques and Izi [Izak], who had already settled in Sofia and had a shop for electric materials near Serdika Street. My wage was enough for me.

When my brothers left for Israel, I worked as a press operator on Karl Shvedski Street. At that time there were some very fashionable electric rings - the most modern and easy to use kind of electric stove at that time. I produced their metal part under a license. So, I worked there until 1941 when, as a Bulgarian Jew, I was forced to work in labor camps [24](#).

In fact, I had a double job, because I did not come from Varna to Sofia by accident. I was recommended by the Union of Young Workers [25](#) and I was involved in the illegal communist party. As a young man in Varna I had joined the Union of Young Workers. I was recommended by Zahari Donchov from Varna, a classmate of my brother Perets, and I had to contact Jacques Baruh, who was a student of medicine in Sofia. Zahari Donchov and he were colleagues at the university.

I arrived in August, but he had gone to his birthplace, the town of Kyustendil. In the autumn Jacques Baruh came back and we met in the Jewish community house on Lege Street in Sofia. I went to the community house every evening to check if he was there. I remember clearly my first visit to the Jewish community house. I was welcomed by the librarian - the famous writer and activist Haim Benadov. He was a librarian and kept the community house from outsiders not sharing our views.

I definitely looked like an outsider. The situation was quite funny. Haim Benadov was short-sighted and he came near me and pretended to read something. He did that for a while and then he asked me who I was looking for. I said, 'Jacques Baruh.' 'And who are you?' 'Don't you see me, here in front of you?' And I explained to him that I was from Varna and I was sent to contact Jacques Baruh, but I did not tell him why.

He put me in touch with Jacques Baruh and I met him. He, in turn, put me in touch with Baruh Shamli and he – with Haim Oliver. We were a whole group of UYW members or a youth unit at the workers' party. One of the activists was Haim Levi-Haimush, future husband of the actress Luna Davidova. I also worked actively, mostly as a campaigner.

The Jewish school was also important for me for another reason. There I met and befriended my future wife Berta. Jacques Baruh introduced us to each other. He told us that we were people from a similar kind, with the same views. At first she and I met mostly at the so-called 'meetings of sympathizers.' They included not only members of the WP [Workers' Party] [26](#), but also of the youth movement of the party, sympathizers and people sharing the same beliefs. For example, Violeta Yakova came. Berta also came often.

The topics we discussed were on a variety of issues – political, economic, theoretical [philosophical], social and even military ones when World War II started. At these events which resembled a circle of people with similar interests we could see who from us were the best prepared ideologically. Those who were not so well-prepared, had to move to other groups discussing other issues.

After the meetings the whole group went for a walk and if it was Saturday or Sunday, we went to the opera or to a concert. Berta and I were always together. Even as early as then she created the impression of a humble and considerate person who really listened to what the other was talking about. And these qualities were very important for me.

My wife Berta Kalaora, nee Isakova, was born on 29th March 1920 in the town of Gorna Dzhumaya, present-day Blagoevgrad. After she finished high school in Gorna Dzhumaya on 24th May 1937 she went to Kyustendil to live with her sister Buka Haravon, nee Isakova, who was seven or eight years older than her. Buka was married to Samuel Haravon, who worked as a tinsmith.

Berta could not stay and live with her step-mother, whose name I do not remember, because they did not get along well. Her step-mother was also a Jew, but she treated her very badly. But Berta's father, Yako Sabetay Isakov, was a very nice man. He made quilts at people's houses. He could barely make ends meet.

In Kyustendil Berta lived only a couple of months, because the Haravon family was also very poor. Then she came to live in Sofia where she worked as a librarian in the Jewish community house at Lege Street [at the crossing between Stamboliiski Blvd and Odrin Street]. She lived at the place of Raina Mayer, who now lives in Shumen, since she married in Shumen during her internment there [27](#).

Berta lived miserably at that time. She weighed hardly 45-46 kilos. She ate lentils, rice and tomatoes in a restaurant. I also went with her to this restaurant on Tsar Kaloyan Street near Stamboliiski Blvd [near the place where the Jewish Home in Sofia is located now] to check if she was eating well. At that time I worked as a press operator, and I had no problems at my work place because of my origin neither before nor after the Holocaust.

## **During the War**



I remember the date 6th April 1941 very well. There was a bombing over Sofia during the evening by Serbian planes which was Serbia's answer after the Germans attacked the Serbs from Bulgaria. [Editor's note: Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria jointly attacked Yugoslavia in April 1941.]

During the day forty of us were on an excursion in Vitosha Mountain. We came back late and Berta and I decided that she would stay at my place. She went to sleep in my sister's room and the bombing happened during the night. Right behind our home – we lived in a rented apartment on 51 Benkovska Street – a bomb fell down and four people were killed. That made us even closer, although we were still only friends.

Berta worked in the library only for about a year and two months. After that she left, because she was paid very little there. But for her this year was very fruitful, because it coincided with the golden period of the Jewish community house in Sofia. There were different circles there led by the best artists in Bulgaria at that time: in choir art – the conductor was the famous Bulgarian artist of Jewish origin Tsadikov –, in dramatic art – the famous Bulgarian directors of Jewish origin Mois Beniesh and Boyan Danovski staged plays in the community house starring artists such as Luna Davidova, Leo Konforti, etc.

After she left that job, Berta found another one, which allowed her to pay the rent to Raina Mayer where she lived for free up to then. She became a typist in a shop, whose owner was a Jew. I do not remember his name. It was on Banski Square. That happened in 1942 when the decree to dismiss Jews from their jobs came into force. Then Berta once again was left without a job, but this time for a longer period.

During the internment, after the Law for the Protection of the Nation came into force in 1941, I was sent to a number of labor camps. I had to work first in the labor camps in the village of Beli Izvor, Ardino region in 1941, and in the village of Klisura, Tran region, in 1942. I came back for a little while from the labor camp in the village of Beli Izvor in November 1941 and then I was sent to the next one.

At that time Berta was worried and visited my parents very often. They were still in Sofia. By the way, when the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed, my parents who lived in the center of the capital, on 51 Benkovski Street, were forced to live in luchbunar [28](#), the poor Jewish neighborhood in Sofia. They rented an apartment on 31 Sredna Gora Street Berta lived near then, also in a rented apartment. Soon my parents were interned to Shumen and Berta to Kyustendil.

When in 1941 I was released for a while from the camp in Beli Izvor, I came back to Sofia and I wanted very much to find a contact and enter once again the illegal organization fighting against the fascist power in Bulgaria. I missed my former activities. So I contacted Haim Oliver and he became my contact. But everything happened very slowly, that is, I was not given a serious task for a long time, and I started to become nervous.

At that time the commander of the illegal combat special task groups, Slavcho Radomirski, who was famous as a great street fighter, set fire to a workshop with leather coats worth around 20 million leva. These were special leather coats designed for the German armies on the Eastern front. The action was organized as an attempt to sabotage the Bulgarian production for the German troops. The accomplices were Violeta Yakova, Ivan Burudjiev and others. That happened in 1942.

But this action was criticized by the leadership of the Trade Union Commission at the District Committee of the still illegal Communist Party. Some, however, applauded it. Thus, an illegal group was formed whose aim was to continue to organize acts similar to that one. I was also in that group and I took part in it in the breaks between the three camps that I was sent to, that is during the days when I was on leave.

The other members of the group were Slavcho Radomirski, Violeta Yakova, Velichko Nikolov, Ivan Burudjiev, Mitka Grabcheva, Miko Papo, Zdravka Kimileva and Danka Ganchovska. The group was divided into a number of sub-groups which consisted of two to three people and did not know the members of the other sub-groups. Metodi Shatorov was the leader of the whole group.

My sub-group included at first Mitka Grabcheva, Velichko Nikolov, Zdravka Kimileva and me. Its goal was to assassinate General Lukov, who was honorary chairman of the Legion in Bulgaria and Lieutenant Colonel Pantev, who was former director of the police. I hated Lieutenant Colonel Pantev the most, because it was known that he had killed honest people, democrats, who had taken part in the illegal fight against fascism in Bulgaria.

Moreover, General Lukov and Lieutenant Colonel Pantev insisted that the symbolic war declared by Bulgaria against the USA and England should become a real one. That meant that Bulgaria would be involved in a war against the democratic camp of England, the USA and the USSR.

In the end, General Lukov was assassinated by the group of Ivan Burudjiev and Violeta Yakova. My group was divided into two pairs. The first pair had to shoot Lieutenant Colonel Pantev and the second one, Violeta Yakova and I, had to watch their backs. We assassinated him on 3rd January 1943, at 1:23am.

Meanwhile, when the decree for the internment of the Sofia Jews to the countryside came into effect in 1942, Berta was arranged to be interned to Kyustendil and I was sent to my second labor camp [in Klisura, Tran region].

What do I mean by 'was arranged'? In fact, in the beginning Berta had to be interned to Vratsa, but my brother David Kalaora contacted the commissar on Jewish issues in Sofia and in exchange for some money arranged for Berta to be interned to Kyustendil so that she would live with her relatives: her sister Buka lived there with her husband Sami Haravon. So Berta lived again with her sister in Kyustendil until 1st March 1944 – the day of our wedding in Shumen.

I have various memories from the different labor camps I have been to. For example, my first camp in the village of Beli Izvor, Ardino region, was bearable. I worked there for six months. In 1941 when the war against the USSR started and there was the danger that Bulgaria could be involved in a war against England, the USA and the USSR, we in the camp managed to steal some stone-mason's explosive and combat capsules. Our aim was to give them to the partisans with whom we kept in touch. In my second labor camp in Klisura, Tran region, I personally kept in touch with the Serbian partisans who fought against the Germans.

I remember that my stay and my work in the second labor camp were more unpleasant than those in the first one. I was there once again for six months. Everyone in the camp worked very hard and the food was complete rubbish. I remember the hunger. We were hungry all the time. The food was always bean soup with hardly any beans in it. So, we, the prisoners, made jokes over our plates,

calling, 'Hey, show up!' to the little bean at the bottom of our plates...It was very miserable.

The first three months we wore clothes given to us by the state, but then they made us work with our own clothes, which turned to shreds right away. 42 people lived in one tent. It was raining often. And when it stopped raining outside, it rained for another hour inside our tent.

Despite all that, there were some nice people among the commanders, who were all Bulgarians. For example, the commander of our labor group in the second camp was a great lover of music. Unfortunately, I do not remember his name. Thanks to him we managed to arrange for the great violinist, pedagogue and future professor Leon Surojon to be exempt from work. We wanted to spare his hands.

He, in turn, became our courier. He went to the village of Klisura, Tran region, to get the mail and learned the political and military news there, which he informed us about. We passed them on to the other groups. Moreover, Surojon was the first to know if the commanders of the camp groups had received an order dangerous for us, he warned us and we were more careful.

In the evenings one could often see the following scene in the camp: the silhouette of Leon Surojon playing the violin on a hill bathed in moonlight. His favorite piece, which also became my favorite later, was 'Funny Story' by Dvorzak. The commander of our labor group also sat among us and listened to him. During that time we had complete access to his tent. So, one day we stole his weapon without him finding out.

In 1943, while Berta was still in Kyustendil, I worked in my third labor camp which was in the town of Lovech and later it was moved to a neighborhood 4 kilometers away from Lovech. There I kept in touch with villagers from the nearby villages, who had radios. I visited them to listen to the news from the front. I also kept in touch with some partisans. Some of the men in the camp bought cheese from the villagers. The great opera singer Bitush Davidov was also among them. I was released from that camp in November 1943.

When I left my third labor camp, I hurried to go to Kyustendil to see Berta instead of going to Shumen first to see my parents who were interned there a year earlier, in 1942. I was traveling in the train with the husband of Buka, Berta's sister, with who she lived there. His name is Sami Haravon. We were both in the same camp in Lovech.

I did not wear the obligatory yellow star at that time. I only had my mobilization documents which all people in the labor camps had. The conductors realized that my star was missing, but pretended they did not see that. I was very lucky that no policemen got on the train. I do not know what would have happened to me if they had arrested me.

When I went to Kyustendil, Berta told me that she could no longer remain in this town, because she was in danger. She had become a member of the illegal District committee of the Workers' Party [after 9th September 1944 the Bulgarian Workers' Party changed its name to Bulgarian Communist Party]

At that time the future professor Simcho Aladjem led the youth movement in the party; he educated the youth in the spirit of communism. His father was a glazier and he inherited his business. One day the police in Kyustendil asked him to come to repair some windows. At that time I was at a labor camp.

While he was placing the glass sheets, a policeman approached him and started asking him about Berta - who she was, why they met etc. He lied right away that they were close friends, because their meetings as members of the Workers' Party were illegal at that time. Then he told everything to Berta and she told the party secretary Ivan Nidev. When I came back from my third camp, he advised me to do everything I can to get Berta secretly out of Kyustendil.

Berta and I discussed this complicated situation and decided that it was high time we married. And during those days one had to have a serious reason to leave a town with the permission of the authorities: a funeral, wedding or birth. And now we found a reason to leave the town. We went to Shumen where my parents were interned and married there on 1st March 1944.

After the wedding in Shumen Berta and I packed our rucksacks in order to escape to another place, but the illegal organization of the Workers' Party in Shumen insisted that we stay. The reason was that they did not have any people, whom they could trust to hide them. So, Berta and I took that risk and remained in Shumen until the end of the Holocaust.

The deputy commander of the Shumen partisan squad, Stoian Radoslavov, speaking about his memories of the events before 9th September 1944 still adds, 'Only three secure Jewish apartments had remained: that of the Kalaora family, of Albert Basat and of Baruh Grimberg.' And it was true that there were only three apartments that could be used as hiding places, because all the others had been arrested and sent to the labor camp in Enikioy, Xanthi region [Bulgarian occupied Aegean Thrace].

In Shumen Berta and I lived in a room with no windows, three by three and a half meters. A small sagging Turkish house plastered up with mud on the outside. We did not have any money to rent another house and that one at least was in the Shumen Jewish neighborhood near Tumbul Mosque. [Editor's note: Shumen is a city with a large Turkish population even today and it used to have a much stronger Turkish character in the 1940s.] [29](#)

Despite the risk, the humiliation and the poverty, there were things that brought us much joy. Such an example was Kiril Angelov, my employer in Sofia. He owned the shop in which I worked as a press operator. He was a craftsman, a very humble man. He supported me from the day we met, especially during the Law for the Protection of the Nation. He did all he could to send us money, because he knew that we were starving. Even after I married, he came to Shumen to see me and brought some things I could sell and use the money.

At that time, in order to make ends meet, I dug hiding places in Shumen. The money I received was only enough to buy rice and yogurt. [Editor's note: 'Kiselo mlyako', literally 'sour milk' is one of the cheapest and most common food in Bulgaria.]

## **After the War**

After 9th September 1944 Berta and I came back to Sofia. At first, until 1947 we lived with my parents on the last floor of the 'Shalom' building [this building still stands today on Stamboliiski Blvd. and is known as Bet Am - the Jewish home, housing the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria 'Shalom' and the Jewish community house 'Emil Shekerdjiiski'] [30](#). At that time this building was also used as a police hospital for people wounded or tortured by the police. They were treated only to have strength to endure torture again.

For a while after 1944 I worked as director of state trade companies such as 'Stroyamatmetiz' – the name is an acronym of construction materials and metal products – ironware –, 'Shoes and Clothes' and 'Home Appliances.'

Berta, who worked in the trade union commission before 9th September 1944, which was illegal then, continued to work at first in the City Council of Trade Unions and then in the Central Council. At first she worked in the human resources department and then she headed the organizational department. After 1949 she became editor-in-chief of the 'Trud' newspaper [31](#) which propagated the communist ideas. Berta died this spring after a long illness. She spent her last nine years bedridden and I still can't get over her death.

My daughter Dolya Leon Andreeva, nee Kalaora, was born on 6th January 1948 in Sofia. She finished the Russian high school 'A. S. Pushkin' [communist elite high school before 1989.]. Once a classmate of hers in the elementary classes mentioned to her that she was a Jew. She returned home puzzled and asked us, 'Mum, dad, are we 'evreitsi'? [Editor's note: The correct word for Jews in Bulgarian is 'evrei'; hearing the word the first time she used a made-up incorrect version.]

Then she graduated from the Faculty of Architecture Institute of Sofia University. While she was a student there, she had the following experience. In the break between two lectures the students in the corridor were talking to each other divided into two groups. Dolya and her friends were in one of the groups and a Syrian student with his Bulgarian friends in the other. One of her colleagues from the other group said something insulting about the Jews and Dolya went to him and slapped his face.

Today Dolya is married and has a son and a daughter. Her husband is also an architect. My life as a pensioner in Bulgaria was so to say quite restricted, as in the course of ten years I took care of my wife Berta, who was bedridden because of an illness.

Meanwhile I didn't lose my connections with both the Jewish and the Bulgarian communities. One of the main reasons for me to meet with different people was my devotedness to the communist idea – I communicated mostly with my party comrades. I am still a member of the BSP [Bulgarian Socialist Party, heir to the former Bulgarian Communist Party after 1989]. I spend my pension mostly on medications. Yet, I am not complaining.

My friends after 1989 are mostly Jews. Like most of them I have received aid from Switzerland, Germany and the Joint [32](#). We usually gather in the Jewish home. We eat together. Then we play cards and talk. To tell you the truth, I do not feel well, when I am isolated from the other people.

During the totalitarian period my relations with my relatives, that is my brothers, cousins, and friends, have always been strong and unhindered. I am aware of the fact that among Jews in Bulgaria there were ones, who complained from obstructed contacts with their relatives in Israel, but I was never among them. I can only feel sympathy for them, without actually knowing anything specific.

## 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 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.

## **3 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 Dobruzha, 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).

#### **4 Rakia**

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

#### **5 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.

#### **6 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.

#### **7 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.

## **8 Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**

Bohemia and Moravia were occupied by the Germans and transformed into a German Protectorate in March 1939, after Slovakia declared its independence. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was placed under the supervision of the Reich protector, Konstantin von Neurath. The Gestapo assumed police authority. Jews were dismissed from civil service and placed in an extralegal position. In the fall of 1941, the Reich adopted a more radical policy in the Protectorate. The Gestapo became very active in arrests and executions. The deportation of Jews to concentration camps was organized, and Terezin/Theresienstadt was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families. During the existence of the Protectorate the Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia was virtually annihilated. After World War II the pre-1938 boundaries were restored, and most of the German-speaking population was expelled.

## **9 King Boris III**

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

## **10 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.

**11** 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.

## **12 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.

### **13 Hashomer Hatzair ('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.

### **14 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.

### **15 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).

### **16 Poalei Zion**

Leftist Zionist movement, founded in the late 19th century in Russia that combined Zionism with Socialism. The early Poalei Zion found its expression in the organization of trade unions, mutual aid societies, and Zionist groups of workers, clerks and salesmen. These groups emphasized the need for democracy within the Jewish community. The Austro-Hungarian branch of Poalei Zion differed markedly from the Russian one. Its ideologists maintained that the Zionist movement was an expression of the entire Jewish people and transcended class interests. It maintained that the position of the Jewish worker and commercial employee was different from that of the non-Jew, since the Jew had to face both exploitation and discrimination at the same time. It warned the Jewish workers against following the teachings of the Social Democrats in Austria-Hungary who denied this fact. It negated the socialist solution unless it were combined with a Jewish autonomous territory. Instead it stressed the need for the conscious direction of the migration of the Jewish masses to Palestine. The Poalei Zion groups in other countries followed in their ideology either the

Russian or the Austrian models. Poalei Zion in Romania and Bulgaria adhered to the Austrian school. In 1907 a Word Union of Poalei Zion was founded. In 1920 the movement split over the attitude toward the Socialist and Communist Internationals, the Zionist Organization, and the place to be accorded to the movement's activities in Erez Israel. Left Poalei Zion sought unconditional affiliation with the Third International (Comintern); by 1924 it had abandoned this attempt and reorganized itself on an independent basis. The other faction, the Right Poalei Zion, merged in 1925 with the Zionist Socialists.

**17** **Betar in Bulgaria:** Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, 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.

### **18** **Fruitas**

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

### **19** **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.

### **20** **Ratniks**

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

### **21** **Otets Paisii All-Bulgarian Union**

Named after Otets (Father) Paisii Hilendarski, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian National Revival, the union was established in 1927 in Sofia and existed until 9th September 1944, the communist takeover in Bulgaria. A pro-fascist organization, it advocated the return to national values in a revenge-seeking and chauvinistic way.

### **22** **24th May**

The day of Slavic script and culture, a national holiday on which Bulgarian culture and writing is celebrated, paying special tribute to Cyril and Methodius, the creators of the first Slavic alphabet, the forerunner of the Cyrillic script.

### **23** **Yavorov, Peyo (1878-1914)**

Pseudonym of Peyo Kracholov, one of the greatest Bulgarian poets. He was among the founders of the Symbolist movement in Bulgarian poetry, a dramatist and a revolutionary. Yavorov took part in the preparation of the ill-fated Ilinden uprising against Ottoman hegemony in August 1903, edited revolutionary papers, and crossed twice into Macedonia with partisan bands. He committed suicide at the age of 36. (Source:<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9077867>)

**24** 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.

## **25 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.

## **26 Bulgarian Workers' Party**

The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) is heir to the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party founded on 2nd August 1891. In 1903 it split into the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (broad socialists) and the Bulgarian Worker's Social Democratic Party (BWSDP) (narrow socialists). In 1919 the BWSDP was renamed Bulgarian Communist Party (narrow socialists). It was banned between 1923-1944 and went underground. Between 1938-1948 it was known as Bulgarian Worker's Party. Between 1944 and 1990 the BCP was the only ruling party in Bulgaria.

## **27 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.

## **28 Iuchbunar**

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

## **29 Tumbul Mosque**

The Sherif Halil Pasha Mosque, more commonly known as the Tumbul Mosque, located in Shumen, is the largest mosque in Bulgaria. Built between 1740 and 1744, the mosque's name comes from

the shape of its dome. The mosque's complex consists of a main edifice (a prayer hall), a yard and a twelve-room extension (a boarding house of the madrasa). The main edifice is in its fundamental part a square, then becomes an octagon passing to a circle in the middle part, and is topped by a spheric dome that is 25 m above ground. The interior has mural paintings of vegetable life and geometric figures and features a lot of inscriptions in Arabic, phrases from the Qur'an. The yard is known for the arches in front of the twelve rooms that surround it and the minaret is 40 m high.

### **30 Shalom Organization**

Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria. It is an umbrella organization uniting 8,000 Jews in Bulgaria and has 19 regional branches. Shalom supports all forms of Jewish activities in the country and organizes various programs.

### **31 Trud (Labor)**

Bulgarian national daily paper, today published by 'Media Holding.' Its first issue came out in 1946 and until 1990 it was the official organ of the Central Council of the Bulgarian Trade Unions. From 1990 to 1991, due to the democratic changes and the disintegration of the state organizations, the newspaper was a body of the Confederation of Independent Syndicates in Bulgaria. In 1994 it began to be published under the name 'Dneven Trud' (Daily Labor).

### **32 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

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