

Yosif Levi With Rabbi Haim Meshulam During Shavuot



This is a photo taken at the synagogue in Sofia during Shavuot. The photo was taken at the end of the 1980s in Sofia. There is a tradition on this holiday where a large flat cake is to be prepared, presented here to Rabbi Meshulam by his wife Bela. I am on the right in the picture. The Shavuot holiday is dedicated to Moses, who was given the Torah in the Sinai Desert. It was on the 50th day [Shavuot is the 51st day after the first day of Pesach] when Moses received the Torah. The cake is cut into pieces which are distributed among people. A stairway is drawn on the cake and it's considered that through it man can reach Heaven.

Starting in 1983, as I hadn't forgotten Ivrit yet, I was invited at the synagogue as chairman of the Central Israeli Spiritual Council. During the totalitarian years the Jewish organizations in Sofia used to be an educational center. It didn't deal with Jewish questions. At that time, 1st May, 9th September, and 7th November were celebrated and these were holidays of the Jewish community in Sofia also. Yet, here, in the synagogue, the status quo was quite better and during this period of time I managed to read lectures about Chanukkah, Pesach, Moses and the migration of Jews from Egypt. Our holidays are most often connected with history, so the Jews in Sofia became aware and began to realize the true meaning of the Jewish history. Besides, I visited quite a lot of conferences of the Jewish World Congress and some other organizations. I was well accepted as I spoke Ivrit well, which was rather uncommon for most of the people there, because most representatives of other countries spoke English. Therefore, my speech in Ivrit was always a huge success.

I was quite efficient in terms of public activities not only for local organizations but also with international Jewish organizations. Yet, when 10th November 1989 came things changed as Shalom took over the international Jewish activities and it was their responsibility to maintain contacts with international Jewish organizations. Actually, from 1983 to 1989 I established a lot of contacts, and provided matzah and other things here, which was quite difficult at that time because the

Department of Ecclesiastical Matters had a negative attitude towards religion. There was even a representative who kept a close watch on the quantity of published calendars. It was a great achievement for him if he could report that in the course of years fewer and fewer calendars were issued, which proved the death of religion. Yet, the Jews are a hardy nation and they couldn't vanish so easily.