

# Izak Sarhon

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Istanbul

Turkey

Interviewer: Yusuf Sarhon

Date of Interview: December 2004



Izak Sarhon is an extremely intelligent and talented 90-year-old man. He and his wife live in a flat at Gayrettepe, Istanbul; a spacious apartment in an apartment building where a lot of other Jewish families live. Mr. Sarhon is slim, not very tall, has blue eyes and is always eager for a good joke. He is extremely orderly and likes to keep old papers and documents in perfect order. Painting is his hobby and he still makes copies of paintings that take his fancy. He worked as an account until last year, when he decided to retire at the age of 89. He is now working on the rashi-to-latin transliteration of the Meam Loez (the greatest literary masterpiece of the interpretation of the Torah written in Ladino), a project he is helping his daughter-in-law, Karen Sarhon, coordinator of the Ottoman-Turkish Sephardic Culture Research Center, with. He likes jokes and collects them in writing. His Turkish is not very good so it was extremely difficult to reorganize his sentences into correct Turkish. He normally prefers to speak either French or Judeo-Spanish.

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### **Family background**

There are no stories or legends that I remember from any of my ancestors. As to my grandparents, I only know about my mother's side of the family. I don't know anything about my father's parents, Avram and Sinyora Sarhon.

My mother's father, (Nesim Danon) was a very serious man. He must also have been a highly informed [he uses the expression "cultured" when he means "a man of the world who is informed, can speak many languages and has also had more years of schooling than the average person of the time, especially if that schooling was done at the Alliance schools"] man because he was doing trade (I don't really know what kind of trade because I was very young at the time) with England at that time. He used to go to England on business, and at that time this was done by ships because there were no planes then. I do not remember his face or anything about him; I just remember the day he died. On that day, they did not let me see him when they were about to take his body out

of the house because he died in the house. I was very young at the time, that is all I remember. I assumed he was an educated man afterwards when I learned about what he had been doing as business.

As to my maternal grandmother, Mazalto Danon, I do not remember anything original about her either. She was a normal woman. She used to live with my parents in Ortaköy because she was a widow. Then when her daughter, Fani Saranga, emigrated to Israel [Palestine] in the early 1930s, she went to join her and she lived with her after that in Israel. She died in Israel but I do not remember the date. I never heard of any sisters or brothers so perhaps she did not have any.

My grandparents did not have different neighbors from ours as they used to live with us. They did not have friends they met socially either.

My father, Samuel Sarhon, was born in Istanbul. I don't remember when he was born, but he died in 1960. As far as I know, he lived in Ortaköy most of his life. In the early 1940s, they moved to Talimhane and then later in life to Harbiye [these are all different districts on the European side of Istanbul].

My father had three brothers. The first was Bohor Sarhon. He was a "cow shohet". He also used to give lessons to students about how to slaughter animals. No one could become a "shohet" without his permission. His wife was Grasya Sarhon and they had five children: Alber, Liz, Ojeni, Viktorya and Sara. Most of them lived in France.

My father's second brother was Yaakov Sarhon and he was a "chicken shohet". His wife was Rebeka Sarhon and they had 2 children: Rober never married. Ojeni married someone with the surname Aluf. Apart from these two, my father had another sibling who lived in Cairo but I have no information about him.

My father, loved making jokes. Whenever we were at family or social gatherings, he would tell jokes and he would also play jokes on people. At that time the coachmen who drove the horse carriages used to wear uniforms, long overcoats with big, shiny buttons and hats etc... Well, my father had a uniform like that and one day he played a joke on his sisters. He went to visit them in this coachman uniform of his!

My father first worked as manager at a clothing store, then one of the biggest of the time, called "STEIN". The store was in "Istanbul" [this generation called the region of Eminonu-Sirkeci, actually the old city, "Istanbul"], in Eminonu. Then he worked at "MAYER", another big textile store in Karakoy, which then moved to Beyoglu. The building where this Mayer store was situated belonged to the municipality and the municipality wanted them out of that building. They even sued Mayer, but Mayer won in the end.

My mother, Ester Danon, was born in Istanbul. She studied at the Alliance school, but I don't know which one. She always lived in Istanbul and died in 1971. She never worked, she was a housewife. Her native language was [Judeo] Spanish, Ladino.

My mother had one sister, Fani Saranga. As far as I remember, Fani was among one of the first who emigrated to Israel, at the beginning of the 1930s. It was Palestine then, of course. She settled there. She had 4 children; 2 girls (Alegra and Fortune) and 2 boys (Ruben and Nisim). Her

daughters went and settled in France. One of her daughters, Alegra was deported by the Germans in France. The other daughter, Fortune, was all right, nothing happened to her. One of her sons, Ruben, died in Israel during the war with the Arabs. Her second son, Nisim, died a few years ago in Israel.

My mother was a very serene person. She wasn't frivolous or anything. She spoke calmly. The novels she read were never frivolous, they were always serious, and always in French. When she went to the cinema, it was to see historical films only. She was a serious woman and liked serious things.

Both my parents were born in Istanbul. I don't know which schools they went to. What I do know is, they both read in French. They bought the "Journal d'Orient". <sup>1</sup> Their native languages were French and Ladino. They spoke to us, their children in "Espanyol", Ladino. They spoke French amongst themselves. I remember being very young and tell them when I heard them speaking French "avlaremos en 'oui'" ["avlaremos en" are words in Ladino that mean "let us speak in" and of course "oui" is the French word for "yes"]. I didn't know French but as "oui" was a word I had heard frequently I told them I wanted to speak in "oui". I wanted to learn this language.

I do not know how my parents met. The only thing I know is that my mother did not like any of her previous suitors until she met my father, whom she liked immediately.

My parents were quite modern people. Even before the Republic [the Turkish Republic] was founded they used to wear European clothes, mainly because my father worked at a European clothing store, STEIN, like I said. We never wore the "fez" [the old Ottoman headgear for men]. We did not have to of course, so we never dressed "a la turka" [in the Turkish style]. We had European made dresses, coats, shoes, everything. There were people, including Jews, who wore the "fez" at the time but we never did. Our family was famous for it actually. My brother and sister and I always had European made clothes, even though our economic situation was mediocre.

We had a cleaning woman who came to clean our house once a week.

I was born on 23rd March 1914 in Ortakoy [a Jewish district at the beginning of the 20th century on the European coast of the Bosphorus. The Ortaköy Synagogue is still a very active synagogue in Istanbul], Istanbul.

## **Growing Up**

I was the last child of the family. I had an older brother, Albert Sarhon and an older sister, Anjel Sarhon. There had also been another brother before me, Nisim Sarhon, who died. I do not know anything about him. Our eldest, Albert left for France when he was 20, came back for his military service, then left again and settled in France. He got married there and died there. When World War II started, he was in France; and then the Germans invaded France. He was in danger and had to hide. He couldn't write anything to us at that time. There was a girl he knew there, a Christian girl who lived in Avignon. She took him out of Avignon, to a village where her relatives were. She hid and protected him throughout the war. When the Germans came, even the little children in the village came to warn him to hide and not be seen walking around. My brother was saved thanks to that girl. He spent all the years of the war in that way. Then after the war, he married that girl, Raymonde Charhon. [Charhon is the french spelling of the Turkish Sarhon] He owed his life to her.

My brother used to sell textile products at a market place in France. They used to sell coats and things like that. They owned a tent at that market place.

My brother had two children, Patricia and Alain. They all live in France.

My older sister, Anjel, lived in Istanbul all her life. She went to a French, catholic school, but I don't remember which one. She then worked at a firm called "Arditty". She used to do office work there. She got married, then separated. She never had any children. None of my siblings are alive today.

The house I was born in was on the main street. There was a street that went to the pier. I remember the times when there were fires in the district. When there was a fire, the "tulumbadji"s [water pumpers] came. They came all the way from Eminönü or Kasımpasa [two districts that are at least half an hour's drive from Ortaköy today]. Wherever the fire was, they used to come running. 4 of them would be holding and pulling the water pump, and the others would just come running shouting and screaming. They would ask: "Where's the fire, where's the fire?". At that time, they used to put up notices on the walls of the police stations about the locations of the fires if there were any. These water pumpers always went by the main street in front of our house to go to the places along the Bosphorus where there were fires. They got wind of these fires somehow and then the groups of water pumpers would fight amongst themselves : "Our group will put out this fire, don't interfere" one group would yell at the other.

I remember, when I was quite young, there was war. After World War I [2](#), there was the Turkish War of Independence [3](#). I was about 6 at the time. They had recalled my father to the army. He was at the military base in Selimiye. My mother used to give him vinegar to drink every day so he would be too ill to go to war. She succeeded in making him ill enough to get a medical report saying he was too weak to go to war, and he didn't.

Our home was on the main street in Ortakoy, on the corner of a little street that went to the pier. It overlooked both the main street and the sea. It was a 3-storey house. We lived on the first floor. Somebody else lived above us. We rented our flat. However, we used to find the people who were to rent the upper floor. The owner of the house, who was Jewish, would never rent his house to people we did not approve of. We had another room on the top floor.

There did not use to be any bathrooms then. Just toilets, and the toilets were "a la turca" [a hole on the floor with two stones on each side to put your feet on and squat] and not "a la franga" [European style].

We had normal types of furniture. Actually, if we still had them today, they would be considered as having antique value. I remember a console with a mirror that was covered with colored stones. It was very beautiful. We also had a big, beautiful tile stove in our living room.

As far as I remember, electricity came to Ortakoy when I was still quite young, I don't remember exactly when . And when they did give electricity to Ortakoy, not everyone had it. There was a shop on the ground floor of our apartment building and we drew an electrical line from the shop to our house. However, I do remember the days when we used big gas lamps for lighting. We did have running water in our home. There was also a "hamam" [Turkish bath] nearby. My mother

used to take me but I didn't like it. I used to cry.

We used big, round "mangal"s [brazier] for heating and also of course stoves to burn wood in. We had two sorts of braziers; one made of copper and the other of sheet iron. We had stoves in 2 of the bedrooms and in the living room, and we had a brazier in the living room. There were 3 rooms downstairs and another room on the top floor. On Shabat [Sabbath] of course, we never lit the stoves or the brazier. Somebody would come to light them for us. He was Turkish of course, couldn't be Jewish. He used to make the rounds of all the houses. He came round once or twice in the day to check the stoves. That was his job.

We did not have a garden but we had a cat and once we had a dog, too. A very small one. My mother used to look after it, gave it baths etc... My mother was very serious about cleanliness and she took special care of the cleanliness of the dog, so nothing would happen to us. I remember taking him out in the inside pocket of my coat. The cat was always there. I also liked birds but my mother always let them free because she believed it was a sin to keep a bird in a cage. "It flew away, it flew away" she would say. She never wanted us to keep birds.

There were a lot of books in our house. I used to read a lot. Actually everyone in our home read a lot. When I went to "Kapalı Carsı" [the closed bazaar in Eminönü] for shopping, I used to go to the second-hand book sellers and buy 8-10 books at a time. I used to read books by Michel Zevaco, and others like "Les Pardaillans" [by Alexandre Dumas]. I liked detective novels. We used to read a lot even in bed. When we went to bed at night, we used to read under the quilt with a torch. We also read newspapers of course. There was the "Journal d'Orient" and also a Jewish newspaper in Ladino that appeared once a week "El Jugueton", which we always had in our house. [4](#)

My family was quite religious. My parents used to practise their religion and that must have been because they had seen and been trained in their respective homes by their own parents. They used to practise all the traditions: kasherut [Kashrut], shabat [Sabbath], Pesah [Pesach], everything. They had different sets of kitchenware for Pesah [Pesach] even. [everything that was not made of glass was changed for Pesah] All the kitchenware used to be changed in Pesah [Pesach]. They called this different set, "lokso". I also remember that my father used to say his "tefila" [morning prayers] and put on his tefillim [tefillin] every morning.

My father used to read religious books. He was very serious about his morning prayers. When I was very young I used to do the same, but when I went abroad I "loosened up".

For example, when Pesah [Pesach] came, the night before there was a ritual of leaving bread crumbs in the darkest corners of the room. Then the next day, there was an in-depth cleaning and all the crumbs were found and the house was purified. That is a tradition we had.

Then of course, we were careful with kasherut rules [kashrut]. All meat was bought from the Jewish butcher.

My father couldn't go to the synagogue every day because he was working but any day that he did not work and on all the holidays he would go to the synagogue.

Our neighbors and the people we socialized with were mostly Jewish. We had a neighbor, Agop Terziyan. He was Armenian and was a dentist. He had a notice on his door that said "diplomée de

Paris” [degree from Paris]. At that time most such notices were in French.

One member of our family was the mukhtar [the administrator of the smallest administrative area] of Ortaköy. He had used to be a teacher or the headmaster in one of the schools in Besiktas, and then he became the mukhtar of Ortaköy.

My parents used to socialize with the neighbors upstairs and those opposite our house. At that time people did not use to go out to dine to restaurants. They used to gather in homes. They chatted and had dinner together. Once, we prepared the dinner table and my father brought a plate of something to the table. Everyone tasted it and asked what it was. It was “tarama” [a spread made of fish eggs and olive oil]. My father had learned how to make it from a Greek colleague at his workplace and this was a first. No one knew about this “tarama” before that.

One more thing I remember from the time of my parents is that during the war [WWI], Istanbul was under siege, there were a lot of English and French soldiers in Ortaköy. We used to sit in the dark in our homes at night so nobody would see us, because these soldiers would get drunk and start shooting at random, not to kill, but just for the hell of it; we were frightened some accident would happen so we just sat in the dark.

The French soldiers stayed in a place they called “Petit Paris” [little Paris]. There was a slope, called “Portakal Pasha”, that went up beside the stream with an empty lot. That’s where the French soldiers had their camp. There were also soldiers from Algeria there.

These soldiers used to treat us well because we spoke French. But we still closed up our curtains at night. There were a lot of drunken soldiers. There was a nightclub opposite our house, where the English soldiers gathered at night. We even had a relative of ours who had come here from England as a soldier. (My grandfather, used to do business with England. He was probably doing business with relatives of ours, who at one time or other had emigrated to England.) As he played the piano, he would play and sing at this night club and entertain all these English soldiers. As to the French soldiers, we used to visit them in the summer and sing songs together.

Our relative, Vitali Aseo, who was the mukhtar [administrator] of Ortaköy, also had a nightclub. He worked as the mukhtar in one room and the other side of the building was the night club. Every night “ince saz” [Turkish classical musicians] would play there. A friend of my father’s, who lived in Kuzguncuk [a well-known Jewish district on the Asian coast of the Bosphorus] played the Oud and he was part of the “ince saz”, too. As they were late playing music every night, he could not return to his house and would come and stay in our house. When he came to our home, they used to give him food and he would play for the family. I was very young at the time, and even though I wanted to, I never got the chance to listen to him play because I was fast asleep by the time he came.

My parents are both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Ortaköy. My father died in 1960 and my mother in 1971. They had a Jewish funeral and we do the services, a “meldado” [a reading of the Mishne and the Zohar for the dead; the equivalent of yahrzeit] every year. The rabbi “throws the ashkava” [says the name of the dead person and prays for his soul to be in heaven] and we chant the “kadish” [Kaddish]. We do this every year.

When I was a little boy, we had horse carriages in Ortaköy as a means of transportation. We had trams then, no buses. The synagogue was right beside our house anyway. Our house was at one

corner and the synagogue on the other. It still stands there today. At that time there was also a “midrash” [bet midrash] in there.

I cannot tell you about the population at the time, but Ortaköy was quite crowded. There were a lot of Jews living there, too. There was a “normal” [with all the necessary institutions] Jewish community there. There were two “shohet” [shochet] s in my family. I remember that all sorts of meat we ate had to have been slaughtered by the “shohetim” [shochetim]. The community also had a “mikve” [mikveh], Talmud Tora [talmud torah], Yeshiva [yeshivah], etc... We had everything.

The Jews lived in various places in Ortakoy, not in a specific area only. Jewish areas were according to “district” only in Istanbul. For example, Galata, Balat, Haskoy, Kuzguncuk and Ortakoy of course.

The Jews who lived in Ortakoy all had different jobs. There were careers of every kind: bankers, grocers, greengrocers, all sorts...

As to the political events during my childhood, I remember the Greeks. We were against each other with the Greeks at that time. There were a lot of Greeks in Istanbul at that time. They were our “enemies” [he means “adversaries”]. One of the Greek districts was “Tatavla”, whose name was changed to “Kurtulus”. [it is interesting to note that the meaning of the word “kurtulus” is “saved”. It could be that the place had been “saved” from the Greeks after they had been forced to leave] Whenever a Jew went to Tatavla, there was always a fight. I also remember a youth club called “Maccabi” [World Union] [5](#). They used to fight with the Greeks, too. “Maccabi” was both a sports club and a social club. I do not have a special memory of these events but I remember that whenever you were with the Greeks there was always a fight. I do not know anything of the kind happening with the Armenians. I only know that no Jew could go and live in Tatavla until a certain date. Just Greeks could.

I do not remember any other political events in my childhood. I only remember a bomb falling on the roof of a neighboring house during the war [World War I]. It came from a plane and fell on a house near the dock. Nothing much happened. The bombs at that time, you know, they weren’t much! I also remember that one night they said “your Dad is coming home from the military”, and we lit the lamp and waited for him to come home. That’s all I remember.

I started school when I was 6-7. Before that, we used to go to the rabbi’s home in Ortakoy. There were a few of us, and the rabbi would teach us how to read and write in Hebrew and also religious things. He gave us a religious education. Then I went to the Alliance [Israelite Universelle] [6](#) school in Ortakoy. I studied in French. After studying there for a few years, I continued my studies at the new Alliance school in Galata. At that time the classes went from 6 to 1, 1 being the highest class. I studied until grade 1, then went to St. Jean Baptiste school. This was a Catholic school run by monks. I went to that school because first of all it was free, or very cheap, and secondly, my cousins also went to that school and we knew it was a good school. Plus the language of instruction was in French and I had studied in French until that time. There were 2-3 Jews in my class, and when it was time for the Christian students to have their religious classes, called “catechism”, we used to leave and go home.

There were only Jews in the first school I went to. They also used to teach us about Judaism, religion and Hebrew in the Alliance schools.

I studied in French. I also went to the Berlitz school [a private school that offered German language courses] to learn German. I studied German for a while, but learned little. Near my workplace there was a button factory called “Korozo”. Their engineer was German. I practised with him a little. Then, when I went to Israel, all my friends were Ashkenazim, and they all spoke German. I practised with them a lot.

I never had any talent for music. My real hobby was painting. There was a kind of painting that was called “decorative painting” and it was not done with brushes. I had a tutor that taught me how to do this. I applied all that I learned at a job, when I went to Spain and made a living out of it there. I used to paint/ decorate ties. They gave me unicolored silk ties and we would paint them, dry them and return them. We would paint the ties by the dozen. I would show them the patterns I could paint, they would choose and I would paint the ties accordingly. At first I was working for luxurious stores, but their orders were always very small. Those ties were very exclusive. Then I started doing wholesale work.

If we go back to my childhood, I used to spend all my spare time with this kind of painting. I painted cushions and handkerchiefs.

I had a lot of good friends in Ortakoy, who remained friends until they died. When we were little, we used to play with marbles or go out together. There was Atiyas, Avigdor, and Sages [these are all surnames]. Then there was Halit, my friend. He was my cousin Belkıs Aseo’s husband. Belkıs was the mukhtar’s daughter. She married Halit and settled in Ankara. Halit was Moslem. He was from Ortakoy and I knew him from an early age. He had a sister called Halide. Belkıs did not have any problems marrying a non-Jew because at the time both her parents had died. They were 3 sisters: Sara Aseo, Belkıs, who had been Beki and then became Belkıs [she changed her Jewish name, Beki to a Turkish one, Belkıs, after she married Halit, who was a Moslem], and Vera Ventura.

Moiz Atiyas, my best friend ever, was born in 1330 [hijri calendar], which means 1914. He was born in Istanbul. He used to live on the opposite corner from our house in Ortaköy. He went to the Italian school as a child. Then after he finished school, when he was 17-18, he started to work at a transportation firm in Sirkeci. He worked there all his life and retired from there.

We were always together from our childhood on. We used to play football together, then as young men we went out together. We did our military service at the same time, we even served in the 20 classes in the same place. We were even staying in the same tent.

We went on going out in the same group after we finished our military service. He married a friend of ours, Elvir Barzel in 1947. They never had any children. His wife worked at a pharmacy in Karakoy but she was not a pharmacist herself.

Our friendship continued until Moiz died. I don’t really remember what year he died in. His wife also died a few years ago.

All of my friends were from Ortakoy. We used to live very close to each other anyway. Most were Jewish and we only had Halit as a Moslem. We used to play football in the empty lot across our house.



On Saturdays, we had to go to “kal” [“synagogue” in Ladino] because it was Shabat [Sabbath]. But we did not spend the whole day at the synagogue. We used to go out with friends and play. I remember when it was time for the Selihot [Slichot], we got up in the middle of the night, went to the “kal” for prayers. I loved to go with my Dad because when we came out of the synagogue there was always a “sahlep” [hot drink] seller and we always drank “sahlep”.

There were no cars. There were some taxis in our street. I do not remember when I first rode in a taxi but I do remember that the taxis came after the horse carriage era was over. There was a taxi station in our street. The taxis used to queue there. When a customer came, s/he used to get into the first taxi in the line, and the others would move to the head of the line. I used to sit in one of the taxis at the back of the line so I could ride in them when they moved to the front of the line. I used to sit beside the driver of course.

I also remember that there was a shop that sold sweets below our house. The man sold “akide” sweets [almonds wrapped in white sugar], “lokum”s [Turkish delight] etc... I used to collect all the empty boxes of chocolates or sweets that our guests brought. Then I would go and sell the man downstairs those boxes. Once he took the boxes and said: “I will give you 8 kurush for them”. I said, “I want 7.5 kurush”!!! I did not know what “8” meant then. I kept hearing “2.5, 5 and 7.5” and thought I was getting a good bargain.

## **During the War**

I would go on a train to go to Florya [in those times a beach resort on the shores of the Marmara, today a residential area]. I vaguely remember our going to Florya. There used to be French soldiers there [during WWI], and the trucks of the French army. They used to offer us tea when we went there. The Florya of that time was not like the Florya of today. There used to be a long sandy beach there. All we had to do was take off our shoes and walk barefoot on the beach.

At that time, people used to go to the Bosphorus or to see the city on their free days. There was no other form of entertainment. We used to take boat trips on the Bosphorus.

We did not use to go on holidays then. We would go to the cinema, or gather in homes with friends. There never was holiday we went to with my family. During the weekend holidays, which was either Saturday or Sunday, I don't remember which, we used to go to this very famous place called “Altinkum” after Kavaklar [the very northern point of the Bosphorus] or to the two spring water places in Sariyer [again a district in the north of the Bosphorus], called “Hunkar” and “Chirchir” [these used to be very famous picnic places because they had clear and cold running spring waters. People went there both for picnics and also to drink from those wonderfully healthy waters that were provided by nature itself]. These were very famous places. Everyone went there. We used to carry bags, food everything. We used to go to Sariyer by boat and then we took horse carriages called “talika”s. I remember once, we were going in a horse carriage like that and I saw a little boy running after us with a sack on his back. I drew the attention of my parents and told them “look, this boy is running after the carriage”. And then my parents told me: “you are going in a carriage but this boy has to make a living by running after us so that when we come to the picnic place and get down, he will carry our bags to the café at the top of the hill and make some money”. We used to eat at those picnic places, we put the watermelons in the springs, in the ice cold water so they would cool. We used to bring our food and buy tea and coffee at the

cafés.

I don't remember exactly when the French, the English and the Italian soldiers left after the War of Independence was over [1922] but I remember that we used to speak, read and write in old Turkish [Ottoman Turkish, before the language reform Turkish contained a lot more Arabic and Persian words and it was written by Arabic letters] and then Ataturk [7](#) passed a law that said we had to use the new alphabet [in 1928 a law was passed in the Turkish parliament of the new Turkish Republic that abolished the old Arabic alphabet and installed the new Latin alphabet for the official language of the country]. Everyone had to learn this new alphabet. I of course, knew this alphabet from school. But they opened schools for grown-ups, and for everyone so they could learn. There were even night schools. Everyone took lessons and everyone learned this new alphabet. I remember a poem from that time on "Brotherhood":

Durdugumuz bulundugumuz bu sevimli topraklar  
Oyleyiz ki baba nedir kardes nedir dinlemeyiz  
Eger oglum sen sen isen bunlari cigne ez  
O duygular hic olmazsa aramiza sokulmasin, kardesligi kovmasin  
Elele ver yasadikca sev, sevil bunu dusun bunu bil  
Lakin bizler bir anadan bir babadan yetistik  
Onun icin ayrilmayiz ne buyuktur kardeslik.  
Oyle koksun bahcedeki sıra sıra agaclar  
Bora kopar ruzgar eser de onlara  
Birbirini korurlar birbirinden ayrilmazlar  
Ve kır ciceklerini severek korurlar.

These sweet lands we stand on  
Are such that we don't know what father is, what brother is  
My son, go and walk on these lands  
Let not enmity come between us, let it not throw our brotherhood away  
Hand in hand, love as long as you live, be loved and know it, think it  
We were raised by one mother and father  
That's why we can't separate, that's how great brotherhood is  
Let the trees in the garden smell that way  
When the storm starts and the wind blows  
They protect each other and never separate from one another  
And they protect the wild flowers with their love.

I went to Spain when I was 20. How did I decide to go to Spain? Well, when I finished school I started working at an office writing letters in French. This was quite a big firm that was doing 'commission importation'. It was called Rotterman. That was my first job. I was doing the correspondence in French with firms abroad. There was another friend there, Jak Behar, from Kuzguncuk [a district on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus where Jews used to live] who was doing the correspondence in German. One day, we were talking and thinking out loud: "shall we go somewhere? Where can we go? Where shall we go? Shall we go to France? Where?..." We were dreaming of travelling. Then one day my friend came and said: "Shall we go to Spain?" and I said: "Yes, let's go". So we decided to go to Spain, find a job there and settle down. Of course, our

families started protesting: “Why do you want to go there? You don’t know anyone there etc. etc.” But we were decided and did not budge. Then one day my friend came and said: “Hey, look, they are putting a lot of pressure on me at home, let’s not go”. However, this was the 1930s and everybody was talking about an imminent war and that Turkey would also go to war; so everyone was afraid really, and that’s how I managed to convince my own parents. My friend’s father did not give up though; one day he came and told us: “My boys, where are you going? What are you going to do there? Come, let me find you a good job. Come with me, there is a tin can factory; I’ll buy it for you, and then you won’t have to go”. We said “No”, then my friend’s father said: “Come, there is a fabric knitting atelier on sale, I’ll buy it for you, don’t go”. But I said: “No, my mind is set, I’ll go”. So he had to accept our decision. There was another Jewish family from Kuzguncuk, who had already gone to Spain. We said we would go to them and that is how we were finally able to convince both families. I went to get a passport, but I was a bit scared that maybe they wouldn’t give me a passport, but they did.

We left for Spain in 1934. We went to Barcelona. We went by boat. We had the address of a restaurant with us. It was in fact, a kind of café and they served lunch and dinner. The owner of the restaurant was a Jew from Greece, I think from Salonica. So we went to this restaurant and told the owner that we had just arrived and needed somewhere to sleep. He called someone called Joseppe and told him to go and ask a certain lady if she had rooms available. Joseppe went and came back saying that she did, so we took our bags and took the rooms in that hostel. That’s how we started to stay there. As for money, I remember that I went to Spain with 50 liras. One peseta was then 50 kurush [100 kurush is one lira], so 50 liras was not a lot of money but it was OK for a while.

At first, we started to sell textile products at open markets and observed what others were doing. Most people were doing this kind of business, so we learned it too, and started doing it. Then I started doing painting work. I was painting ties. My friend couldn’t do this work, so he returned to Turkey after one year. I was alone then. I stayed in Spain for 2.5 years. Then there was a revolution during Franco’s time [Spanish Civil War, 1936-39]. Franco was in the government and the communists started a revolution. This revolution lasted long years. At first they weren’t doing anything to the people. I remember that at that time the Olympic Games were going to be in Barcelona [1936], and my business had been thriving because I was painting ties for the Olympic Games. I was painting the 5 circles, the symbol of the Olympics on the ties. Then in Barcelona, the revolutionists won, the Olympic Games were cancelled, all business stopped and I had to leave. I went to France on a British ship. The British had sent warships to Barcelona to get all the foreigners out. They only took the foreigners who wanted to leave, but they did not take the Spanish. That is how I was able to leave. The ship was going from Barcelona to Marseilles. So I packed my bags and went to the port. I presented my passport and went on board.

Let me tell you about a small incident that happened while I was on that ship. When I first boarded the ship, I went to the dining room of the soldiers, or rather sailors. I sat at a table and a sailor came and asked me something in English. I didn’t know English at that time. I thought he was asking me if I wanted something to eat, so I said “Yes”, one of the few words in English that I knew at the time. Then I waited and waited and there was no food. So then I realized that he had asked if I had already eaten! Thankfully, they then said “Tea”, and brought some tea. I went to sleep after that. In the morning I woke up to complete silence on the ship. I got up quickly and

looked for my bags, but they had disappeared, and so had everyone else. I saw that while I was sleeping another ship had come by and everyone had gone on that ship. Thank God it was still there so I was able to board it, too. Can you imagine, if I had slept a bit more, I would have been left behind. However, I lost one of my bags in that melée. It just disappeared. I don't know what happened to it. The ship set off and arrived in Marseilles. My elder brother was in Marseilles then. When we arrived at the port, I heard someone calling "Izak Sharhon, Izak Sharhon". I was very surprised. I had just arrived, who could know me there? Then I learned that the British government had let the Turkish Embassy know that one of their citizens was on board that ship and had told them to come and pick me up. So two officials from the consulate came looking for me, "Izak Sharhon". I went to them and they asked me: "Are you Izak Sharhon? Come, let's go". I was given my suitcase (the one that was not lost) and my passport. Then the men from the consulate took me to the consulate in a taxi. Inside the taxi, they asked me how things were in Spain. As we were in France I spoke to them in French. They took me to a hotel near the consulate and I stayed there that night. I sent a telegram to my brother and told him I was in France. A few hours later I received a reply that said: "Don't move, we are coming to get you". When he said "we" he meant him and his partner. The men from the consulate asked if I had any money and I said that I only had Spanish money. They changed that money into francs. By the way, unfortunately, because of the revolution the Spanish peseta had lost all its value and all the money I had made during the years that I had worked there came to be worth near nothing. I lost everything because of the revolution. They also gave me some cards so that I would be able to board any trade ship that went to Turkey, but when my brother came in the morning, he took me to Avignon, where I stayed for a year. I didn't do anything there. There was no work. So I waited for news from Istanbul. When my time for military service came, they let me know and I returned in around 1937 and did my military service.

Actually, my military service doesn't really count as having done military service at all because I served only for 6 months and paid to be exempt from the rest of the time. I served at the construction department of the army corps. My job was to type letters in old Turkish. I knew old Turkish of course.

My family was not affected too much by the Wealth Tax in 1942. [8](#) I was affected because I was working then. I do not really remember about my father. He wasn't a businessman, so they probably taxed him as a "worker", like they did me. The Wealth Tax did not affect those who were not businessmen too much. They taxed me for a certain amount and I paid, but it wasn't too much as I did not own a shop or anything. However, I know that they asked exorbitant amounts of money from those who owned businesses. And they sent those who couldn't pay to work camps in Eastern Anatolia.

What can I tell you about the 20 military classes [9](#)? Well, the Turkish government did not trust its minorities, the Jews, Greeks and Armenians. They were scared that in the event of war, these minorities would turn traitors. So they gathered all of them in the guise of serving in the military, but we weren't really soldiers. They made us build roads. They gave us brown uniforms, which were not soldier uniforms. These were special uniforms for us. I did not present myself until the last day we were supposed to give ourselves in.

Anyway, they called these road builders the 'Nafia', which meant "road building". They sent all of us to different places. I was sent to a place near Balıkesir. They called in 20 classes, and I was in

them. There were even fathers and sons going together as it was 20 classes. They were all given these brown uniforms and asked to build roads. It lasted about 2 years. We worked in building roads, but we did not do a good job really. In fact, we did a terrible job.

During World War II, there was antisemitism in Turkey, I think. They used to say that the Turks had built some “crematoriums” [nazi death camps] but these were rumors; I didn’t see them myself, nor do I know anyone who actually saw them.

At that time there was this law that enforced the speaking of Turkish. [this was actually a political campaign that started on 13th January 1928 to ensure the language homogeneity of the Turkish people] When people heard you speak in another language they would warn you: “Citizen, speak Turkish”. For example, when the consulate officials in France were taking me to the consulate and I spoke to them in French, one of them told me: “Hey, when you go to Istanbul, if you don’t speak Turkish, you will be beaten up”.

I knew what had been done to the Jews in Europe because I was in Israel [Palestine at that time] during the war. I was in Turkey at the beginning of the war. In the middle of the war I went to Palestine. I worked as a cinema operator at the British army, and every night they showed films about what was happening in Europe. I saw everything that was done to the Jews live in films at the cinema.

I met people who had escaped from those nazi camps in Israel. Some of them had been able to escape from the ghettos in Greece when the Germans came. They told me things like, they would go to the bathroom to wash accompanied by German soldiers. They told me how they had to collect crumbs in order to eat. Then they had been let free because they had been of Spanish nationality. [Some of the Sephardim had been able to acquire Spanish nationality and therefore had Spanish passports] That’s how they had escaped.

Meanwhile of course, our cousins, Allegra Saranga and her whole family, who had been living in France perished in the camps. I don’t know how, we just got the news that they had died in the camps.

Let me tell you how I went to Israel in 1944. The British were there at that time and there was something called the “Quota”. [The British, who ruled Palestine until 1948 took measures against the waves of Jewish refugees by applying a monthly quota. They would allow only a certain number of Jews to enter Palestine every month and refused entry to the rest.] This meant that they gave only a few entrance visas to Jews who wanted to go to Palestine. Only this many [certain number of] Jews could enter Palestine in one month. The Jewish Agency [Sochnut] [10](#) organized the visas for the Jews who wanted to go from Turkey. They did it in such a way that a whole family, however many they were, could go with one visa. That is why, they preferred married people for a visa because then they would be able to send more people. So they recommended us, the young people to get married and use one visa for at least two people. Both single boys and girls were applying for visas, so they put us in contact with each other. They said: “marry this girl and we will send you to Palestine”. They said the same thing to me too. I was given the name of a girl who by coincidence I knew from a group we had. So we got married and went to Palestine. She went to a kibbutz and I went to Tel Aviv. We met only once after that and got divorced. We applied to the Turkish consulate for a divorce and were thus free again. That was my first marriage.

## After the War

Then by coincidence again I found the job at the British army as a cinema operator and worked there for 3 years. After 3 years, I got really bored and decided to return to Turkey. I returned in 1947.

I remember when the state of Israel was founded. It was barely a year after I had returned from there. I remember the first Israeli consulate was in Taksim [square] and the first day they put up the Israeli flag, my then fiancée (later my wife) and my mother and I went there to watch. We were terribly excited and it was a very emotional experience.

We never thought of making aliya because we had our jobs here. Our families, friends were all here. There have been relatives who emigrated of course. My mother's sister, my aunt, was one of the first to go before Israel was founded even and I had stayed at her house when I went there myself.

When I returned to Turkey, I opened a bureau of "commission importation". My cousin Mordo Perez told me a friend of his, Jak Rutli was looking for a partner in business and so Jak Rutli and I became partners and opened the business. We imported lots of different products. I did the correspondence side of the business and my partner did the sales part. Then the import business did not go well, so we closed the business and I started working as an accountant. I worked as the accountant of a firm that produced cloth, and called "Yuntip" until 1980. Then I worked as freelance accountant with a partner until I retired. After I retired, I continued to keep the accounts of a firm until last year [2003].

My wife Suzi Sultana was born in Istanbul in 1927. Her native language is [Judeo-] Spanish, like us. I never knew her father because he died when she was very young. I knew her mother. She was a "passive" woman. She didn't socialize, nor did she have many friends probably because she had been widowed so young. My wife had 3 brothers: Sami, Vitali and Alber Danon. Alber and Vitali were older and Sami was younger than my wife.

Her older brother Alber, born in 1917, had meningitis when he was 5 so his mental faculties were never normal. He started talking very late and did not go to school. A private teacher taught him certain things including French but it was never much. However, he grew up and even did two years of military service. When their uncle returned from Germany just before World War II, he took Alber to work at his jersey factory. Alber worked there until their uncle died in 1951. Then he worked as an office boy for the Kastro family until his retirement. He had been living with his mother but when she died in 1989, my wife decided it would be best for him to live at our Old People's Home in Haskoy. He lived there for 10 more years and then one day he fell down and died in 1999.

Her second brother Vitali, who was born in 1922, couldn't study much because their father died when he was very young. As a young boy he worked at a florist's in Osmanbey. Then when he grew up, he worked all his life as a salesman at the big china shop in Beyoglu, called "Galeri Kristal". Vitali had met an Armenian girl, called Adirne, when he was 14. They used to play together in Ferikoy, where they lived. Then they decided to get married. The families were against it of course, but when Vitali came on leave during his military service they secretly got married. They had 2 daughters, Linda and Rita. When Linda grew up she married an Armenian and so

became armenian herself, whereas Rita married a moslem and became moslem. Vitali died in 1982 from a heart attack.

My wife's third brother, Sami was younger than her. He was born in 1928. He studied at the St. Michel French school [catholic school] but he didn't finish it. He opened a drugstore that sold perfumes and things like that. He then married Fortune Algazi and they had 2 children: a girl, Sara, and a boy, Yasef. Then he got a heart disease and one day as he was coming home from Sirkeci in a taxi he died inside the taxi in 1989.

An acquaintance introduced us [Suzi and me]. There was a sort of café called "Haylayf" in Harbiye [a district in Istanbul between Sisli and Taksim]. We met there. This was one year after I came back from Israel, in 1948. Then we met and decided to get married. She was Jewish of course, because this was a normal thing then. We got married at the Zulfaris Synagogue [the building of the Jewish Museum of Istanbul today] in 1949. There was nothing extraordinary about the wedding. It was a normal synagogue wedding. It was summer, and after the wedding we went to the house of my parents in Taksim. A couple of our friends and relatives came. We had drinks and ate sweets. In the evening, at around 8:00 p.m., we went to the Belvu hotel in Fenerbahce and stayed there for 2 or 3 days. Nobody came to the hotel with us that night. We were alone. After that we went to a summer house we had rented in Caddebostan [a summer resort, now a residential area on the Asian side of Istanbul]. After the summer, we went to live at my parents' house in Taksim, Abdulhak Hamit street. We lived with my parents and sister, Anjel for four years because of economic reasons of course. Then, after four years, it had become a bit difficult to live with the parents, and my wife did not get along with my sister, so we moved out and rented our own house in Kurtulus.

It was not important if our friends were Jewish or not, but our friends turned out to be mostly Jewish. We used to go to the cinema or the theatre or we would go for outings. I remember, when we were young, we would be a group of 20 and we would hire motor a boat for the day. Then we would go to the Prince's Islands or to the Bosphorus, we would eat nice food and enjoy ourselves immensely. We would also go to the cinema in Harbiye, called Konak. You could buy seasonal subscriptions to this cinema, so every week we had a film to see.

We had two sons. Sami Sarhon was born in Istanbul, on 3 March 1951 and Jozi Yusuf Sarhon was also born in Istanbul on 5 May 1958. Nowadays we always speak Turkish with our children but when they were little we used to speak to them in French. Then when they started school, they had some difficulties with Turkish so we started speaking Turkish, too. We did not want them to have a difficult life in school because they did not speak Turkish properly. So it was Turkish after that. That is why they do not know the language that we also use, Ladino, very well.

When the kids were young we always went to Caddebostan in summers. The sea was clean then and they swam a lot. We used to hire rowing boats every day and go out to the sea to swim. There were also horse carriages and the boys would always race after swimming to see who would get to sit beside the coachman on the return journey home.

What I remember most about my sons when they were little is how beautifully they ate: 'mashallah' [may God praise them] they wouldn't finish eating in 3 hours! We used to run after the younger one with a meatball in our hand! As for the older boy, when we told him stories, he would forget about everything and open his mouth. The younger wouldn't open his mouth for nothing,

not even for the best stories in the world.

My sons did not go to a Jewish school. My older son finished a Turkish lyceum and then the university. My younger son studied at one of the French [catholic] schools, St. Benoit, and then started university but couldn't finish it because of the terror at universities in the late 1970s. [11](#)

Both my sons were active in community activities. They went to Jewish youth clubs. Sami went to Kardeslik Dernegi in Kurtulus and Yusuf went to Dostluk Dernegi in Osmanbey. [Both Kardeslik Dernegi, which closed at the beginning of the 1980s because of lack of members, and Dostluk Dernegi, which still continues its activities, are Jewish youth clubs. They are institutions that the Grand Rabbinate supports financially. Their activities aim to attract Jewish young people, who come and socialize and take part in social, cultural and philanthropic activities. The main aim of these clubs is to bring Jewish youth together and thus prevent assimilation] They did activities like the theatre, dancing etc... They would go to these clubs every night after dinner, either because they had rehearsals for some performance they were preparing or just because they wanted to be with their friends. Yusuf was very busy with theatrical performances in Dostluk Dernegi. He once wrote the scenario of Leon Uris' book called "QB VII", directed and acted in the play he also called "QB VII". Dostluk Dernegi, at the time had a president called Jojo Eskenazi, a very charismatic man. They used to collect money at the performances and then look after 100 poor families with that money. We were happy that our sons were involved in this kind of thing and that they were going to these clubs, because there they were also with Jewish girls. Actually, that is where Yusuf met his wife, Karen, at Dostluk Dernegi. They were involved in a play together and during the rehearsals they started going out together.

My sons do not go to the synagogue often but not because they have left Judaism or anything. They both observe all our holydays but they did not grow up like I did. I grew up doing my tefila [tefillin] every morning, doing what my father was doing, until I was 18. Then when I left these practices when I went abroad, my sons did not see me doing them, so they didn't either. So the fault is mine really.

Both my sons had their bar mitzvahs of course. I still have the speech my older brother read at his barmitzva. It is in [Judeo-] Spanish of course, and written in the old alphabet [rashi]. It starts with the words: "Sinyoras i sinyores, ya es savido ke la persona es de dos fuersas. La fuersa de la entelijensia i la fuersa korporale..." [Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a known fact that a human being is made up of two forces. The force of the intelligence and the physical force...] Both the barmitzvas of our sons were celebrated at home. For Sami my eldest son, we had two kinds of ceremonies. First, on a Thursday morning, I don't remember the exact date but it was in 1964 of course, we went to the Sisli synagogue for the tefilin ceremony. That morning, my son wore the tefilin for the first time and there were prayers. Then the following Saturday morning we had another ceremony at the Sisli synagogue, this time with guests. My son read a traditional barmitzva speech and some prayers. Then we came home and in the afternoon there was a party. Friends and relatives came. We hired waiters and food from a baker's shop, cakes, chocolates, biscuits etc... That was all. We had a good time because the house was full of guests. For Yusuf, my second son, it was a bit different as he hates all kinds of ceremonies. We did the Thursday morning tefilin ceremony and then as Yusuf refused to memorize and read a speech in front of an audience we did not have the Saturday morning ceremony. On the Saturday however, we did have the home party, which was the same as the party we gave for my older son.



My sons both have families and children of course. They continue their lives as Jewish families in the same way we did. They are not as religious as I would have liked them to be, but they keep the traditions: Pesah, Roshashana, Kipur etc... Unfortunately, Jews do not live close to one another nowadays. Everyone lives far away from others. My elder son lives on the Asian side with his two children, Sandy (25) and Izel (28). My younger son lives in a new suburb that is called Kemberburgaz, which is really far away. They all speak Turkish best. My grandchildren do not know Judeo-Spanish at all.

Today I always go to the synagogue on holy days. My whole family keeps Pesach for 8 days. We fast at [Yom] Kippur and celebrate all other important religious days. My daughter-in-law, Karen, undertakes the gathering of the family for the holy days. We gather in her home and have a meal together. At Pesah, she used to read the Agada [Haggadah] in Judeo-Spanish, but now we read it in Turkish so the young ones can understand. Then we sing Pesah songs, usually in Judeo-Spanish.

I have three grandchildren, two from my older son Sami, and one from my younger son, Yusuf. Sami has a son, Izel and a daughter, Sandy. Izel was born in 1976 and Sandy in 1980. Izel finished high school and then started working. He is working as a salesman at a cloth store. Sandy studied tourism and hotel management at university and is working at the banqueting department of the famous Swiss Hotel. My son Yusuf's daughter, Selin was born in 1996. She is studying at a bilingual private primary school where she is learning English, too. I am friends with all my grandchildren and I love them dearly.

As for Jewish activities, the youngest one, Selin, sings Ladino songs in a children's choir. My older grandchildren used to frequent the Jewish youth clubs.

When we meet with our friends, the Matalons and the Behars nowadays, we usually chat as we are now quite old. We talk about politics, illnesses and we play cards a little bit. The men play poker and the women play canasta.

We used to go on holidays in the summers until 2 years ago, but I don't enjoy that as much any more. We used to go to the Aegean coast mostly. We used to travel by bus to these resorts and it was quite tiring actually because even when you go to the Aegean, the bus trip takes at least 12 hours. We usually went if one or more of our friends went, too. I enjoy a holiday if there is good company. Nowadays however, I have grown too old to enjoy swimming and going on long trips to the Aegean or the Mediterranean.

I remember the 2003 bombings [12](#) very well indeed because I was in the street at that moment. We didn't know where the noise came from but then we learned from the news that it was our synagogues. We were terribly upset by these events and we were glued to the TV for days.

Nowadays I spend my days doing some work for my daughter-in-law, Karen, who is running the sephardic research center in Istanbul. We found out one day that I could read what she kept calling "the rashi letters" [13](#). I never knew they were called that. We always read the passages written in the prayer books with these letters automatically and never questioned what they were. Then one day, Karen brought me a text and I immediately started to read. She was so happy. She has embarked on this big project of transliterating the Meam Loez [the greatest literary work written in Judeo-Spanish. This is a series of books, which consist of the interpretation of the Tora. It was started by Rabbi Yaakov Hulli of Istanbul in 1730 and continued by other rabbis after Hulli's death until the last book in 1930.] and I am helping her in this. I love being useful, and this work

has become an addiction. I spend long hours at my old and outdated typewriter and this makes me happy.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Journal d'Orient**

This newspaper started to be published by Albert Karasu in 1917. The paper was in French and consisted of 4 pages of daily news. It was read mainly by francophone Jews. Albert Karasu's assistants were his wife Angele Loreley and Jean de Peyrat idi. The paper stopped being published on 25 August 1971, when Albert Karasu retired.

### **2 World War I**

1914-1918 The Ottoman Empire entered the war as an ally to Germany. However, the empire had weakened considerably at the time, and when the war ended, the Ottoman Empire was one of the losers. The French, English, Italian and Greek forces divided the country amongst themselves in the Treaty of Sevres (1918).

### **3 Turkish War of Independence**

1919-1922 The army of the Turkish people headed by Mustafa Kemal, fought against the Allied Forces physically, and against the Sultanate politically. The people won the war and the last Sultan Vahdeddin, who had been ready to hand over his empire to the Allies, escaped on a British ship. Ankara became the new capital of the new country, Turkey, which started out as a Republic on 23 April 1920, with Mustafa Kemal as its first president.

### **4 El Jugueton**

A weekly satirical/humouristic newspaper that started to be published by Elia Karmona in Istanbul, on 21 April 1909 (5669). The 4-page paper appeared on Mondays. On 25 April 1914, the paper was temporarily closed due to the out-of-the-ordinary adjectives Elia Karmona used against the Grand Rabbi of the time, Rav Hayim Nahum Efendi. The paper continued to be published until the 29th of May 1931, one month before the death of Elia Karmona on 27 June 1931.

### **5 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.

## **6 Alliance Israelite Universelle**

founded in 1860 in Paris, this was the main organization that provided Ottoman and Balkan Jewry with western style modern education. The alliance schools were organized in a network with their Central Committee in Paris. The teaching body was usually the alumni trained in France. The schools emphasized modern sciences and history in their curriculum, nevertheless Hebrew and religion were also taught. Generally students were left ignorant of the Turkish language and the history and culture of the Ottoman Empire and as a result the new generation of Ottoman Jews was more familiar with France and the west in general than with their surrounding society. In the Balkans the first school was opened in Greece (Volos) in 1865, then in the Ottoman Empire in Adrianople 1867, Shumla (Shumen) 1870, and in Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), and Salonika in the 1870s. In Bulgaria numerous schools were also established; after 1891 those which had adopted the teaching of the Bulgarian language were recognized by the state. The modernist Jewish elite and intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was known for having graduated from alliance schools; they were closely attached to the Young Turk circles, and after 1908 three of them (Carasso, Farraggi, and Masliah) were members of the new Ottoman Chamber of Deputies.

7 Ataturk, Kemal (1881-1938): Great Turkish statesman, the founder of modern Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was born in Salonika; he adapted the name Ataturk (father of the Turks) when he introduced surnames in Turkey. He joined the liberal Young Turk movement, aiming at turning the Ottoman Empire into a modern Turkish nation state and also participated in the Young Turk Revolt (1908). He fought in the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I. After the Ottoman capitulation to the Entente, Mustafa Kemal Pasha organized the Turkish Nationalist Party (1919) and set up a new government in Ankara to rival Sultan Mohammed VI, who had been forced to sign the treaty of Sevres (1920), according to which Turkey would lose the Arab and Kurdish provinces, Armenia, and the whole of European Turkey with Istanbul and the Aegean littoral to Greece. He was able to regain much of the lost provinces and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia. He abolished the Sultanate and attained international recognition for the Turkish Republic at the Lausanne Treaty (1923). Under his presidency Turkey became a constitutional state (1924), universal male suffrage was introduced, state and church were divided and he also introduced the Latin script.

8 The Wealth Tax: In December 1942, in a desperate effort to resolve depressed economic conditions, inflation, shortages and budgetary difficulties caused by wartime mobilization measures, the Grand National Assembly enacted the disastrous Varlık Vergisi, or Capital Tax, program which in order to raise the equivalent of some \$360 million to pay in part for the extremely large army being maintained against the possibility of a German invasion through Greece, taxed not only the depressed incomes of the mass of its citizens but also the capital of those who had property. This in itself, was a fairly common practice in Europe at the time, but it was administered in such a way to bear most heavily on urban merchants, many of whom were Christians and Jews. Local commissions of Finance Ministry officials and Turkish merchants were organized to assess the taxes in their districts. Their decisions were not subject to appeal or change and the tax had to be paid in a very short time. Those unable to pay were subjected to hard labor at the Ashkale camp until their obligations were paid off. Those who lacked the financial liquidity needed to pay the tax had to sell everything or declare bankruptcy and even work on

government projects in order to pay their debts, in the process losing most or all of their properties. (from *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* by Stanford J. Shaw; New York University Press, NY, 1991)

## **9 The 20 military classes**

In May 1941, those non-Muslims aged 26-45, were called to military service. Some of the men had just come back from their military service but were told to report for duty once again. Great chaos occurred, as the Turkish officials took the men from the streets and from their jobs and sent them to military camps. They were used in road building for a year and then they were disbanded in July 1942.

## **10 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)**

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.

**11** Terror at universities in the 1970s: the fights between the rightist and leftist students at universities had reached such a level that at a certain point between 1975 and 1980, instruction had nearly stopped and people were too scared to continue their university education. A great number of students had been killed during that period. The only university that was able to continue with instruction was Bosphorus University, mainly because all of its student body was basically "leftist". All this went on until the military took over the government in 1980.

## **12 The 15 November 2003 synagogue bombings**

On November 15, 2003, two suicide terrorist attacks occurred nearly simultaneously at the Sisli and Neve-Shalom synagogues in Istanbul. The terrorists came driving vans loaded with explosives and detonated the bombs in front of the synagogues. It was a Saturday morning and the synagogues were full for the services. Due to the strong security measures that had been taken, there were no casualties inside the synagogues. However, there were 26 dead, of whom 5 were Jews, of the people in the street at that hour and terrible material damage. The terrorists belonged to a branch of El Kaide in Turkey.

## **13 The Rashi alphabet**

The Sephardic Jews, who had used Judeo-Spanish as their mother tongue for centuries, wrote their religious and secular texts in that language, too. However, they did not use the Latin alphabet to write in Judeo-Spanish, but they used a special alphabet that used some form of Hebrew letters. They had also devised special signs to denote the sounds that did not exist in Hebrew. The

Sephardim continued to use this alphabet in all their publications until the introduction of the Latin alphabet by the Alliance Israelite Universelle in the 1860s.