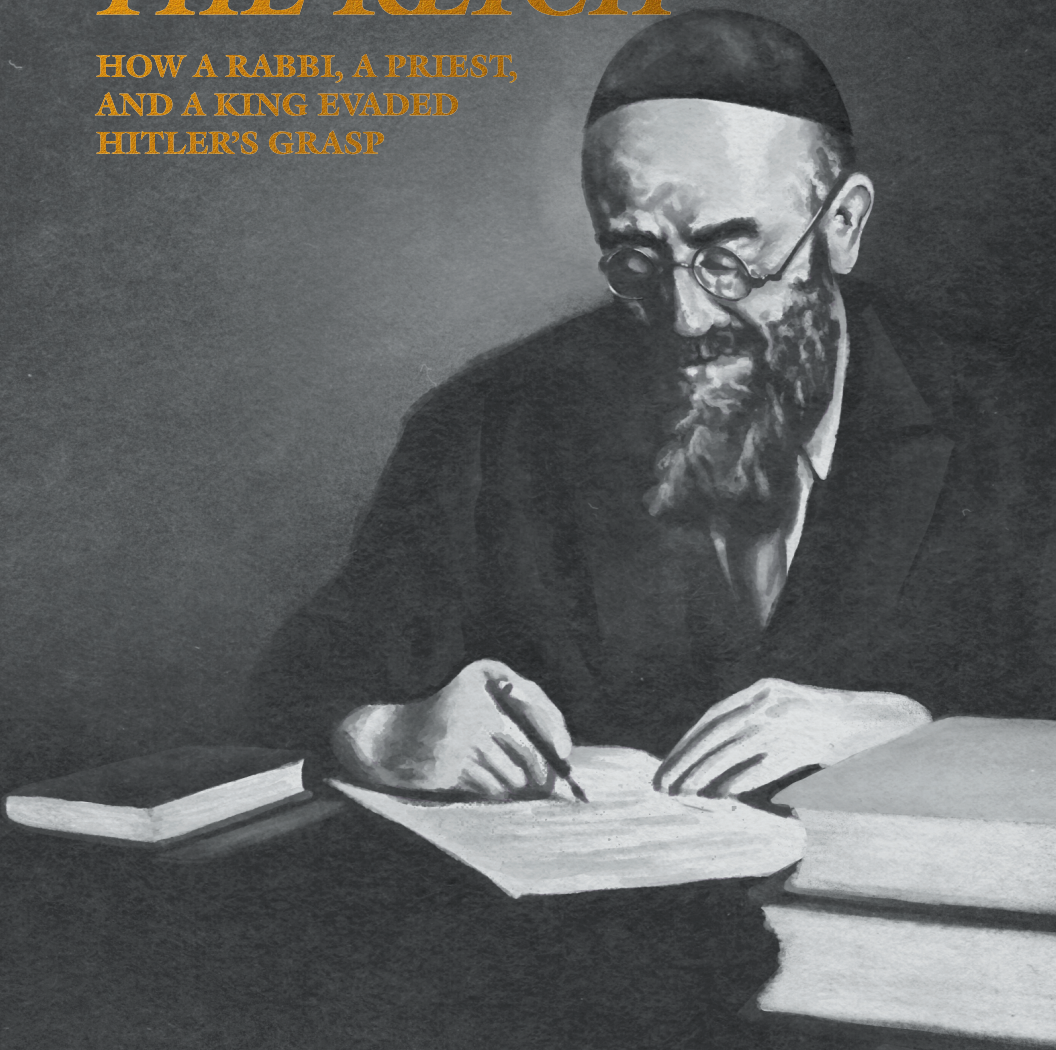


# *RESCUED FROM THE REICH*

**HOW A RABBI, A PRIEST,  
AND A KING EVADED  
HITLER'S GRASP**



**RABBI DANIEL ZION  
ENGLISH EDITION PREPARED BY FIRST FRUITS OF ZION**



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DANIEL ZION

ENGLISH EDITION PREPARED BY  
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TRANSLATED BY  
NIKOLAI BOYADJIEV  
& KATIA MOTZEVA-GUTIERREZ

MANUSCRIPT EDITED BY  
JACOB FRONCZAK  
& SIMEON LANCASTER



*Rescued from the Reich: How a Rabbi, a Priest, and a King Evaded Hitler's Grasp*

By Daniel Zion

English Edition Prepared by First Fruits of Zion, 2021

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# FOREWORD

## TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

While Bulgaria's history is largely unknown, and due to this pervasive ignorance, we may suggest it is unfairly underrated. It is no small thing that, once delivered from five centuries of Ottoman oppression by the Russian army (then a rescuing brother with one hand of crossed fingers hidden behind his back), my nation managed to recover itself and rise from the ashes. We rebuilt our monarchy, and within short decades we were caught again in the violence of the sword. Before the First World War swept Europe, Bulgaria was brought to her knees by the end of the Balkan Wars. We did not enter the First World War with strength but with renewed hope Bulgaria would at last achieve her dream of national unification. We failed yet again, and our king conceded his crown to his son—and here we meet King Boris III for the first time.

Boris was tasked with a formidable assignment: redress Bulgaria once again, and rebuild her—again. He was a kind man known for his love of his hunting dog, train locomotives, and cars (he is quoted to have once said, “I don't care if I lose my crown. I'll just move to America and become a car mechanic”). In 1925 he survived a Bolshevik coup attempt in the deadliest terrorist attack before WWII, just before the shadow of the Third Reich began to rise in Europe. At once, he had to decide a strategy to bring our country—already burdened and

grieved by so much—through the challenge Hitler posed: join the Reich or the Reich will crush you. After much tergiversation and stall, on March 1, 1941, King Boris III of Bulgaria became an ally of Nazi Germany. This is where the real controversy begins.

If you walk through Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, you will meet many Righteous Among the Nations, some nations themselves. You'll meet, for instance, Denmark, where more than 7,000 Jews were safely rescued in boats bound for Sweden. An entire wall is dedicated to this memorable act. And if you happen to turn around and catch a small plaque, you may also see the memorial given to Bulgaria, an ally of Hitler's Reich, who came out of World War II and the Holocaust with more Jews than she entered those terrible years with. You read this right: Hitler's Bulgarian ally saved and preserved every single Bulgarian Jew from the fires of Auschwitz.

The rescue of roughly 50,000 Bulgarian Jews during World War II is still intriguing for both specialists and laymen. There is still no uniform reading of the events, especially of those from March and May 1943. On the contrary, the role of King Boris III and the various political, religious, and social figures of that time still polarize historians, sociologists, and politicians, and even the Bulgarian Jewish community in both Bulgaria and Israel has never been unanimous on the matter. Each party relies for its position on some documentary evidence and speculations abound, and we must concede this is natural given the stakes and the importance of this unusual event. Perhaps only the lies of the Bulgarian Communist Party on the subject could now be definitively laid to rest.

At first glance, all sides present their convincing explanations for the amazing fact of the rescue, but the controversy has never been settled. How was it possible for a small ally of the Third Reich, with a King of German-Italian descent, and its own anti-Semitic legislation, to save all her Jews? Why should some say King Boris is to blame for the anti-Semitic measures in Bulgaria, while all the reports of the SS and the Gestapo spies are extremely cautious towards that King and even call him "a cunning fox," accusing him of undermining the anti-Semitic policy of Germany? How are we to interpret the participation of our



country in the deportation of the Jews from Bulgaria-administered Macedonia and Thrace (1943), while as early as the Wannsee conference (1942) the Nazis themselves did not consider these Jews as Bulgarian subjects?

Over the past few years, the role of Bulgaria in the deportation of the Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, which is mentioned also in the book you hold, turned into a hotly debated topic. Some people brandish their quest for justice and say that blaming Bulgaria is a belated expression of “historical retribution,” while for others this is an unfair and deeply politicized attempt at downplaying and belittling an act that no other nation in Europe might boast in, namely, the rescue of an entire national Jewish population from the ovens of Auschwitz. The rescue of the Bulgarian Jews is definitely a momentous event, and it is with good reason associated with emotionally charged concepts such as *honour* and *national pride*, *heartfelt thankfulness* and *eternal gratitude*. That being said, emotions tend to hamper the work of the specialists.

There is, however, one factor that seems to have been overlooked. No matter how divergent the different opinions are, they all make use of the scientific tools of history, documentary, sociology, or politics. These approaches have proven their merits, and also their shortcomings, when it comes to the people of God. Does anyone still hope to irrefutably prove or reject the Exodus from Egypt more than 3,000 years ago? And yet, wherever you stand on the history of the Jews, ancient Egypt is no more, but the Jews are here. The same goes for Babylon, Ancient Greece, and Rome. The battles of the Maccabees against the heirs of Alexander the Great or the fighting of the Jewish rebels against the Roman legions are undoubtedly worth the historical analysis, the archaeological excavations, and all those countless studies, but these events cannot explain the sheer miracle of the Jewish people. The uncommitted mind reflects within the confines of historical trivia because it is afraid of miracles. And the Jews are indeed a historical miracle.

No one could deny the obvious – wherever there are Jews, there is history, geography, archaeology, sociology, anthropology, and inevitably...at least some theology. Who can deny that the fantastic events

in our dear motherland deserve *also* a theological reading? And by saying “theological,” we don’t imply only the role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church or the letter of the Bulgarian evangelicals to King Boris dated May 24, 1943. The real question is whether we can presume that these fateful events, related to the ancient people of God, could and should yield some absolute meaning. Isn’t this the very first calling of the Jewish people (and their history) – to bring absolute meaning in a fallen and otherwise meaningless world? But once we venture on this journey, are we ready to hear what the ancient Jewish prophets thought of the destruction and the survival of the chosen people? Have we ever heard the names of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, or Amos? I am convinced that even the most skeptical of us could connect some of Daniel Zion’s experiences and actions to the words and deeds of those ancient non-specialists who have always trusted that Israel’s history transcends the purely historical, and bears witness to eternal truths. What would *the prophet* Daniel think of *the rabbi* Daniel and the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews? What would the prophet Isaiah think of our nation? Who would even care to ask these questions?

What are God’s thoughts?

### THE RESCUED RABBI OF SOFIA

Daniel Salomon Zion was born on August 17, 1883, in Thessaloniki, a town of about 30 synagogues, countless Jewish religious schools and institutions, foreign education missions (*Alliance Israélite*) and nearly 120 rabbis and numerous priests. He graduated from his father’s seminary “Beit Yossef,” and after he became a rabbi at age seventeen, he immediately joined the social and philosophical quarrels between the party of the believers and the atheistic movement led by Moise Levy. It was a bitter and relentless struggle in which he prevailed. This tenacity would serve him well later on in Bulgaria and in a much more dramatic context. Meanwhile, he devoted himself to charity and refused all salary. “*I believe priesthood is not a profession, it is not a craft, it is a calling, a gift from God, and so it must be expressed in free labour.*”<sup>21</sup> However, his father’s material situation

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1 From the preface to “A New Path,” by Eliezer Asher Ansky, p. VII

deteriorated, and the young rabbi was forced to work in trade to help his parents and to support himself. In 1915, the Jewish Council in Sofia, Bulgaria, approached the Chief Rabbi of Thessaloniki and asked for some young and capable rabbi for their smaller synagogue, and the choice fell on Daniel Zion, who settled as a *hazan* in Sofia.<sup>2</sup> The Bulgarian Jews soon proved to be much less religious than their brothers in Thessaloniki, so the young rabbi went on to work tirelessly and lay the foundations of several religious, educational, and charitable societies, one of which is especially interesting, the *Matan Baseter*, whose task was to support the so-called “*unregistered poor Jewish families*,” i.e. people who for some reason do not stretch the hand for alms and remain uncared for. Daniel Zion won the hearts of his parishioners.

Unlike other religious leaders Rabbi Daniel Zion was a devoted Zionist, and in his sermons he often quoted the ancient Jewish prophets and their promises of a Jewish return to the Promised Land. Suffice it to say that he named one of his sons Herzl. “*This is how he became the target of so much bitter fighting.*”<sup>3</sup> The majority of the members of the synagogue board coerced him into leaving his post as a *hazan* and preacher, and much to his grief, he went on to live in Kyustendil in 1933-1934, that same Kyustendil which would prove so crucial in the events of March 1943.

Two years later, though the management of the official Jewish institutions in Sofia, i.e. the Central Consistory, the Jewish Council and the schools passed for the first time into the hands of Zionists. Daniel Zion returned to Sofia and resumed his functions as *hazan*, preacher, and Hebrew language teacher, but also as a de facto chairman of the Rabbinical Court (Beth-Din). In 1931 Daniel Zion was officially appointed Head of the Supreme Beth-Din under the Central Consistory of the Jews in Bulgaria with the prerogatives of Chief Rabbi for the whole country, although officially in the period 1925-1945 there was no official Chief Rabbi in Bulgaria. In Sofia, he collaborated closely with the city’s Chief Rabbi, Dr Asher Hananel,

2 Idem, p. VIII

3 From the preface to “A New Path,” by Eliezer Asher Ansky, p. X

and side by side they went through the dramatic events of March and May 1943. In all his sermons and articles, Rabbi Zion declared his opposition to the crude materialism and the pervasive godlessness fuelled by the political events in Europe after the end of the World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

In 1935, he founded the *Jewish Cultural Society*, exploring the economic and social dimensions of society. He also founded the *Jewish Biblical Society*, whose purpose was the study of the Bible in light of modern scientific achievements. The immense interest and the growing audience forced him to abandon the Jewish-Spanish dialect he had used so far and to improve his Bulgarian language. Rabbi Zion published also the magazine *Svetlina* (light), but his parallels, comparisons, and references to other religions sparked an endless quarrel with the Consistory, together with slander, intrigues, and scathing rumours about him. This would explain in part his lack of sympathy for the members of the Synagogue Board later on, in 1942 and 1943, when his prophetic position on the events in Bulgaria led to a complete rift and to his dismissal. He published also many books: *The Way of Life*, *The Triple Way of the New Man*, *Kabbalah*, *A New Road*, *Jewish Holidays and Traditions*, and also *Jewish Marriage and Divorce* (presenting for the first time in Bulgarian the marriage norms of the Sephardic Jews). In August 1945, he published the booklet that you are holding.

Daniel Zion interceded for his brothers in Bulgaria both before God and before prominent public figures such as Lyubomir Lulchev, a member of the Petar Dunov religious society and a close adviser of King Boris. At that time (1942) all male Jews were called to labour camps throughout the country to work on infrastructure projects (the German spies claimed these camps were a transparent attempt by the Bulgarian government at preventing the deportation to Poland).<sup>4</sup> Together with a group of fellow Jews from Sofia, Rabbi Zion visited Lulchev in November 1942 and asked for the suspension of these works during the winter months and the release of the Jews to their native places. Later on, in USSR-occupied Bulgaria,

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4 See note 8.

in a testimony dated December 16, 1944, before the Communist sanguinary People's Court, Daniel Zion tried to return the favour to Mr. Lulchev and intercede for him before the nascent dictatorship.<sup>5</sup> We might never know to what extent Lulchev's intervention before King Boris was decisive for the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews; all we know is that Rabbi Zion's intercession for this man before the Communists proved unsuccessful. The "Red Roller" was not much preoccupied with the role of Lulchev in the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews, and he was executed on February 1, 1945.

You will read in Rabbi Zion's first-person account about his intercession with Ministers in the cabinet of Prime Minister Bogdan Filov and King Boris. From several other corroborating accounts,<sup>6</sup> we learn that Daniel Zion was part of the delegation of five people to Metropolitan Stephen of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on May 24, 1943.

We have at our disposal a witness account of the events on May 24, 1943, and about a heated exchange between Daniel Zion and perhaps the most prominent anti-Semite in Bulgaria at that time – Alexander Belev, the director of the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. Rabbi Zion was arrested with his son-in-law Albert Ben Bassat together with a small group of Jews. Alexander Belev brutally demanded that Daniel Zion provide information on the organizers of the Jewish manifestation that same day. Rabbi Zion answered: "Sir, I am not afraid of you! I only fear God!"

The courage and determination of all the actors on 9 and 10 March and 24 May 1943 are commendable, but we should not forget that King Boris had obviously and always thought one move ahead. According to a report from April 5, 1943, of the Gestapo attaché in Sofia, it was King Boris and none other who had cancelled the deportation orders from March.<sup>7</sup> In early April, after his meeting with Hitler in Berlin, King Boris spoke also with the Reich's Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and told him that except for a contingent

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5 First Chamber of the People's Court, CSD, Fund 1449, inventory 1, ac. 11, l. 155 [http://archives.bg/narodensud/thumbnail/image=/12018852\\_174\\_m.jpg&sus](http://archives.bg/narodensud/thumbnail/image=/12018852_174_m.jpg&sus)

6 Yad Vashem Archives, TR.6/1 and P.37/262

7 Report by Karl Hoffman, Gestapo attaché in Sofia 5th of April, 1943 – Yad Vashem Archives, K207604-207609

of about 25,000 “Bolshevik-Communist elements,” the Jews from the older frontiers of Bulgaria would be used in labour squads and would not be deported out of the country.<sup>8</sup> However, an SS report from May 17, 1943, explicitly stated that King Boris did not want to deport any Bulgarian Jews and that the “approximately 51,000 Jews” were declared “absolutely necessary for labour purposes within Bulgaria,” meaning King Boris had brazenly duped Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in April, which is also evident from the mere indicative and even nonsensical numbers he referred to. With a barely concealed irritation, the Nazi report further stated that the Jewish labour squads were a “transparent pretext” to sabotage the German policy of full-scale deportation.<sup>9</sup> In fact, no matter how dramatic were the events of 24 May 1943, it now seems that everything has been decided behind the scenes as early as May 20, 1943.<sup>10</sup>

8 Strictly Confidential Telegram No. 422 by Joachim von Ribbentrop to Adolf Beckerle of April 4, 1943, (PA.AA Bestand: Büro des Staatssekretärs, Bd. 5, Bl. 173890-173891); see also Frederick Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972, p. 142, note 44.

9 Report by Friedrich Bosshamer to Eberhard von Taden of May 17, 1943: *Information from RSHA to the German Foreign Office on the reluctance of Tsar Boris III and the Bulgarian government to surrender for deportation the Bulgarian Jews* (PA.AA Bestand: Inland IIg, Bd. 183, Bl. 486341-486342); see also Frederick Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, p. 142, not. 44; Nathan Grinberg, Hitler’s pressure to destroy the Jews in Bulgaria, Tel Aviv, 1961, p. 91

10 On May 20, 1943, the Interior Minister Petar Gabrovski presented King Boris with two plans drawn up by the SS envoy Theodor Dannecker and the commissioner for Jewish affairs Alexander Belev. Plan A provided for the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews to Poland, while Plan B provided for their deportation to the province. King Boris chose immediately Plan B. The Germans defined this choice in no unclear terms as sabotage. The Israeli prosecutors in the trial against Adolf Eichmann in 1961 corroborated this assessment. And indeed, earlier on, on April 13, Bogdan Filov noted in his diary that King Boris presented him and Minister Gabrovski with his plan to enroll the Jews in labour squads “and thus avoid their sending away from our old borders to Poland.” What is more, the Bulgarian government had tactfully prepared the Nazis already in November 1942 for the prospect of having trouble in deporting the Bulgarian Jews. In his talks with the German envoy Adolf Beckerle on November 2 and 16, 1942, Prime Minister Bogdan Filov (apparently on instructions from King Boris) stated that Bulgaria “welcomed in principle the possibility of their transfer to the East”, but “at the same time ... part of the Jewish men are necessary for the construction of roads in Bulgaria”. All this goes a long way to explain the almost hysterical tone in the reports of Walter Schellenberg.

For both plans, see *Secret Report of 17 May PA.AA*, (Bestand Inland II geheim, Bd. 183, Bl. 486341-486343); Nathan Grinberg, *Hitler’s pressure to destroy the Jews in Bulgaria*, Tel Aviv, 1961, p. 91; Michael Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler’s grasp*, p. 199.

For the irritation of the Germans, Adolf Hofmann’s report of 7 June 1943, (T120, serial 2330, roll 1305; 486350-486356); see also Frederick Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972, p. 144, note 47; Yad

King Solomon says “the king’s heart is channelled water in the hand of the Lord; God directs it where He pleases.”<sup>11</sup> It takes great skill to direct the heart of a king, and it is unlikely Boris took the “right direction” without the prayers of Daniel Zion.

On December 16, 1948, Daniel Zion made Aliya to Israel, together with his family and the vast majority of the rescued Bulgarian Jews. He was appointed *dayan*, i.e. a rabbinical judge, and officially served as a rabbi of the Bulgarian Jews in Jaffa until his dismissal in 1950, and unofficially until his death in 1979, when he was buried with military-like honours and a solemn and crowded procession to the cemetery in Holon, near Tel-Aviv.

## ENCOUNTERING THE GREATER RABBI

But perhaps the most singular side of his intriguing life is Daniel Zion’s testimony that in the 1930s he repeatedly had a vision of Jesus Christ, whom the Messianic Jews call Yeshua HaMashiach, and started gathering a narrow circle of people in Sofia where he was also reading from the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> His friendship with Metropolitan Stephen and other spiritual figures provoked some malicious and tenacious rumours. He addressed them directly in 1941 in the preface of his book, *A New Path*.<sup>13</sup> We do not have a detailed first-hand account of his supernatural experience in Sofia, but his later life in Israel, his

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Vashem Archives, K 207639/45; Nathan Grinberg, *Hitler’s pressure to destroy the Jews in Bulgaria*, Tel Aviv, 1961, pp. 106-113.

For the prosecutors’ complaints in the Eichmann trial, see <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-047-03.html>.

For the entry in Filov’s journal, see Богдан Филов. Дневник (Bogdan Filov, A Diary), Sofia, 1990, p. 568.

For the talks of Adolf Beckerle with Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, see България – своенравният съюзник на Третия райх (Bulgaria, the willful ally of the Third Reich), 1992, pp. 90, 105 (P.A.A.A, Bestand Inland II geheim, Bd. 183, Bl. 486237, 486261).

For Walter Shellenberg’s reports, see Information from RSHA from 9 November 1942 to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin on the advocacy role of King Boris in relation to the Jewish question in Bulgaria in Цар Борис III в тайните документи на Третия райх 1939–1943, стр. 177 (Tsar Boris III in the *Secret Documents of the Third Reich 1939-1943*), p. 177; P.A.A.A, Inland II geheim, Bd. 183, Akten betreffend Judenfrage in Bulgarien, Bl. 486251-486257.

11 Proverbs 21:1

12 <http://www.netivyah.org/rabbi-daniel-zion-zl/>

13 “A New Path,” a preface by Eliezer Asher Ansky, p.X VII-XVIII

joining the Jewish Messianic community there in the 1950s, and the stories told by his contemporaries and companions, as well as his personal statements, especially his notorious and provocative speech on the radio station *Kol Israel* (The Voice of Israel) on September 14, 1952 (see Appendix I), discussed extensively by the Israeli press, and his convocation by the Rabbinate as early as June 1950, are proof enough of his attitude towards Yeshua.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the opposition he met from the official religious authorities, Daniel Zion remained—for a large part of the Bulgarian Jews—“our Rabbi.” A Russian Jew from the early Zionist settlers in Rishon LeTsyion, who later became a Messianic Jew, let the rabbi use a building on Yefet Street in the heart of Jaffa as a Synagogue.<sup>15</sup> There, the “Bulgarian Rabbi” served until October 6, 1973 (he died in 1979). He did not speak openly about Yeshua but often quoted New Testament stories and passages, and every Saturday afternoon he led a small group of people at his home to study the New Testament and talk about Yeshua until the evening prayers when they all returned to the Synagogue. We know for a fact that this small community hired a hall to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in September 1950 and that there were more than 250 people in attendance.<sup>16</sup>

In July 1949, just a few months after their arrival in Israel, Rabbi Zion’s wife Rachel died, and this seems to have sparked a period of intense spiritual quest for him. In 1950, Daniel Zion spent Passover in Jerusalem, where he received a vision of Yeshua from Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel.<sup>17</sup> After returning to Jaffa, he began to preach this truth from the pulpit of the Synagogue, where he was serving until the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Central Rabbinate in Tel Aviv intervened and relieved him of his post. Their stated rationale was that he was preaching Christianity (which of course should be enough for a rabbi’s dismissal), but they also claimed he suffered

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14 Agnes Waldstein, *JCG Nr. 193*, January 1953, Eine Radioansprache , [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/dz193\\_0153\\_rad.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/dz193_0153_rad.pdf).

15 See short biography of Daniel Zion at <http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/pmwiki.php/Resources/Biographies>

16 Abram Poljak, *JCG Nr.168* November, December 1950, [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap168\\_1150\\_dan.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap168_1150_dan.pdf)

17 Abram Poljak, *JCG Nr.164/165* Juli / August 1950, [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap\\_164-165%20Jul-Aug\\_50.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap_164-165%20Jul-Aug_50.pdf)



from some inherited mental disorder. He was also charged with having fallen under the influence of baptized Jews. Despite all of this, Daniel Zion won the sympathy of large swaths of the society.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps one of the main reasons his opponents had to resort to such insulting charges of insanity was Daniel Zion's desire to conduct a rabbinical review of the trial of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>19</sup> The newspaper *Davar* of June 15, 1950, also briefly conveyed the decision of the Rabbinical Court, who claimed Daniel Zion was a mad man.<sup>20</sup>

We learn from the *Maariv* that on June 13, 1950, Daniel Zion went into seclusion for a full month in Jerusalem after some "spiritual crisis" and that he fasted for three days, but it remains unclear whether this was related to his spiritual experience in January 1950 (see Appendix I), or to his dismissal by the Rabbinate. Whatever the journalists' mistakes, Daniel Zion is regularly spoken of in the Israeli press.<sup>21</sup>

The Bulgarian language Israeli newspaper *Phar* ("Lighthouse") from May 22, 1952, reported in an extremely sarcastic article entitled "Rabbi Daniel is at it again" that the rabbi lectured to an audience of "Bulgarian émigrés" on the theme of "The old and the new man" comparing the Old and New Testaments. The unsigned article charged him with "brutal anti-Semitism."<sup>22</sup>

On December 8 and 9, 1950, Daniel Zion took part in the first conference of the Messianic Jews in Israel (see Appendix II), organized by Abram Poljak, Moshe Ben Meir, Martha Baruch, Israel Weber and others, where he was elected chairman of the 13-member board of directors charged with the set-up of The Union of the Messianic Jews in Israel (*Ichud Yehudim Meshichim beIsrael*), the drafting of its statutes, and its representation before the authorities. They were too naive, however, in their hopes to obtain an official recognition from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

18 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Fcxw1wWG8V0XzOjBl6Q03QvlyEv-dTIQ/view>

19 Following the example of Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky, who advocated the same idea at the beginning of the 20th century in his New York newspaper *Dos Naye Leben* (*Jewish Daily Forward*, June 24, 1950 and the *Jewish Newsletter*, July 28, 1950) <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ault0rG13e4QCcDUXnW1vt47BuGgaQUQ>

20 <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qgoEqWbyXpBFpVo0HsYQzaV0vaqeTX5M>

21 [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1G\\_cAUwP81IqZgWk1iuRk7qXfxXb4ibth](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1G_cAUwP81IqZgWk1iuRk7qXfxXb4ibth)

22 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ky9jg\\_zoscC8PntFUe4KLqbSN13JGjSd/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ky9jg_zoscC8PntFUe4KLqbSN13JGjSd/view)

Daniel Zion attracted easily both sympathizers and detractors. His honest position of preserving a distinctive Jewish way of life, Sabbath observance, etc., deterred many missionary organizations. In Israel he also kept his characteristic tone in his conversations with Finance Minister Dobri Bojilov and the King's Chancellery in 1942-1943. Few people could bear this prophetic tone. "*He knows no fear, no restraint, and no diplomacy,*" writes Abram Poljak in December 1950. The available testimonies from those days reveal a small and disunited Jewish Messianic community that welcomed Daniel Zion with a mixture of awe and sincere wonderment.

It is again Poljak, one of the leaders of the Messianic Jews in Israel in the 1950s, who tells us the following:

"He is 67 years old, medium height, wearing a little grey beard and he speaks Hebrew, French, Spanish, Turkish and Bulgarian because he comes from Bulgaria and as a Bulgarian he had to respond to his rebellious nature... Now this old fighter is in Israel, and already you can hear his voice and feel his whip. He raises the banner of the rebellion against "this corrupted religion" (as he is calling the rabbis) and warns that "the days of visitation are near, the days of vengeance!"... "Troubles will come upon Israel, such as never before. And to you rabbis it shall be said: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsim!"

We need to see this event in its historical perspective. We believe that even the smallest spiritual events are more important than the greatest political ones, because the return of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom are near. Everything related to Jesus in Israel is of paramount importance. Therefore, for us, Daniel Zion's peaching is one of the most important events of our time. ... When you hear people rant about him, and his opponents criticize him, you can only smile compassionately. What do these dwarves know of this giant? What do they know of the courage that it takes, as a rabbi at the age of 67 years without tangible collateral in the midst of the Jewish

people and the State of Israel, to challenge the power of darkness? Even if he reaches no further than what exists today, even if he did not do more than what he has already done to date, he must be counted in the number of the greatest Jews, the bravest men. He has done a prophetic apostolic act, and set the ball rolling ....”

Poljak apparently referred to one of Rabbi Zion’s sermons on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur in September 1950 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Some people took notes on this sermon, which had obviously impacted deeply all attendees. Here are some excerpts:

“To the Christians - Behold, the word of the Lord to Christians, to those who say of themselves that they are Christian and are not, because they do the opposite of what Yeshua HaMashiach commanded and lived out. Instead of loving each other, ye hate and kill one another. In His Name, millions were killed. Instead of sanctifying His name, Him ye have profaned. Hear the word of the Lord: If ye seek Yeshua, accept the Messiah and fulfill His words, it’s good. If not, ye shall be devoured by the sword! So the Lord has spoken. Playeth not with God, for He is a jealous and avenging God.

To the missionaries and the priesthood - You hypocritical messengers, who have taken up a sacred duty for you, the sacred name of Yeshua, but you have abused for your benefit - the hand of the Lord will be upon you first! You are responsible for the flock that is lost. You have left them to fend for themselves and feasted yourself!

To the Jews - For you, the children of Israel, is the word of the Lord Yeshua, who is the Messiah come to redeem the people of Israel, and with them the whole of mankind. He sacrificed himself for our sins, to reconcile us. He is risen from the dead, and He is the High Priest, the true one, always ready to forgive the sins of all who believe in Him.

If ye will hearken unto my voice, that I am sent by the Lord, it is good. If not, if you are more stubborn and do not listen to my words, there will be great hardships to come, as there has never been, and many of the children of Israel shall perish, and only those will remain who listen to the words of the living God, who wholeheartedly believe in God. These will repent and accept Yeshua as the Mashiach and Saviour.

Thus sayeth the Lord: Behold, the days come, that all that is left over from that tribulation shall know me, from the youngest to the oldest, and the Lord shall be King over all the earth through Yeshua HaMashiach, His Son.

Behold, the day is near when Yeshua HaMashiach will come into Jerusalem and will redeem the people and God will be King through Yeshua HaMashiach!

To the Chief Rabbi of Israel - I know you think I am deceived because I regard Yeshua as my Messiah and Saviour. Before the Lord's throne as a witness I told you that for many years I prayed with tears and fasting before the Lord, and that the Lord led me into the path of righteousness, that I would only do His will and not mine. I told you of the signs and miracles I have seen, and not just once but many times. You all told me I was raving and that I was delusional. Forgive me, but you are the ones who are raving when you call the real things deception.

Your narrow-minded religious education and your high offices are the veil that separates you from the truth. You cannot judge objectively. I was like you, but God, in His mercy and despite my sins, showed me the right path through the Holy Spirit. I have been running from Him for years, but now He guides me on the right path. Therefor I say to you, even if I were alone in my faith in Yeshua the Messiah, I would still be right, but I am not alone. There are millions of believers, and thousands of

highly educated Jews. Even some rabbis believe Yeshua is the Messiah! Are they all raving? I know that if you wholeheartedly pray to God and read the New Testament by thoughtfully meditating on it and reverently reflect on the Messiah Yeshua, God will open your eyes ...

The truth must be told! Our fathers committed a terrible sin and condemned the One who was without sin! Our fathers sinned and are gone, but we too bore the consequences! Do we want to continue to suffer? We must make up for this injustice! We need to accept Yeshua as a Jew, and as the Messiah of God, and rip Him out of the hands of those Christians who have made Him an idol...

... as a Messenger of God I want to warn you – first comes the warning, then the punishment ... So know ye that the Lord sent me, and that the words I speak are not of me. The days of visitation are come, the days of vengeance! If you accept Yeshua the Messiah He will save us for the second time with perfect salvation. And if not countless tribulations lie before us...

And to you, rabbis, it is said - Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.<sup>23</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine the effect that these words had on his audience in Jaffa in December 1950.

We further learn that, by 1953, the events of the summer and autumn of 1950 had not dispirited Rabbi Zion. On the contrary, he was preaching Yeshua HaMashiach in Jaffa and near Haifa, where people welcomed him enthusiastically. His meetings with Bulgarian Jews, who seemed to have kept their sympathies for him, ended with some of them believing in Yeshua. Daniel Zion met less frequently with the Messianic community in Jerusalem because he travelled a lot around the country. However, his encounters with believers were

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23 Abram Poljak, *JCG* Nr.168, 169 November, December 1950, [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap168\\_1150\\_dan.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap168_1150_dan.pdf); [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap169\\_1250\\_dan.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap169_1250_dan.pdf)

always warm, and when in February 1953 Agnes Waldstein and Baron Albert Springer from the congregation in Jerusalem travelled for a conference in Stuttgart, they entrusted the gatherings in Jerusalem to Daniel Zion, and the congregation sung hymns about Yeshua, written by Daniel Zion.<sup>24</sup>

Surely we might never learn in detail his precise theological positions. In this respect, we might benefit from a comparison by Abram Poljak between Daniel Zion and another rabbi who converted to Christianity – Dr. Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of Rome.<sup>25</sup> Rabbi Zolli grew up in the shadow of St. Peter’s Cathedral, and in old age converted to Catholicism and became a solitary researcher and theologian, but Daniel Zion, despite his many writings and articles, seems to have been much more a man of action and an evangelist. Some of his later statements cast a shadow on his understanding of the mystery of the Trinity, but his long journey to Yeshua and his gradual realization of Messiah’s personality and salvific role hints at a possible, albeit tardy, comprehension of that mystery too. But we might never know.

We should perhaps also clarify the original title of the book, *Five Years under Fascist Oppression*.<sup>26</sup> Its wording and some laudatory remarks about the already settling Communist regime by Eliezer Asher Ansky, who wrote the preface to the first edition in 1945 and also undoubtedly edited the ending of the book, may disturb the readers with democratic convictions. We should not forget that according to some estimates, immediately after the Communist coup in Bulgaria on September 9, 1944, and the wholesale occupation of the country by the Red Army, more than 20,000 people were murdered with no trial, and shortly thereafter, the so-called People’s Court—puppeteered by Moscow—issued 2,730 death sentences executed in February 1945.<sup>27</sup>

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24 Agnes Waldstein, *JCG Nr. 194* February 1953; [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/aw194\\_0253\\_kon.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/aw194_0253_kon.pdf)

25 Abram Poljak, *JCG Nr. 169* December 1950 [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap169\\_1250\\_dan.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/ap169_1250_dan.pdf)

26 *A Note from FAI PUBLISHING*: We made an editorial decision to re-title the English edition of this book *Rescued from the Reich: How a Rabbi, a Priest, and a King Evaded Hitler’s Grasp*, as we felt it better communicated to our English-speaking audience what Zion’s account of his WWII years in Sofia would include.

27 For comparison, in Nuremberg and Tokyo were issued twelve and seven death sentences respectively.

At the time of publication, in August 1945, the Communists had already imposed their power with much cruelty, and perhaps censorship would not have allowed for these memories to see the light of day without the astute editing of Zion's secretary, Mr Ansky. Along with all Bulgarians, they had yet to discover the brutish and merciless true face of the Communist regime. Daniel Zion had no sympathies for it whatsoever. He did not fail to oppose the Marxists in the conclusion of his next book, in 1946, by saying that class struggle is not a viable explanation for all the troubles in the world, and that when the victors "*take away the rights and freedoms of the conquered and impose upon them new chains, they only sow the seed of a new war.*"<sup>28</sup> Lastly, do not let the characteristic pathos of the book and the preface from 1945 prevent you from reading the facts and feeling the spirit of those days.

Before you enjoy this unique historical testimony, I wanted to add also that in 2016, in a short exchange of e-mails with the archivists at *Yad Vashem*, the Museum of the victims of the Holocaust in Jerusalem, I received a confirmation that Daniel Zion's booklet is actually one of the earliest first-hand testimonies for the Holocaust years (or in Bulgaria's case, the averted Holocaust). *Yad Vashem* also helped me locate some SS documents from Auschwitz about Alma Alalouf and Leon Batis.

### PRESERVING A PRECIOUS LEGACY

So the facts are these: Bulgaria is an ally of the Third Reich, Boris III is of German-Italian descent, and the country has its own anti-Semitic legislation in force. But the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria believes that Jesus Christ is the Jewish Messiah, the Son of the Living God and the Saviour of the world. We leave it to our readers to consider whether or not this latter and so little-known fact played a crucial role in the rescue of 50,000 Jews in Bulgaria, while 6,000,000 of their brothers were slaughtered in Central and Eastern Europe.

Maybe at least some of the Bulgarian Jews (and others as well) will appreciate the life of their rabbi for its true value and will venture to look at this rescue from a more spiritual point of view: What if the rescue

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28 Daniel Zion, *The Triple Way of the New Man*, p. 145 (Issued by the Chief Rabbinate of Bulgaria)

was first secured before God “in the name of Yeshua HaMashiach” and its socio-political dimension was just the outworking of a spiritual and invisible process? I think we all have about 50,000 reasons to consider this possibility. Let us ask ourselves, what is the probability that, at the time of the Holocaust, a whole Jewish community is saved and that the Rabbi of that particular community is a Messianic Jew? I have no doubt that our cynical and atheistic epoch will laugh at this juxtaposition, but some people, just like Moses, will be intrigued and will “turn aside” to see how exactly is “this bush burning, but is not consumed!”<sup>29</sup>

In the book of the prophet Daniel, the archangel Michael is also called the advocate or the guardian of the Jews.<sup>30</sup> Many prominent personalities played their earthly role in the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews, but do we really think this could have been possible with no heavenly interference? Is it really much of a speculation to say that this heavenly interference was conditioned by the prayers of Daniel Zion and his Messianic faith?

Baruch Ata Adonai!

Nikolai Boyadjiev

MARCH 2021

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29 Exodus 3:3

30 Daniel 12:1



# FOREWORD

TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION  
SOFIA 1945

*“Throughout its long history, the Jewish people have proven their mettle. Severe trials have only strengthened the spirit of this most ancient nation, which even today, after so many disappointments, still hopes to see the fulfillment of the ideal proclaimed by the prophets: the universal brotherhood of all mankind.”*

– S. Dubnov

The year 1939 will be remembered in history. During this year, Europe’s bloodiest war broke out, taking millions of human lives. Armed to the teeth and driven by an obsession with grandeur, greed, and the desire to dominate other nations, Nazi Germany invaded the territory of Poland, and in a flash of lightning, defeated the Polish resistance. The war started there, in Europe, but it quickly spread into France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Finland, the Soviet Union, the Balkans, Africa, and into the Far East. In 1940, when fascism overtook almost all of Europe, when rivers

of blood flowed on the battlefields, when hundreds of thousands of Europeans were imprisoned in concentration camps, when every progressive thought was mercilessly persecuted, and when enslaved men died the most inhuman deaths at the hands of the bloodthirsty Nazis, a storm cloud covered the Bulgarian skies. Hitler's agents infested every government and public institution.

Nazi propaganda worked to tether Bulgaria to Hitler's chariot. It was unstoppable. Hitler's foreign and domestic agents poisoned the minds of hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians by both word and pen. This propaganda primarily targeted the peaceful Jewish minority, which had amicably coexisted with their Bulgarian brothers for hundreds of years.

The Nazis didn't stop there. The Bulgarian government, represented by Prime Minister Filov and Ministers Gabrovski and Bozhilov, who had occupied the National Assembly with the other illegitimately elected "members of parliament," signed the most disgraceful law against Bulgarian Jewry that could ever be imagined: The Law for the Defense of the Nation. Even then, we knew that this unconstitutional law was not created to serve any grand state interest.

Those who introduced this law and voted for it had several motives. First, to strengthen the position of those ministers and national representatives who were soaked in nationalistic ideology and who were preparing to seize total power. Second, to rob the Bulgarian Jews—buying their belongings for next to nothing. And finally, to cover their tracks by surrendering the Jews to the Germans for extermination. They managed to implement these already-drawn blueprints. Parliament voted on the Law for the Defense of the Nation, approved it, and immediately put it into action. Tens of thousands of Bulgarian Jews were ejected from economic life. Thousands of workers had to leave the workshops. Doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, clerks, and others had to stop their work because the law forbade doctors to cure, lawyers to defend, and pharmacists to prepare medication for "Aryans"... and yet this was not enough. It was only the beginning of an indiscriminate roundup of Jews from one neighborhood to the next. Eventually, the whole of Sofia's Jewry was forced out of the

capital and expelled to country towns and from there to Poland, a plan to which the Bulgarian government and the Germans had agreed.

The Law for the Defense of the Nation gutted the economic support of ninety percent of Bulgarian Jewry. However, the worst wounds were moral. We were forbidden to go outside after nine in the evening. Public restaurants, theatres, streets, and meetings were closed to us. We were given only two hours a day to buy food. Finally, we had to wear yellow stars on our lapels and hang plates that said "Jewish home" over the doors of our houses, so every bully could swear at us, rob us, or just make us disappear.

The Bulgarian Jew, during these five black years, was physically and morally harassed. No one knew the fate being prepared for him by the sadist Belev (the Bulgarian commissar of Jewish Affairs). Despair gripped every Jew. Nobody felt secure.

Those of our brothers who led our public institutions at that time lobbied before some of the leading figures in the country, politicians indifferent to the foreign and domestic policy of fascist Bulgaria or those acting in opposition. They asked them to stand for the protection and the interests of the Jewish minority in Bulgaria. Alas, it was all in vain because the Interior Minister Gabrovski and his most faithful tool, the Commissar Belev, had already decided to wage war with any and all, as long as the Jews were persecuted to their dying breath.

One of these humble public servants who never forgot his duty, who from dawn to dusk concerned himself with the fate of the unfortunate Bulgarian Jewry, who drew plans on how to help them in order to pull them out of the swamp of despair, was Rabbi Daniel Zion. We shall not touch on the personality of this national spiritual servant; his work is well known in all of Bulgaria. But we cannot contain ourselves or refrain from speaking of his activities during these five years of darkest slavery. Bulgarian Jewry undoubtedly remembers how, when the sadist Belev decided to deport them from Sofia, Rabbi Daniel Zion mustered his courage; risking being beaten, exiled, and killed, he appeared before the government ministers of Prime Minister Filov, before members of parliament, and before high ranking clergy and politicians. He even finally knocked at the Royal Court's door to

plead the cause of the destitute Bulgarian Jews. Most importantly, he delivered a warning: whoever attacks the Jewish people will bitterly lament his days, and a day will come when he will pay dearly for every wound.

Emboldened with prophetic insight and strength, Rabbi Daniel Zion spoke boldly of all the injustices committed against the Jews and warned that those responsible would one day pay dearly. Then, on September 9, the Communist revolution put an end to the atrocities perpetrated against us. In addition, the people sought punishment for those who pushed Bulgaria toward catastrophe. The National Assembly, a people's court, was created. Facing trial were the very people who blackened the days of Bulgaria's Jews, who robbed and tormented them. They paid for all the evil they caused to the country. They were warned by the foreknowing rabbi Daniel. But who would have believed him! At the time, those murderers were at the peak of social status. They never imagined they would one day be held responsible before the people for their deeds. They did not listen to the words of the people's defender.

And what warnings he uttered! We will see them in detail in the following pages.

Here I must stress that in the fight to alleviate the fate of Bulgarian Jewry, a great number of our public figures took part and acted each in his own way. Many prominent Bulgarians were actively involved (politicians, clergymen, doctors, lawyers, writers, publicists, journalists, artists, and so on). Though not described in detail in this book, their role in these matters is all well-known to the public. Therefore, let no one be vexed that their names are not mentioned here. This book is a humble work and has as its objective to present the personal memories and experiences of a man we all respect: the rabbi, Daniel Zion.

Everything in this book is true and can serve future historians in writing a history of Bulgarian Jewry during the years of 1939 to 1944.

Eliezer Asher Anski  
SOFIA, AUGUST 1945

# INTRODUCTION

BY E.A. ANSKI

**I**t was 1942. The war raged in Europe with all its dreadful inhumanity, destroying millions of lives, priceless achievements of human genius developed over a millennium. The bony hand of death mowed down the lives of the nations' greatest promise: their youth. In this horror, which exceeded the worst imagination, the nations trembled in painful anxiety amidst their shared uncertainty. No European citizen, neither on the front lines nor on the home front, knew what awaited him. In this monstrously ugly war, the front and the home front had merged into one battleground. Soldiers fell to bullets and bombs while civilians perished under the rubble of their homes destroyed in the air raids.

The Nazi peril threatened the life and freedom of all Europe. The bloody hand of fascism struck at every freedom fighter and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of men and women in concentration camps. Soon Europe itself became an enormous concentration camp. But this danger, this wretched state of uncertainty, was most acute for us, the Jews—the first victims of Hitler's fascism.

After every invasion, the German's first goal was to attack the defenseless Jews by expelling them from their homes and herding them like cattle toward Poland with a single objective: liquidation. It is now known that more than seven million Jews in Europe, 3.5

million of them from occupied Poland alone, were subjected to unlimited psychological torture before being systematically annihilated in the most brutal way possible in the death camps of Dachau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Sobibor, Poniatov, Botrok, Burak, Buchenwald and tens of others. Each of these names is a testament to the most inhuman torture and killing of people by “people.” Each of these names stands for infinite cruelty, killing by asphyxiating gases, burning in red-hot furnaces, mass shootings, starvation, beatings, and more. The authenticated data gathered by appointed international commissions reveals that in these fields of death, in the bonfires and crematoriums, the Germans annihilated thousands and hundreds of thousands of people—Jews, Poles, French, Greeks, Serbs, Czechs, Russians, Slovenes, Dutch, Danes, and others—keeping them alive in the camps only for a few hours or days, depending on the size of the group. In the camps were the “*dushgubki*,” the soul-destroyers—vehicles and concrete booths used for asphyxiation with Zyklon gas. First, they burnt the corpses there in the most primitive way; later, they switched to crematoria for faster incineration. In the death camps, unfortunate souls fell into the hands of SS troops, who shot them in trenches, bludgeoned them, drowned them in pools, and more. This was an unheard-of and never-before-seen factory of mass death in which the number of daily victims depended on only two criteria: how many slaves entered the camp and how many were needed for the endless construction work.

Here is a brief description of a “death camp” (from the Soviet writer K. Simonov).

As you walk on the road to Chelm near Lublin, you see on the right side, only 300 meters from the road, the outline of a whole city: hundreds of short grey roofs in straight rows separated by barbed wire. It is a big city which can host tens of thousands of people. You pull off the road and go through the entrance, which leads you behind the barbed wire. Inside is a row of clean huts with neat and tidy gardens and chairs and benches woven from birch sticks. These are the barracks of the SS guards and their commanders. Also here is the “soldatenheim,” a specially

built small shack used as a brothel for the guards, to which they took women from among the prisoners. They were killed if they got pregnant.

Further down are the chambers for disinfecting the prisoners' clothing. In here we find the door connecting to a second disinfection chamber. It is built in a completely different manner. It is a square room, slightly higher than two meters and approximately six by six meters across. The walls, ceiling, and floor are made of pure grey concrete. There is no trace of shelving for clothes, unlike the first chamber. It is bare and empty... A single large steel door hermetically seals the entrance to the room. It locks from the outside with imposing steel hooks. There are three openings in the walls of this concrete tomb. The pipes run through two of them, and the third one is "the eye": a little square window slotted inside the concrete wall and barred by thick and dense steel grille. Through the "eye," you can see the whole inside of the chamber. By the entrance stand several round, airtight containers labeled in large letters: "Zyklon!" and in smaller print, "for special use in the East." The containers were emptied through the pipes and into the chambers.

The prisoners were stripped naked and crammed together to save space. They packed 250 people into 40 square meters before closing the steel door (which they sealed even tighter with clay), and a special squad with gas masks poured the "Zyklon" gas through the pipes. These small, light blue, innocent-looking crystals, when exposed to oxygen, immediately release toxic substances—gases that immediately and lethally attack all the organs of the human body. The SS guard who oversaw the gassing could switch on the lights to illuminate the chamber and watch the suffocation through the "eye," which, according to some testimonies, lasted between two and ten minutes. Through the "eye," the SS guard could safely watch everything—the

grotesquely distorted faces of the dying and the gradual effect of the gas. “The eye” is positioned at eye level. As the prisoners were dying of asphyxiation, there was no need for the observer to look down; they were dying, but they were not falling—the chamber was so cramped that even the dead were still standing. What unheard-of and unprecedented sadism!

There is also a new, additional block. The fence is not as secure here and for good reason. This was the final destination at which arriving prisoners, already dead or half-dead, were killed. Behind this wire, nobody except the SS guards and the crematorium commanders lived more than one hour. In the bare field is a tall four-cornered stone pipe attached to a long and low brick rectangle. This, indeed, is the crematorium.

Experts have found that the temperature in the ovens exceeded 1500 degrees. The furnaces ran continuously. It is estimated that in twenty-four hours, 1,400 corpses could be incinerated.

Below are the stories of two survivors of the annihilation camp of Auschwitz, told with the hope that we can get a rough idea of the indescribable tragedy experienced by our brothers from the Aegean Thrace.

### **THE TESTIMONY OF LEON SOLOMON BATISH FROM ATHENS**

*(This account was made before a group of Jewish journalists in Sofia.)*

*“I am a fugitive from the annihilation camp of Auschwitz. My name is Leon Solomon Batish; I’m a merchant from Athens.”*

*Batish then pulled back the sleeve of his coat to those assembled around him and revealed the number tattooed on his left arm: 182 464.*



This is the number they gave me in the camp. All the inmates received a short haircut, and our numbers were tattooed on our arms, unlike other camps, in which prisoners wore their numbers written on cards hanging from their necks.

On March 3, 1943, every Greek newspaper reported that all Jews must register in their respective Jewish communities and that the lists of registrants should be submitted to the German occupation authorities. Then on March 24 of the same year, by order of the authorities, the Jewish synagogue in Athens was surrounded, and the two hundred or so worshipers inside were arrested and sent to the concentration camp of Haidari, about 6 km away from Athens. That same day, police surrounded the Jewish homes and arrested 550 men, women, and children. I was among them. We were all taken to Haidari.

On March 31, with no warning whatsoever, we were removed from the camp and loaded on trucks and then into enclosed train cars that sent us through Serbia, Hungary, and Austria to Poland. Along the way, we were given only carrots and water.

On April 10, we arrived at Auschwitz. We were immediately divided; all men aged 14 to 35 who were fit for work were separated from the others. The elderly, the women, and the children were taken away; we did not know where. Jews from all over Greece were constantly arriving in the camp. We later learned that the women, the children, and the men unfit for work were all taken to the Birkenau camp, some 3 km from Auschwitz, and incinerated in the crematoria there.

On May 5, the Nazis gathered us and sent us to camp "D." There, we found 14,000 people, the majority of whom were Jews. There were six large crematoria there. From the 320 left in our group, the Nazis took 150 of us to work in the crematoria. I was put in the second group; we were digging up corpses. After three days, I met those who worked in the crematoria. They told me about the horrors there; for days, they threw the live bodies of their brothers and sisters into the red-hot furnaces. The horror suffered by those damned to the most painful death is indescribable. The mind freezes in icy horror, and the mouth is paralyzed and refuses to tell of the experience. Of those

150 people who worked at the crematoria, around ten each day were burned after falling victim to hunger and fatigue and being stricken by the great tragedy unfolding before their eyes. When only 40 of the group remained, knowing what awaited them, they bombed the crematorium. The explosion killed twenty SS guards. Enraged, the Nazis executed those 40 remaining brave men on the spot.

In addition to the crematoria there were special gas chambers. Thousands of Jews became lifeless corpses in those rooms.

On January 18, 1944, there were roughly 5,000 of us inmates left alive in the camp. On that day we were divided into groups and sent out in different directions. Before that, several hundred people who were utterly exhausted and unable to work were shot. We were loaded into an open train, 150 people per car, and they drove us into the unknown. Fifteen kilometers from the camp, we met a locomotive pulling a single coach car. Both were crammed with German soldiers. Later we learned that they were fleeing the advancing Red Army. Our first impression was that the war was over, and we all cheered up. However, to our great disappointment, our train continued its journey, albeit with fewer guards.

The train stopped in front of a forest. We were all quickly removed from the train and taken into the forest. Here began our complete extermination with machine guns. In the turmoil, one group of the doomed managed to hide. I was among them together with my comrades Avram Isaac and Elia Mendas. We spent the night in the woods huddled together and holding our breath. The next day, we managed to get to a Russian village. We said we were Christians. The villagers gave us food.

Later, we learned that the entire region had already fallen into the hands of the Red Army. We were saved. But thousands of our brothers and sisters from Greece and Aegean Thrace died in the ditches, in the crematoria, and the gas chambers. We will never see them again. The hellish pictures of the death camps are deeply branded in our minds, in our blood. Every memory of what we went through in these camps darkens our minds, and we fall into despair; in these moments we hear

the terrible cries of women, men, and children facing the ugliest and most sadistic violent death.”

### THE TESTIMONY OF ALMA ALALOUF

*76926 is the camp number branded on the right arm of Mrs. Alma Alaluf, a Jewess from Aegean Thrace. A Nazi slave until recently, Alma Alaluf, now lying in her bed in a Sofia hotel as she is still unable to recover from what she went through, tells her story.*

You all remember the years 1942–1943 when in the dark, icy nights with no food, and under the blows of the whip and the barrels of rifles, 70,000 Jews were taken from their homes in Greece and the Aegean region and brought to concentration camps, to disappear finally in the insatiable crematoria of Hitler’s bloodthirsty monster. Men, women, elderly, children, healthy and sick, crammed worse than animals in sealed wagons, with no water, no air—we had to travel eleven days and eleven nights until we reached Auschwitz—a place far away, near the distant German-Polish border. Half the children and elderly died on the way. Of those 70,000 Jews, only a hundred and fifty survive today.

In the camps, we were thrown to live in wooden huts. Each one “slept” (if you can call this sleeping) eight people crammed like sardines, men and women. Without any kind of blanket, with no heating and no windows, we endured the bitterly cold northern winter nights and often found that one of our comrades had frozen to death, unable to endure the cold.

Every morning they woke us up at 3 a.m. They often did this by firing automatic weapons or with some other loud banging to intimidate us. Breakfast was a half-cup of coffee without sugar. Then we waited for two hours of roll call under a barrage of blows, insults, and profanity. Before we set off to work, tattered and sometimes almost naked, we passed through two rows of SS so they could freely curse, beat us, and ridicule us. The physical torment was not enough for our executioners. They wanted to kill our spirits as well.

We walked for two hours on bare feet before reaching our

“Kommando”—our assigned work. This was a channel where men and women, healthy and sick, had to work knee-deep in water. SS men with guard dogs, whips, and iron sticks were waiting for us there. At six o’clock, the work began without any breaks. Anyone who tried to rest for a moment was immediately attacked with blows by the Nazi beasts. They struck his bare back with iron sticks, lashed him with whips and punishing kicks, and if he fell to the ground exhausted, his fate was sealed. They took him away as a useless object to fuel the crematoria.

The women crushed stones, dug in water, and pushed train carts. At noon we had a 30-minute break, during which they gave us half a liter of soup. Then the deadly work resumed— ten hours of slave labor per day in the twentieth century! Even worse, most slaveholders would at least see to it that their slaves were fed well enough to be able to work; as for ours, they just wanted to kill us. This went on until five in the afternoon.

We were a pitiful line of hopelessly desperate people when we returned to the camp every evening. Everyone shuddered under the gaze of the SS killers who were deciding our fate. As a rule, dozens of our comrades were fated to pass away every day. They would stop us in front of the eight crematoria, which ceaselessly belched smoke, to set aside those who would feed the insatiable fiery Teutonic Moloch that night. At first, they suffocated their victims before throwing their bodies into the ovens. Later, however, the slayers abandoned even this “ceremony” and pushed the exhausted bodies of their victims straight into the oven. We heard their desperate screams, powerless to help them. Women usually collapsed at the sight. Our mothers, our fathers, and our children were fed into that bottomless fiery mouth. We knew that one day we would follow them.

The Nazis took the slender and pretty girls from the start to satisfy the animal lust of the German sadists. It was not enough to profane their bodies. They marked their breasts with the seal of the eternal disgrace of the German race, branding them with the inscription, “Woman for the German nation.”

In this respect, the Nazis were terribly imaginative. They often cut

off the genitals of men and drugged the women to make them more efficient. They spent the days killing us in body and soul, and in the evenings, we returned to our disgusting holes. But we were not yet left to rest. For two hours, we were again insulted, cursed, and beaten. After another roll call, they gave us “food”—a quarter of a kilo of boiled potatoes and a piece of margarine meant to last fifteen days. Tormented by what we experienced during the day, we could not fall asleep and did not have much time for it anyway. They often woke us in the middle of the night to take away someone whom the executioners considered suspicious or simply because some drunken SS wanted to torment us. We usually got to bed at 1 a.m. only to renew our martyrdom the next day.

### **THE MIRACLE OF THE BULGARIAN RESCUE**

The Jews of old Bulgaria could have shared the fate of the Jews from the Aegean and Macedonia. Even before the publication of the Law for the Defense of the Nation, we all felt emptied and shaken; every Jew felt the terrible things which were coming, the trials and the suffering we were going to endure. The Jewish streets teemed with rumors about the upcoming publication of the Law for the Defense of the Nation. Finally, in Volume 16 of the State Gazette on the 23rd of January, 1941, the law was published and came into force.

This law’s publication was the first step in a series of decrees issued in the spirit of the relentless battle against us, the Jews, a struggle aimed at our ultimate moral, economic and physical annihilation.

The Bulgarian government represented by Filov, Gabrovski, Bozhilov, etc., reigned in the National Assembly along with the undemocratically “elected MPs” and wielded as a hammer against Bulgarian Jewry the most disgraceful law that could ever be invented—The Law for the Defense of the Nation (LDN). This law, compared with laws of the same nature issued in Fascist Italy, Nazi Hungary, Romania, and later in occupied France, bears the marks of exceptional cruelty unbounded by any semblance of twentieth-century morality and humanity.

From a most reliable source, we were told that high-level government interests dictated the introduction of this extremely reactionary and

unconstitutional law. However, if it were Nazi Germany imposing this cruel and ruinous law in Bulgaria, why then were the anti-Jewish laws in Italy, Romania, Hungary, and France (countries under full Nazi influence) not as cynically cruel? The answer to this question lay in the real motives of those who introduced and voted for this law. First, to strengthen the position of those nationalistic ministers and members of parliament who led an anti-Jewish movement in the country and who were preparing to take all the power into their hands. This truth was revealed during the interrogations of those guilty of the third national catastrophe when they were brought in front of the People's Court in Sofia. The court made clear that Peter Gabrovski was about to become prime minister of Bulgaria and steered the country fully into the hands of the pro-German agents. The second motive: they wanted to rob the Bulgarian Jews, to grab their money, to settle in their apartments, to buy their belongings cheaply, and to deliver them to the Germans for liquidation outside the borders of Bulgaria so no one would be left to call for justice. Unfortunately, they succeeded in implementing this premeditated plan.

The LDN was voted on and approved by the "National Assembly" and immediately enforced. As a result, thousands of Bulgarian Jews were ejected from economic life. Thousands of workers were forced out of "Aryan" enterprises and workshops. Doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, clerks, and others had to interrupt their activity because the Law forbade the doctor to heal, the lawyer to defend, and the pharmacist to prepare medication for "Aryans." As if this were not enough, a massive persecution of Jews began from neighborhood to neighborhood. Eventually, all 25,743 Jews in Sofia were expelled from the capital and sent to live in country towns until their deportation to Poland. This was in accordance with the agreement signed on February 22, 1943, between the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs Alexander Belev and the German representative, a captain of the defense detachments of the SS-Hauptsturmführer, Theodor Dannecker.

**THE AGREEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

For the deportation at first of 20,000 Jews from the new Bulgarian lands, Thrace and Macedonia, to the German eastern regions.

(The words “from the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia” in the original were crossed out by Belev himself, which proves the agreement dealt first only with the Jews from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia, but Belev intended to include also the Jews of pre-war Bulgaria. So Belev crossed out these few words, which were so fateful for the Bulgarian Jews.)

**1) After approval by the Council of Ministers, in the new Bulgarian lands Thrace and Macedonia, 20,000 Jews—regardless of age and sex—will be prepared for deportation. The German Reich is ready to accept these Jews in its Eastern regions.**

**2) Departure railway stations, figures, and numbers of trains are established as follows:**

- a) In Skopje—5,000 with 5 trains
- b) In Bitola—3,000 with 3 trains
- c) In Pirot—2,000 with 2 trains
- d) In G. Djumaya—3,000 with 3 trains
- e) In Dupnitsa—3,000 with 3 trains
- f) In Radomir—4,000 with 4 trains

Since the complete accommodation of the last 12,000 Jews in camps is possible only until 15 April 1943, the German representative will take action so that these 12 trains—as far as this will be possible technically—are ready to depart in the period between the end of March and 15 April 1943.

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1 Editor's note: We are reprinting the document from the book *Documents*, a publication of the Central Consistory of the Jews in Bulgaria under the editorship of Grinberg, Sofia, 1945. The document is written according to the old spelling. We present it with the new spelling, though we have retained its style.

The Jews assembled in Skopje and Bitolya will therefore be deported after 15 April 1943.

**3) The Bulgarian Commissariat for Jewish affairs, as an agent of the Ministry of Interior and National Health, guarantees the German Reich that the following basic conditions will be fulfilled:**

- a) Only Jews will be included in the transports.
- b) Jews in mixed marriages will not be included.
- c) If the Jews being deported are not yet deprived of their citizenship, it should be done upon their leaving Bulgarian territory.
- d) Jews with contagious diseases will not be included.
- e) The Jews may not carry with them weapons, poisons, foreign currency, precious metals, etc.

**4) For every transport, a list of the persons in the transport will be prepared in triplicate.** This list must include the name, surname, date and place of birth, last residence, and profession of the Jews. Two copies will be remitted to the German escort of the transport and one to the German representative in Sofia. The Bulgarian government will provide the necessary food and supplies for 15 days, counting from the date of departure of the train, as well as the necessary number of water casks.

**5) The question of the guard for the transport will be decided later.** A German guard command might take over the transport at the departure station.

**6) The amount of monetary compensation to be paid by Bulgaria,** calculated according to the number of deportees, will be decided by special agreement. This will not affect the timetable of the transports' movements.

**7) The expenses for the transport** from the departure railway station to the destination will be covered by Bulgaria.



**8) The Bulgarian State Railways and the German State Railways will agree** directly on the trains' schedule as well as on providing the means of transport.

**9) In no case will the Bulgarian government demand the return of the deported Jews.**

**10) This agreement is drafted in two copies** in both German and Bulgarian, with each of these copies being regarded as original.

Sofia, February 22, 1943

Signed: A. BELEV

Signed: T. DANNECKER

### THE NOOSE TIGHTENED

The Law for the Defense of the Nation undermined the sustenance of all Bulgarian Jewry, but the middle class was worst affected: shopkeepers, artisans, peddlers, brokers, clerks, and others. Even if the economic hardships could somehow be overcome, the psychological harassment was formidable. The headquarters which invented all sorts of regulations limiting the minimal rights of the Jews was the notorious "Commissariat for Jewish Affairs," created by the Law to charge the Council of Ministers to take all measures to solve the Jewish question.

With the 70th ordinance of the Council of Ministers, drawn up during its meeting on 26 August 1942, proceeding no. 111, a decree for settling the Jewish question was published in the State Gazette, vol. 192, on 29 August 1942. This Law-Decree inflicted the heaviest moral damage to Bulgarian Jewry. For instance, we could not have Bulgarian family names or surnames with typical Bulgarian endings, such as "-ov," "-ev," "-itch," "-ski," and so on. On the left side of the chest, we had to wear a six-pointed yellow star as a sign to distinguish us from non-Jewish citizens. The aim of these measures was clear: the Jew had to be isolated; his relations with Bulgarians had to be severed; he must face all sorts of obstacles in the government or in public places; in other words, we were placed in quarantine.

To the Bulgarians' credit (the non-fascist ones), people were not only *not* avoiding those who wore the yellow star but also clearly

expressing their sympathies and continued to be friends with the Jews despite the explicit prohibition to do so. The progressive part of the Bulgarian nation did not surrender to the malicious anti-Jewish propaganda portrayed in the media. On the contrary, the most prominent representatives of Bulgarian society, the political leaders, writers, publicists, lawyers, doctors, and others, repeatedly expressed their written protest to the political leaders of yesterday's fascist governments about the extremely cruel treatment of the Jewish minority in the country. All Jews who were Bulgarian citizens were issued special pink identity cards, the acquirement of which required tens of certificates, significant expenses, and wasted time. Jews were forbidden to live in hotels or residential palaces and were relegated to certain third-rate buildings defined by the Commissariat, and even then, for no longer than ten days.

Every Jewish home had to have a plate on the entryway door saying "JEWISH HOME" with a six-pointed star in the left corner and the resident's name below it. The same thing was required of all Jewish businesses if they were still functioning. They had to place a prominent sign reading "JEWISH BUSINESS" at the entrance. The same inscription had to be placed on forms, books, and products of Jewish businesses. Jews were forbidden to have cars, radios, and telephones. Under this monstrous decree, the Jews could use their living quarters as follows: two family members—one room; a family of three or four members—two rooms; a family of five or six members—up to three rooms. As if these restrictions were not enough, the decree set a deadline to resettle all Jews to the western districts of the capital. Jews were forbidden to leave town. We had a curfew from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Any delay, even just five minutes, brought a fine, a beating, or deportation to some camp.

Famous public restaurants, theatres, streets, and gatherings were prohibited for persons of "Jewish origins." We were not allowed to shop for food products during established business hours, but only two hours a day, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., after most of the products were already sold. We were also forbidden to buy products directly from the producers (the farmers). Persons of "Jewish origin" received one-fourth of the number of products distributed under the coupon

system than other Bulgarian citizens (except the Gypsies, who were treated as we were in this respect). Crowning all these severe restrictions was the order that all Jews from Sofia were subject to deportation, first to the countryside and later outside the kingdom (Article 29 of the Law-decree of August 29, 1942).

Naturally, all these terrible measures had a negative impact on the minds of the Bulgarian Jewry. They felt progressively more oppressed and fell into despair over these events and their uncertain futures. In this state of mind, the imagination was unleashed, fueled by all sorts of rumors coming from abroad about the tragic fate of German, Austrian, Polish, and Romanian Jewry. Everybody began to picture the grim events that took place in the German-occupied countries, events that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters, and which would inevitably affect the lives of the Bulgarian Jewry, too.

In this situation, of course, we could not remain idle. First, to ease our situation, our representative institutions and some individuals concerned about the fate of Bulgarian Jewry began isolated actions of intercession before certain prominent political, spiritual, and economic policymakers in the country. However, all these actions before official and unofficial figures had no significant or direct results. On the contrary, enraged by the opposition undertaken by the Bulgarian Jewry, the officials of “The Commissariat for Jewish Affairs” further tightened their noose around the Jew’s neck. The fascist propaganda, spoken and written, further kindled hatred against the Jews by urging the Bulgarians first to boycott the Jews and later to break their windows and destroy their shops. Finally, we heard the open shouting of the designated vendors of fascist newspapers: “Death to the Jews! Down with the Jews!”

### **BEARING JACOB’S BURDEN**

It was impossible for all of these conditions not to affect the soul of Rabbi Daniel Zion. Deep inside himself, he was convinced that everything that was befalling us, that everything happening around the world to restrict the freedom of individuals and nations, was only a transitional period of history, a period of decline, a step back to

prepare for a new leap forward. It is a historical truth that violence has never been, and can never be, long-lasting. He was convinced that the depression the world was experiencing under Hitler and the Fascists' oppression would pass away. At the same time, however, when he saw the desperation on the faces of all Jews, he could not wait for the storm to pass and inflict irreparable damage. He had to act.

He began immediately with active exhortations. Whenever and wherever he could, he held encouraging and comforting talks that brought some small hope among the Jews. This activity strengthened his belief that his first duty in these moments was to do anything possible, or even impossible, to ease the plight of his people. Seized by this inspiration, he was fully absorbed in searching for and finding ways to achieve that goal.

In such a situation, what option is there besides resorting to the support and assistance of political figures with the goodwill to help the Bulgarian Jewry? The Bulgarian Jewry that has always been a peaceful, beneficial, creative, and progressive element of the country?

With the position they held in the social hierarchy and the resources readily at their disposal, these figures could significantly contribute to the partial, if not full, easing of our tragic situation. But let us leave Rabbi Daniel Zion, a direct participant in all these struggles and sufferings of Bulgarian Jewry, to tell his memories.

## CHAPTER ONE

Facing these circumstances, I first sought the help of one of the closest private advisers of the late King Boris. My petition to this man was that he appear before the king to intercede for the partial or full cancellation of the anti-Jewish Law and the easing of anti-Jewish policy in the country. Regrettably, this intervention did not yield significant results. The king's adviser relayed to me "the assurances of the king that this Law is set up only to meet the demands of our allies, the Germans, and that the Law will not be applied in its entirety," a statement that time proved to be emphatically wrong, as the Law for the Defense of the Nation was applied not only fully but with cruelty and brutality.

Frustrated by this failure on the one hand, and on the other by the constantly deteriorating situation of Bulgarian Jewry, which, as already mentioned, had fallen into total despair in the face of the continuously multiplying restrictive regulations, I decided to again look for influential people close to the King. I settled on his secretary. I appeared before him and implored him to intercede before the King to receive me for a hearing. I was told that the king was not in the palace, but the secretary showed interest concerning the purpose of my meeting request. I explained that I wished to personally meet the king to discuss the political course of the government of Prime Minister Filov and Interior Minister Gabrovski regarding one part of the Bulgarian citizens—the Jews. I tried to explain that the king as a leader and as a man should not discriminate between his citizens as

Bulgarians, Jews, or others. They are all equal before the Constitution, and so he is obligated before the people and before the Constitution, on which he took an oath, to protect his citizens, their property, their lives, and their freedom. I also explained that just as the Almighty does not distinguish between whites and blacks, Christians and Jews, so also he should not divide his citizens into “higher” and “lower,” into “friends” and “enemies” and so on. Finally, I said that if despite all this, he continues to tolerate such a clearly unconstitutional law, he would be responsible before God and the people.

The secretary then asked me whether the Law for the Defense of the Nation affected me personally and if this was the reason I came to the palace. I replied that this law does not affect me personally because I own no property, but that, morally speaking, I am extremely affected. I emphasized that I hadn’t come to the palace to seek personal mercy but to warn the king against throwing himself and the country under the wrath of the Almighty.

Finally, I asked the secretary to be so kind if, for some reason, the king refused to receive me and hear me out to relay to him my final words.

“Tell him also that I insist on being received and heard. This meeting will be for the good of Bulgaria, for the welfare of the Bulgarian people, and his own personal good.”

The secretary took note and assured me that he would do whatever was possible.

Two days after my visit to the palace, I went to the Ministry of Finance to find Minister Dobri Bozhilov. I appeared before his secretary. I asked him to tell the Minister that I wanted to see him and was told that he was very busy right now in a sitting in the National Assembly and that it was highly uncertain whether the minister would deign to receive me. Despite this, I insisted the secretary contact the minister on the telephone and tell him I was waiting for him and wanted to speak with him at all costs. The secretary called the office of the National Assembly. My request was relayed to the minister, who apologized and said he was very busy with some bill and that it was impossible for him to receive me. Therefore, I suggested that the meeting could take place after the conclusion of the sitting in the

National Assembly. The minister consented and set the meeting for 1:30 p.m. in the ministry. For his part, the secretary promised to wait for me in the office until I arrived.

At the appointed time I appeared and entered the office of the minister. He had not arrived yet. Shortly afterward, the phone rang. The minister said he would be half an hour late. At exactly 2:00 p.m., he entered his office. We introduced ourselves. Immediately afterward, he said to me:

“As you can see, I have satisfied your wish. I must tell you I have not had lunch; therefore, please be brief because I am...hungry...”

I assured the Minister I would be brief. Very brief. With concise words, I emphasized that persecuting the Jews was an anti-Christian deed, that it was unconstitutional, and that by the will of the Almighty, I was obliged to warn the Bulgarian government about the dangers that would ensue for the country should undeserved, anti-Jewish persecution set in.

Visibly displeased with the bold tone of my warning, the minister began to attempt to prove that he had no say in any change of the political course against the Jews and that I should go and see the Interior Minister Peter Gabrovski. I objected and replied that my coming to him was not by my own will but by the will of the Almighty and that His will was for me to hand my warning to him personally and not to Peter Gabrovski. Regarding the latter, I said that if he, the Finance Minister, does or does not want to talk to Minister Peter Gabrovski on the Jewish question, this is his personal business. In the end, the minister promised to talk to the Interior Minister.

## RECEIVING REVELATION

As I left the ministry, an inspiration from on high seized me. An inner voice spoke to me:

“The Kingdom of God comes to Earth. It is coming, and it will destroy all those who take the crooked path. Life and wealth will be left to be enjoyed only by those who walk the straight path.

The people and nations who live will be those who give life and

freedom to others. There will be no more bondage. Each child of God has the right to live and grow freely.

This is the will of God! Whoever opposes it will suffer and disappear. The divine love that embraces all creation and every creature will supplant hatred and disagreement. Brotherhood will replace disharmony.

Whoever accepts and practices this will forever be provided for. The nation that applies this word of God will succeed because all its political and economic affairs will turn in its favor. The converse is also true.

Watch out, nations!

God is speaking! Whatever He says comes to pass!

Go and write down this word of God and hand it to the king and the rulers. Let it shock all who walk the paths of darkness!”

### **DELIVERING THE WORD OF GOD**

I immediately printed the word on a mimeograph. I made a copy of the original on a typewriter. With it, I appeared before the secretary of the palace. As I handed him the first copy, I said, “This word must be handed to the king at all costs.” The secretary promised to do so as soon as possible. Later, I learned that the message had indeed been delivered. I went to the Ministry of Finance. I appeared before the minister’s private secretary and pleaded for him to inform the minister that I wanted to hand him a printed word. Shortly after, I was invited to enter the office of the minister.

“Sir, I came to deliver to you this Word of God.”

He rose from his chair, took the paper, and began to read. I watched him. I noticed that his hands were trembling. His expression was thoughtful. After reading the contents of the sheet, he asked me if I had met with Interior Minister Peter Gabrovski. I said I had not, but I was on my way to give him a copy of this word. Finally, I went to the Director of the Police. I gave him a copy. He read it in my presence.

“What do you want with this?” asked the director.



“Please pay utmost consideration to the content of this word. Please send a copy of it to everyone in your service.”

“Good. Do you want anything else?”

“Yes! I want a permit to travel around the country.”

“What for?”

“So I can spread this word of God.”

“To receive such a permit, you need to submit an application.”

We said our goodbyes.

As I left the police headquarters, I met two of my countrymen. To save their honor, I will not mention their names. Curiosity is one of the characteristic features of the Jew. One of them rudely asked me what business I had with the police. I told both of them that I was there on common matters. Not even a few hours later, the president of the Consistory, Yosef Geron, found me on the street. The following conversation took place.

“Were you the one in the police department?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“To deliver a word of God.”

“With whose permission are you handing out such words? How can you do such things without telling us? You work for us! We forbid you to spread this message. I invite you to immediately hand over all printed copies of this word.”

At first, I was surprised by the unconditional and commanding tone of the president of the Consistory. I did not want to act like him. Quite calmly, I replied:

“I am not your employee. I am a servant of God, and I do what pleases God. The Word of God is for others; it is neither for you nor for your records.”

We parted. The next day the Consistory invited me to attend an important meeting that was to be convened on account of that Word of God. I went. Everyone there appeared extremely pensive and

concerned. An icy atmosphere reigned over the room. The president addressed me with these words:

“Tell us about the content of this word of God, which, as we have learned, you have been distributing to all ministers, to the palace, to senior clerics, and political figures.”

“This is a word written under the inspiration of God, given with a direct obligation to present it personally to all the major actors in the country.”

“But you have no right to engage in political activity. You’re just an employee.”

“How odd!” I interrupted the president. “Wherever I went, I met no objections. On the contrary, all without exception treated me with care and listened to me with consideration even though I spoke sharply against the measures of the Bulgarian authorities against us, the Jews. How ironic that you, the representatives of the Bulgarian Jewry, are now blaming me instead of supporting me and congratulating me for the campaign I successfully initiated. Do you see, my brothers, how history repeats itself!? Let me very briefly tell you the following: As you know, Moses was inspired by God to appear before Pharaoh and to plead for the release of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. Moses tried to deflect God’s will for fear of Pharaoh because he killed an Egyptian, but God’s voice did not allow him peace. Finally, he went to appear before the face of his own enemy, with the sole purpose of saving his people. Surprisingly, Moses was received with honor by Pharaoh. Despite all the sharp words that the prophet spoke against his people’s oppressor, Pharaoh agreed and freed the Jews. But what happened next? Part of the Jewish people rebelled against Moses. This was the reward Moses received for having brought the Jews out of Egyptian slavery.

“The obstacles you are erecting against my campaign to alleviate the fate of the Bulgarian Jewry is your gratitude for all I do for our common good.”

“Don’t you know that with your actions, you can cause great trouble for the Jewish people?” a member of the Consistory asked me.

“I have thought it all out. I have caused trouble to no one, and least of all to the Jewish people. On the contrary, this fear that has gripped all of you will bring even greater evils and misfortunes to the Jews.

“And if you are afraid that I, as a spiritual leader of Bulgarian Jewry, could harm its interests with my actions, then I am ready to hand in my resignation.”

### **FRIENDS & FOES**

It was clear to me that it was based on the report of those two Jewish men that the Consistory now took measures against my action to alleviate the fate of the Bulgarian Jewry. This resulted in that same Consistory testifying before the Bulgarian authorities that I acted quite independently and on my own initiative and that I was—please note—insane! Furthermore, they, the members of the Consistory, neither agreed with my acts nor approved of them. Instead of backing my action in the public interest and assuming the leadership of the Jewish nation, the Consistory was content only to reproach me and to spread gossip, such as that about my supposed insanity.

In turn, the Jewish communal leadership in Sofia hurried to join in with the Consistory. At that time, I was put on the agenda. They invited me to attend the meeting. I appeared.

A member of the board asked me what I was trying to accomplish by distributing this word of God, so I explained. The chairman tried to convince me that my actions were detrimental to us all, and so on. I objected that it was not I, but they who were putting people in danger by succumbing to fear.

“Don’t you see that we are all concerned about the fate of our Jewish community? In these times it is better to refrain from rash actions that could further aggravate our situation,” said one councilor.

“Yes. I see how all your faces are haggard, that you have lost all peace of mind, and that you have lost faith in yourselves. I undertook this action because the power of the Almighty stands behind it. I am afraid of no one because the right hand of God guides me. The cause I have dedicated myself to is not mine; I am only the executor of one will—the Will of the Almighty to help an ill-fated nation.

“I have said it elsewhere, and here again, I will repeat: Nobody threatened me with anything; nobody threatened or offended me or the Jewish people.”

“But you know that you are our employee! You are subject to the municipal council, and as such, you cannot act and have no right to act without our permission by appearing at such high places,” said yet another of those present.

“But gentlemen, it never occurred to me that anything I have done to alleviate the plight of the Jews would be against your beliefs. On the contrary, given the impasse the Jews are in, I had hoped that my action would receive your full support and approval, and that I would be encouraged to continue the work I started, and that I would benefit from your just advice. However, just like the Consistory members, you are consumed with fear, and you endure the blows that rain down on you as Jews. All day long, you whine while seeing the approaching storm but take no measures whatsoever. Not only do you do nothing, but you also hinder those who are brave and who seek to avert the blow that the enemies of the Jewish people are preparing. You should know, however, that I am not working in this direction alone. There are other people who, without your permission, have undertaken to act for the benefit of Bulgarian Jewry. Regarding the fact that I am the chairman of the Jewish Spiritual Court and the Chief Priest in the Sofia Central Synagogue, if you consider it to be in the interest of all Bulgarian Jews, I’m ready to resign from these posts. I must declare that here on earth, I am subordinate to no one! I am a free man, and I only obey my inner voice, my God! I serve Him and Him alone!”

“We do not understand what you are saying,” said one of the councilors.

“It’s a pity you do not understand. One day you will understand.”

The president asked me, “So what do you think? Should we resign, or should you?”

I thought a bit and replied, “I see no reason to resign. I have committed no crime. But allow me to add that you should resign for the sake of our national interest.”

I walked out of the meeting full of relief.



## CHAPTER TWO

**I**n my experience as a spiritual preacher, more than once have I met obstacles from both our Consistory and the Jewish Parish. In the past, and during those dark years of oppression when people craved any hopeful word, these two institutes expressly forbade me to speak. I told them:

“You may not want me to speak in the synagogue because you feel ‘uncomfortable,’ but the people want to hear my invigorating word. If you and your colleagues in the Consistory do not feel strong enough to resist any attack directed against us, leave your posts. Other people braver than you will come, who are ready to sacrifice anything for the good of the Jewish people.”

But to no avail! On the contrary, instead of rolling up their sleeves and committing to work for the public good, these gentlemen lost no occasion to discredit me. They began spreading rumors in the Jewish quarter and cafés regarding my religious affiliation. These gentlemen thought it was the right time to resurrect a legend from eight years ago told by self-serving councilors and clergy that I was a Danovist, that I had Christianized myself, that I was a sectarian, etc.

Those who have read the foreword to my book *From the New Road*, by Eliezer Asher Anski, know very well who and what I am. All those who have listened to my lectures know who I am. All of Bulgarian Jewry knew me, except that clique of envious councilors and “clerics”

who wanted to smear me at all costs, to denigrate me before Bulgarian Jewry, to discredit me. Unfortunately for them, they failed. Those who are now spreading rumors about me will fail as well.

For thirty years, I have been working incessantly, honestly and selflessly for the benefit of Bulgarian Jewry. During this period, I did not cease to be and to feel Jewish for a moment. I love my people; I love the Bible as a youth loves life and pursues it wholeheartedly. But even so, I do not forget that I am a man, and at that, one who seeks to be part of all humanity.

Naturally, this conviction led me to contact representatives of other religious and philosophical communities. I wanted to get a clearer idea of the various facets of spiritual, philosophical, and religious thought. In this regard, I investigated, for example, the doctrine of the “White Brotherhood.” This is a school in which occultism is taught in theory and practice. And occultism is nothing more than a paraphrase of the teachings of the Kabbalah. Occultism elaborated on and stripped the Kabbalistic thought of all obscurity and brought it together with a scientific explanation of nature. Put simply, occultism is nothing more than a doctrine of natural law and the relationship between this law and man.

Well then! Will you say that if I was interested in this or that religion or doctrine, I have already ceased to be a Jew? Will you say that if I visited this or that spiritual milieu, I have confessed their religion? I will not answer these two questions. I submit them to the conscientious reader. He can decide for himself.

Indeed, during those dark days, I often met with some members of the “White Brotherhood.” The reason for this is well known to all. I had to find strong individuals to advocate here and there to alleviate the plight of Bulgarian Jewry. I did all this out of love for my people. And when I engaged in efforts to help my people, if I was ever sharp or did not listen to the “advice” of this one or that one, it was because the social circles they inhabited were not sympathetic to the will of the people.

I can hardly describe the joy that came over me after these oppressive meetings. I left the last meeting with a new, invigorating jet of energy



and courage to continue my action regardless of all obstacles. I felt a special joy that I was fulfilling a holy duty to my people who were so afflicted and persecuted by Hitler's corrupt agents as if we were standing at the brink of death. Nothing else in the world had as much worth or meaning to me as my desire to help my brothers. At that moment, I felt I was able to bear the biggest sacrifice; I was ready to resign from all my posts, to let go of all my possessions, just to be able to follow the bidding of the voice of God inside me, which continued to push me forward on the path I was already following.

Speaking frankly about my thoughts with those who stood at the head of our Jewry, those who had undertaken to protect its interests, brought such mental relief and a sense of satisfaction. It was as if I had rid myself of a heavy burden that was weighing on my soul. In such a state of mind, I mostly felt the inevitable delight of my spiritual aspirations and deeds, and I never went home as overjoyed as I did that day.

The following day went according to my expectations: I received two letters—one from the Consistory and the other from the Sofia Jewish Parish. Both had approximately the following content:

The Rabbi Daniel Zion dared to print leaflets with content absolutely contrary to the position of the Parish Council and the Jewish community. He also dared to distribute these leaflets to prime political figures in the country: palace, ministers, senior officials, and others. Given this harmful activity that does not correspond to his rank as chairman of the Jewish Spiritual Court of Sofia, in agreement with the decision of the parish council of August 2, 1942, with Protocol no. 14, the Rabbi Daniel Zion is dismissed from his post of Head of the Jewish Spiritual Court of Sofia. The above decision of the council shall be forwarded for sanctioning by the Supreme Spiritual Court.

A few days later, I met the chairman of the parish, Z. Alkalai, on the street. He said, "All of us members of the parish council wept (unnecessary sentimentality!) when we decided to fire you because we realized that you sacrifice yourself for the good of the Jewish people!"

As such, we also voted for a small monthly pension in your favor. You should know that this measure against you was taken entirely on political considerations.” I thanked mister Z. Alkalai for his attention, and we parted.

It was not long after this that I learned from a third party that Mr. Yosef Geron had said that the Consistory had nothing against the word I was distributing and that if the Consistory had consented to my dismissal, it was only because my work could bring harm to the entire Jewry.

Regardless of what was happening between me and the Consistory and the Parish, I continued to visit all the prominent political actors. I appeared before the palace secretary and told him that I knew that the king had been influenced by the dark, reactionary forces that rule the world.

“Tell the king not to be influenced by these dark forces; they will fall very soon. Let him trust only in the one and eternal God! Tell him also to take under most serious consideration the Word of God, or I will not speak about the bad consequences which will come for him and for the country.” I also delivered a letter.

## **LETTER TO HIS MAJESTY BORIS III, KING OF BULGARIA**

For two years, the National Assembly has passed restrictive laws against my countrymen, and their implementation threatens all Jewry with ruin. I do not want to bother Your Majesty with the impact of these laws, but they have led to a state of hopeless misery for thousands of workers, peddlers, petty traders, and their families. I find this misery hopeless because the latest laws and orders deprive the Jewish parishes, the Synagogue boards, and charities of their incomes. It is well known that all these institutions are principally engaged in helping poor Jews. The implementation of these laws will lead to the closure of schools and synagogues, which on top of the material burden, will heap spiritual misery on my compatriots.

I beg your Majesty to put yourself in the position of those thousands of fathers, mothers, and children who have fallen into black misery and whose misfortune is a fortune to no one. Does the Gospel not say: “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you”? The current situation is not in accord with God’s laws for good, justice, and rationality.

In the name of God, I must remind Your Majesty of the Word of God that I had the honor to convey to you. Everyone must comply with this word, especially Your Majesty, as the head of the Bulgarian people for whose fate You are responsible before God. If these laws are not implemented, Bulgaria will become the conduit of the will of God, and the sun of peace will shine on it for the good of all humankind. Amen.

– Rabbi Daniel Zion

I gave this letter to the Head of the Court Chancellery, and I asked him to present it to the king. Even though I was assured the letter would reach the king, I also gave a copy of it to the king’s private adviser. He was ready to verify whether the king had indeed received my letter through the Head of the Court Chancellery, and if not, to hand him a copy. Two days later, the private adviser passed on the king’s assurance that there would be no deportation of Bulgarian Jews outside of the confines of the country and that the synagogues, schools, and charities would not be closed.

### **THE CHURCH & THE SYNAGOGUE**

I also visited the Sofia Metropolitan and His Beatitude the Exarch Stefan I. With proper attention, he read the word of God I delivered to him. He said to me:

“This is a true revelation of God. It is gospel through and through. I will go to the king and tell him that everything written here is true and that it will come true. I will go to Minister Dobri Bozhilov, too, and I will warn him to be careful and to cease from persecuting the Jews because everything in this revelation will come true.”

I must stress that His Beatitude the Exarch Stefan I was very polite with me. He told me he was completely opposed to the measures being taken against the Jews; that he, together with the Holy Synod of the Church, had advocated many times on our behalf; and that he would continue to react vigorously against the anti-Jewish course and against the anti-Jewish regulations, each of which was more inhumane and anti-Christian than the last.

As we parted, the high dignitary told me, “The doors are always open for you. You can come whenever you want; you are always welcome.”

### **THE TRAINS WERE DISPATCHED**

In the meantime, the situation of Bulgarian Jewry grew increasingly worse. The LDN was rigidly implemented. All kinds of administrative measures were effected in quick succession. The Jewish street shuddered at every rumor—and there was no lack thereof. Unfortunately, these rumors plunged us into preemptive mourning. Somehow we had to curb the despair that was gripping our community more and more tightly every day. Desperation peaked when we learned that the Jewish population in Kyustendil had been notified to pack whatever they could carry and make themselves ready for departure (March 1943). Everybody knew what this meant. Meanwhile, it was reported that the Jewish community in Plovdiv had been gathered in a school and that at any time, they could expect to be loaded into wagons and sent to Poland.

These two facts plunged all Bulgarian Jews into the greatest despair. It was clear to all that the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was bent on destroying us. Prominent Bulgarian public figures from Kyustendil and Plovdiv immediately approached the relevant policymakers and lobbied to repeal the secret order to send part of the Jewish population outside Bulgaria’s borders. Fortunately, they were successful. The order was canceled. However, the danger remained. Everyone tried to predict what the Commissariat would target next. We didn’t have to wait long. May 24–28 in 1943 were the darkest days for the Jews of Sofia. At this point, the Commissariat, through the police, began sending formal notices to all Jewish homes about an impending forced eviction in the province. No one will ever forget

the heartbreaking scenes within Jewish streets and neighborhoods in those hellish days, during which our brothers and sisters were parting with friends and family with tears soaked with blood. We were certain that this measure was just the first step towards sending us to Poland. We had to act at the speed of lightning.

Eviction notices rained down. On my personal order, May 23, 1943, was declared a day of fasting and prayer.

### **OUR PRAYER**

The kingdom of God is coming to Earth! God will bring the Jewish people out of their Egyptian bondage together with all mankind. The Jews must first embrace and struggle for it because this is the only way they can fulfill the will of God, which consists of the following:

Let us love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength!

Let us extend God's love to all beings as children of God!

Let us demonstrate God's wisdom and truth!

Let us be a model of good!

Let us be a model of fairness!

Let us be a model of reason!

Let us turn to the one true and eternal God, on whom all things depend, and dedicate our lives to work for Him!

Let us open our hearts and souls to all who are weak and helpless!

Let us see and enjoy the good and the beautiful in every living being!

Let us leave the path of unloving and enter God's love; let us think and feel and act like Him!

If we fulfill these ten new rules, salvation will come, and God will show us mercy. He will send peace on Earth and awaken the hearts of all people. He will enlighten their minds, and they will do only good.

We all will become bearers of love, and God will be glorified in the world.

**AMEN!**

Our prayer had to begin at 5 a.m. On the eve of the day of fasting, the central synagogue was already crowded. People packed into its courtyard and the surrounding streets as well. Unspeakable grief and fear could be seen on every face. I barely managed to make my way to the synagogue, only to discover that the door was locked. I ran to the Consistory to ask on whose order the Synagogue was closed. There I found Mr. Madjar. I asked him why the Synagogue had been closed. He said that this measure had been taken to avoid any conflicts.

I returned to the crowds. Everybody was perplexed, not understanding why, in a moment like this, someone could close the doors of the house of prayer and deprive all these thousands of people of prayer, comfort, and encouragement! I reported what I had been told. Some were shouting: “Cowards!”

We all relocated to the Synagogue of Yutchbunar. Thousands more met us there. Here I saw something I had never seen nor heard before. These thousands of people began to pray aloud, and their prayer turned gradually into mourning. These were not words directed to heaven, but the sobbing of fathers, mothers, and children, rich and poor, simple and educated. For the first time in our country, all the Jews from all walks of life, young and old, and from all political persuasions, were united and thought the same thoughts. Indeed, only misery can unify the people...

In this atmosphere, I went up to the pulpit and began my speech:

Do not despair, brothers and sisters! Do not lose faith in the power of the Most High! Believe in His power and ability to turn to dust all those who have raised their sword against the defenseless Jewish people! We have stared at death before. However, the Almighty has always helped us, even if only at the eleventh hour, to save us from imminent danger. Believe and do not lose heart! No matter what happens, we will overcome all the suffering they pour on us. Keep your heads up! Open your hearts and let the light of God come in; then God too will open his heart and send us salvation.

When I finished, Rabbi Dr. Asher Hananel said, “There are machine guns in Bulgaria too; our lives might well end here rather than elsewhere.”

**RUMORS OF A RESCUE**

The tension in the room increased! Then Mr. Menachem Moshonov came and said that Bishop Stephan had agreed to see us immediately. A few minutes later, we were talking with the bishop face to face. I could tell by his look that we were about to hear some good news. My intuition was proved right.

“Go,” said Bishop Stephan. “Go tell your people that the king gave a solemn promise to the Prime Minister of Bulgaria and to me that the Jews of Bulgaria will not be deported out of the country. Go and tell them the news, reassure them, and let them believe in the good providence of the Almighty, who never forgets His children. Go in peace!”

Moved by this news, I warmly thanked the bishop for all his care in the rescue of Bulgarian Jewry and told him that the Jews would never forget this invaluable intercession and protection.

Here, on behalf of all Bulgarian Jewry, I would like to express our gratitude to His Beatitude the Exarch Stephan I for his active intercession before the prominent policymakers in the country, which helped to mitigate our unhappy fate, and especially for his bold intervention before the King to repeal the ordinance for the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews in Poland.

Eternal gratitude for the Christian deed of His Beatitude Stefan I!





## CHAPTER THREE

**M**eanwhile, the thousands of people in the Synagogue were eagerly waiting for my return. I left the car and headed to the pulpit. I was greeted by grave silence! I announced: “Here, brothers, our prayers were heard. I have reason to assure you that we will not be deported out of Bulgaria.”

Nevertheless, the Jews of Sofia decided to protest before the king against the government’s decision to deport the Jews outside Bulgaria’s borders. At several places in Yutchbunar, platforms were erected, and some of our comrades protested against the extreme measures of the Commissariat. A few thousand people walked down Clementina Boulevard on their way to the palace. However, before they could even reach Vazrajidane Square, they were attacked by several packs of guards and agents armed with automatic rifles. These men arrested whoever they caught. At first, about three hundred people were detained in the school “Fotinov.” Later on, guards began to patrol Jewish homes; every Jew they met was brought to the school. In the heat of the scuffle, two Jews quickly hid me in a home. After I had stayed there awhile, I reconsidered and decided that my duty was not to hide but to go and see on whose order this raid against us was organized. I went home, and seconds later, two guards and several agents knocked on my door. They were led by a Jew. He pointed at me and said to the guards, “Here, this is Daniel Zion!” (At least he did not kiss me!)

They arrested me. I was taken first to the school, then to the station,

and interrogated. They planned to beat me, but in the end, they did not.

### **SOMOVIT**

I arrived at the stopover commandant's office by Sofia Central Station at midnight. I found many of our public figures there, prominent Jews and many who had never engaged in public affairs and had no public authority whatsoever.

I can't remember how long we stayed there. All who had been arrested were brought out and led toward a side-track. It was pitch-black; there was no light whatsoever! Dark deeds are done in the dark! We were loaded into closed train cars. No one knew where the train was heading. At long last, we arrived, but we didn't know where. Somebody opened the doors. We felt as if we were drunk because of the stench, the darkness, the hunger, and the lack of sleep. Numerous soldiers and guards surrounded us and herded us onto the muddy road. What excessive caution! We were all so exhausted that none of us would have thought to run away. After a long march, we arrived in the city. They took us to the schoolyard. The guards started a thorough inspection. They took everything we had: money, watches, knives, books, etc. We were divided into groups of 30–40 people, and each group was sent to a single room.

Despite our fatigue, the guards called roll. We could barely stand on our feet. A lieutenant appeared.

“Listen,” he said, “from now on, you will be staying here! You will obey all of our commands as if you were soldiers. Those who hesitate will immediately be thrown into the Danube or shot. Remember, no one here would be held responsible for your death. Do you understand?”

### **LIFE IN CUSTODY**

They sent us back to our rooms. Everyone started looking for a place to “settle in.” I had an overcoat and two small pillows. Mr. Aaron Berakha came and asked if I could lend him one of the pillows, and of course, I obliged him.

We were not given any food. Those who were able to bring some

provisions with them shared them freely. We starved like this for three days. Every time we tried to ask for food, they told us, "You have your own bread; eat that." And indeed, a few of us had brought loaves of bread, but it was not even enough for the first night.

The conditions of the camp were extremely cruel. We were not allowed to get up and walk around the room (and even if we wanted to, we were so crowded, there was not enough room); we could not look out the windows; we could not talk, and so on. We had half an hour per day to meet our bodily needs. There were about two hundred people in the entire camp. You can imagine how these two hundred people had to attend to their bodily needs in just half an hour with only a few latrines. And if some had an upset stomach ... You can imagine the pain of the wretch who had to endure with superhuman efforts until the specified time.

The guards were extremely rude to us. No supplications would help. Beatings and curses became normal in the camp. It was the psychological harassment that oppressed us the most.

After a few days, during our next roll call, the lieutenant came to us. I complained that the guards were extremely rough on us. I asked him to tell me whether we were animals or people detained by the authorities only because we were born Jews. Why was it necessary to humiliate us and beat us with the butts of their guns?

The lieutenant only deigned to laugh and said nothing. And what followed my complaint? The next day, a senior guard, who was probably offended by my "report," entered the room and threateningly asked, "Which of you complained yesterday to the lieutenant?"

"I did!" I replied.

"Come with me into this room."

I walked toward the door, and he followed me. He took me to the guards' room.

"Listen, don't you know that nobody here has the right to complain?"

"It wasn't for no reason that I told the lieutenant you are too tough with us," I replied calmly.

“There is no such thing here!” he shouted at me. “And keep this in mind!” At this point, he drew his gun and pointed it at my chest. “If you complain again, I’ll do away with you. Remember this.”

### **ON THE BRINK OF AUSCHWITZ**

The days passed by, grey and pale, filled with anxiety and adversity. The mental state of the inmates darkened by the day. Everyone was “convinced” that one night they would round us up, put us on some barge, and send us along the Danube to Poland. This thought never ceased to haunt the inmates. Everyone was on the lookout. The slightest noise and the guards’ slightest movement were taken as an indication of an impending “action.”

Everybody thought that sooner or later, we would be sent to Poland. Of course, I tried to convince them that this would not happen. It was not until we saw that they were building a kitchen for us that everyone began to calm down.

At the roll call, the lieutenant again reminded us that we must obey the guards’ orders and that no one should count on mercy. Then he told us he had received orders from the Commissariat to give us food: 100 grams of bread a day per person and 7 kg of beans per two hundred people. We said nothing about the food being insufficient, but the lieutenant himself noted that “indeed the ration is small, but you will have to put up with it.” Those 100 grams of bread reached us in the form of a handful of porridge of undercooked bran, and I won’t even talk about the beans.

The first few days, I refrained from eating this “food.” I fasted. We had to adapt to these new living conditions. Then I remembered my last speech about the need to adapt to the circumstances life imposes on us. For many years, I had personally preached temperance and modesty in all things; now, I had the chance to practice what I had preached and thank God I endured everything. With great patience and peace, I bore every difficulty I ate the bread with an onion for which I had begged the cook. It was interesting for me to watch both rich and poor pounce with the same zeal on the “beans” and how they quarreled when one of them received a few beans less. The poor suffered less, of course, because this was nothing new for them.

On the one hand, I enjoyed this new equality between rich and poor. I thought perhaps this “hunger probation” would cause the rich to become more compassionate and more responsive to the sufferings of the poor. But when I watched the exhausted faces of these unfortunates, workers, porters, and blue-collar people who normally ate a kilogram of bread per day, I pitied them. I was moved with such compassion that I braved the interdiction and went out to the yard to pray every morning for God to mitigate the sufferings of the innocent.

Fortunately, after a few days, the ration of bread was increased to 200 grams per day. The broth was also better. But in less than a month, the inmates had once again been seized by desperation. Besides the mental harassment, what oppressed them the most was the scarce, poor-quality food. The “food suppliers” saw this and soon increased the bread ration to 300 grams per day. They changed out the guards, and the police took over for the military. This proved to be a positive change for some inmates who could afford to pay for food deliveries from the outside. The poor still had to content themselves with the ration; however, it was luckily increased to 500 grams of bread per day. Some brave men for whom the broth was not enough often resorted to stealing onions and other vegetables from the kitchen. Malnutrition and fear led to irritation, viciousness, and envy. Some people reported minor infractions to the guards; consequently, the beatings resumed and gradually intensified.

The families of the inmates started sending parcels, but the guards kept them for themselves. For example, David Farkhi, a very noble man, knew a parcel had been sent to him. He asked for it several times. Finally, the lieutenant hit him in the face so badly that the poor man staggered and fell to the ground. Why was he so insistent? His relatives had told him the parcel contained medicine he desperately needed.

Snitching to the guards became more frequent. The beatings did, too. The cries of the unfortunates who were being abused terrified us all. This is what happened to me:

We were called into the yard for a “thorough inspection.” At the call

of his name, each inmate had to shout back: "I, Mr. Lieutenant." They called my name. I answered, "I."

"Hey, you, shout it louder!" the Lieutenant said as rudely as possible.

"I've never been in the army, so I cannot respond in due military form," I replied.

"Is that so?" He said threateningly and grabbed my ear.

I did not move. This must have angered him; he looked like he was about to hit me on the head. The inmates suddenly started a commotion. This must have troubled the bully because he then put his hand down. After we had been left alone, everybody expressed their indignation. But I felt that the lieutenant was feeling sorry for his rudeness and that he was seeking a way to speak to me. I shared this thought with Bertha Nusan, a fellow inmate.

"You will see," I told her once. "This man will become my friend one day."

A few days later, we were in the yard. The lieutenant approached us. He spoke with some of the others, then walked up to me. I was reading a book.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I am reading."

"What are you reading?"

"A book with philosophical content."

"Look at them; they have nothing to eat, but they read philosophical books."

"That's right, sir; if it were not for this book, which explains the philosophy of life, I would not be able to stand the suffering to which you subject us. What's more: had I not been imbued with this philosophy, I would probably have acted differently when you pulled my ear."

As I talked with the lieutenant, my eyes fell upon the face of the former city councilor, Mr. Madjar. I could tell from his expression

that the poor man was panicking, fearful of seeing me talking so openly to “the superiors.” To his even greater surprise, I continued.

“If I may, sir, let me also tell you that one day you will realize your mistake and, mark my words, you will become my friend.”

“Even now, I am not your enemy,” he added, to the general surprise of us all.

“You say you are not, but you leave us starving.”

“I want to increase your rations and improve your food, but here in Somovit, there is no food.”

“Then ask from Pleven, from Sofia, and they will send it to you.”

“Ok, we’ll see,” he replied and left us alone.

Not all the guards were beasts. There was among them a noble soul, a senior guard. Once, he admitted to me that he was losing sleep because he was so depressed from everything he saw during the day in the camp.

“You are people like us,” he told me. We became friends. When he was on duty, the food was better, and there were no beatings. He would also allow me to climb a small hill outside the schoolyard where I went alone to pray.

“But be careful,” he advised me. “If someone sees you, we will both have problems.”

There was one senior guard who was especially nasty and ill-disposed toward me. He watched me closely. When he was on duty, I was more cautious and reasonable. Yet trouble still found me.

One day, new inmates entered the camp. We needed yet another room. For convenience, I moved to this room with the newcomers. I chose a bed by the window. I could see the Danube from there. What a beautiful view! I often felt like opening the window and getting some fresh air, but it was strictly forbidden. I was content with watching the Danube through the window...

I was thirsty. I drank water from our common cup. Then without realizing what I was doing, I opened the window to throw the rest

out. That evil senior guard saw me, and a moment later, he burst into the room with furious anger.

“I finally caught you,” he growled. “Come with me immediately. Move!”

He took me to another room. There was a basin on the ground with laundry in it.

“Remove the laundry!” he shouted.

I bent down and took out the laundry.

“Go to the sink and fill the basin with water!”

I filled the basin with water.

“Take this rag!”

The rag was behind the door; they used it to wash the floor. I bent down and took it.

“Now come with me to the spot below the window and wash it, so next time, you’ll know better!”

“But sir, what should I wash? I only poured two sips of clean drinking water through the window.”

“I said, wash it!”

I bent down and calmly, patiently “washed” the place... My son-in-law wanted to do it for me, but I wouldn’t let him. It wasn’t difficult, but what was offensive was the fact that such a crude and uneducated man was “giving speeches” every evening and issuing orders about anything and everything. But now, this “man” was beginning to reveal his sadistic nature.

Once, we heard cries around midnight. The senior guard was questioning several inmates. He wanted to know who had been on duty during the day to carry fresh water. The two men on duty had forgotten to bring the water bucket back to the kitchen. So the guards took turns beating one and then the other. When the bully got tired, he ordered them to beat each other. It was as funny as it was tragic. This beast enjoyed watching two brothers sharing the same fate beat each



other against their will at his orders. Finally, they grew weak, and the battle stopped. They were dragged back into the room.

On another occasion, this sadist caught an inmate smoking. He brought the poor wretch out to the courtyard and forced him to stand and face the sun for twenty-four hours straight without food or water. This poor man was Dr. Alkalai, a dentist. But this was not the end of it. The inmate Isaac Calderon tried to defend “the offender.” As a result, the same fate befell him. Another inmate, Albert Almozlino, was also punished in the same way for daring to buy a kilogram of tomatoes.

As I have already mentioned, the relatives of the inmates were sending parcels. That was our only link with the outside world. At first, the parcels were being held by the guards. Then, their consciences had apparently spoken to them, and they started handing over parts of the contents of those parcels to the intended recipients.

I once received a parcel as well. Some friends from Pleven had sent nine loaves of bread and several boxes of sardines. The package was for Mr. Nadler and me. We shared the contents with everyone in the room. The people were thankful. I told them that this was just my fraternal duty. I calculated that if anyone receiving a parcel were to share its contents with everybody, we would all have roughly enough food. Alas, that did not happen. I struggled to blunt the social differences among the inmates. We all worked equally; we all had the same fate; why should we not also divide equally the food that we got from the outside?!

### **A SHEPHERD FOR THE SHEEP**

Every day new unfortunates arrived at the camp. Most of them carried all their baggage with them. They had prepared themselves for deportation. The guards looted them all and left each one with nothing more than a single blanket.

Once, I quietly gave a lecture on “The benefit from Somovit.” It consisted of the following seven points:

1) We should never say, “This is mine.” You can see how even the wealthiest of us have been left with nothing after twenty-four hours.

2) Equality! Now we are all equal. The richest and the poorest are on equal footing; each one of you waits to have his mug filled with a few beans; each one of you—whether formerly poor or rich—now lies on the bare floor; the former mistress is now washing next to her former laundress.

3) Humility. This misfortune that has befallen us should teach us humility, humility that endures even once we leave this place. No one should boast of things that can disappear in a moment and leave one looking foolish.

4) Some people used to pay too much attention to food. They acted as if we only live to eat. However, now you can see that food is not the most important thing in life. We have among us those to whom the doctors have expressly forbidden “to eat beans” due to stomach disorders. But this humble food makes these stomach disorders disappear. Stomach disorders are brought upon us by highly irritating spicy food and alcohol, not healthy, plant-based food.

5) Suffering is not an accidental phenomenon in human life, in society, or in a nation. We have to learn from it. When do you wash a pot? When the pot is dirty. Suffering washes our souls. It lifts us above pettiness. Suffering reveals to us that we can do without the things we thought were vital to us.

6) Our assessment of things. Our life here is teaching us to appreciate whatever we have. Now each one of you will appreciate even the smallest piece of bread and be satisfied with it.

7) Now that we have had to fast and experience hunger, an unfamiliar feeling for many of you, we are better fit to understand the hungry because we now know what it means to be hungry.

In conclusion, each one of you must draw the appropriate lessons from the misfortune with which we have been burdened; we should learn from it and see what fruit it can bear.

I thank the Almighty for this heavy trial He has sent me because even at 60, I have found much to learn from the experiences I have had during the months we have spent here in the camp.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**M**y first talk prompted others to speak. Then lectures followed on various topics: Jewish history, art, and more. We began translating the Bible and had discussions on various texts and the prophets. Everybody was very pleased with these cultural activities. Later on, we had these lectures in the yard. We secured this right for ourselves. Even the lieutenant was attending our lectures and discussions.

An evil I struggled greatly against even until the last moment of our exile in Somovit, sadly with little success, were all the rumors that fell on the eager ears of the inmates. There were all sorts of rumors! The interesting thing was that every new rumor gave rise to mortal fear among the prisoners because as they spread these rumors, they would add gruesome details to make them even scarier. The most maleficent of them all was the rumor of our imminent deportation to Poland.

The Pleven Commissioner for Jewish Affairs once came to visit, and I would say he was well-disposed toward us. He told us the following: “Now you can worry no more. Not a single Bulgarian Jew will be sent to Poland.”

Meanwhile, the regime at the camp became more tolerable. We were allowed to receive anything we needed. I was allowed to receive books. There were active reports that we would soon be released. However, the camp was still swelling with new victims of anti-Semitism. Shortly after the arrival of the latest victims came an order to

release a fraction of the detainees. After that, they freed the sick. I was in the third group. When I was told that I was free, I hesitated between going home and staying with my brothers to share their fate to its end. In the end I considered that the poor Jews in Ruse also needed my help. I went to Pleven. The Jews of Pleven were pleasantly surprised to see me free again because they all remembered the words of Commissioner Al. Belev—that he would leave me rotting in the camp and then “expedite” me to Poland. Upon my arrival in the synagogue, the city already knew about my liberation. Everyone was happy to see me alive and well. That same evening, I was invited to say something. I went up to the pulpit and had my first free sermon since that memorable speech in the Yutchbunar synagogue shortly before being arrested.

In Pleven I also had my first Sabbath as a free man. On Sunday, I traveled to Ruse. Upon my arrival, I immediately began to actively undertake spiritual and social work.

In my first sermon, I made clear the meaning of “brotherhood and equality.” However, when I wanted to speak a second time from the pulpit, I was prevented by the Jewish Parish in Ruse under the pretext that we would provoke conflict with the authorities.

The story was repeating itself! I told the members my lectures were not political but to no avail. I was banned. Then, to stay in touch with the people, I resorted to the following: every week, I read parts of the Bible in Spanish. The audience was pleased. But again, our parish showed excessive caution. I was told, in writing, that these readings of the Bible in Spanish were now forbidden under the pretext that secret agents were coming to the synagogue, and as they did not understand the language, they could invent some illegal activity to report.

I appealed to the former chairman of the Jewish Parish in Ruse, Mr. Chelebi Hasson. I explained to him that if I were forbidden to speak in the synagogue on purely religious topics, not by the Bulgarian authorities but by our own parish, it would be better to close the synagogue altogether. I asked him to talk with the councilors and impress upon them that their duty is to help my work and not put

obstacles in my way. The intervention of Mr. Chelebi Hasson was unsuccessful.

### FINDING A WAY FORWARD

The political course of the country had indeed changed. As a result, the authorities began to repeal certain restrictions imposed by the former fascist government. After the abolition of the “yellow star,” some Jews who had been recently baptized started visiting me and asked me to do whatever was necessary for them to be able to return to the flock of Israel. The community was split between those for and against their return. I stated that their acceptance back into the flock of Israel would neither harm nor profit our community. But the families of those who were baptized would profit, because their wives and children had probably not been asked whether they wanted to change their religion. Consequently, we should not be cruel toward these people.

September 9, 1944, put an end to our suffering. The Bulgarian people took their destiny into their own hands. To start, the new People’s Government of the Fatherland Front repealed all the restrictive measures against us. Freedom of thought, speech, and press were restored. The old administration of the Jewish municipality stepped aside. The pulpit was free again. In my first talk, I addressed the change. The Jews owed their freedom to the fact that the Fatherland Front was now in power. In return, we had to back the government in every possible way. Remember the heroic death of comrade Leon Tadjer who was hanged on the gallows because of the struggle he had waged against the fascists in our country and the bloodthirsty German oppressors. Remember our partisans, who in those dark days of slavery and bloody fascist terror acted to destroy the oppressors’ military power by all sorts of sabotage. In this heroic struggle, along with the glorious Bulgarian partisans, Bulgarian Jewry also made costly sacrifices, and we did so for the benefit of us all.

The deep changes in Bulgaria’s public life did not leave our Jewish community untouched. The new times required rapid changes in all sectors of society. We are now building a new social life. Naturally, changes were necessary in our worship, too. The first reforms that the

new times imposed eliminated the sale of synagogue honorifics and scaled-up categories for weddings and funerals.

Some other reforms are still due that will help to strengthen the religious sense and the democratization of our prayer houses.

## CONCLUSION

Indeed, the torment and suffering we have endured during these past five years have been immense. The Jewish people have never before seen such severe trials. But it is equally true that the greater the suffering, the stronger the lesson. In its desire to make us truly human, nature sends us many various kinds of suffering to teach us. For the reasonable, even the least of sufferings is an indication that they have gone astray on some dark road. For the foolish, small sufferings are not enough. They need a more tangible torment and heavier suffering. Following this line of thought, we were struck with very heavy suffering. But it was this suffering that was meant to make us human. The torment and the suffering we experienced allowed so many different people—rich and poor, simple and smart, educated and illiterate—to live united. This life together taught us to share our bread with the hungry; it taught us to be united in the days of suffering and the days of joy.

The new Man is being formed today: a man of love, brotherhood, and justice. He has been through the crucible of suffering. He has learned a valuable lesson from his experience. One final lesson we learned from these sufferings is that all evil has its retribution. The most recent example is our tormentors and persecutors. From the highest point in the social hierarchy, where they felt as if they were the strongest, they were cast down and brought before the justice of the world's conscience. They must answer for the millions of victims swallowed by the war and for the thousands of crimes they have

committed. They will also answer for the seven million Jews killed in the German “factories of death.” And they will get what they deserve! It is written: “The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you!”



## APPENDIX I

*On September 14, 1952, Daniel Zion spoke on Kol Israel (Radio Voice of Israel) in the monthly United Protestant Services English program. He told his audience how his faith in Yeshua was born first in Bulgaria, and how it deepened after a personal experience with God in Jerusalem on Passover 1950. He recounted his confrontation with the Chief Rabbi in June 1950, when he was dismissed from the post of Rabbi in Jaffa. Contrary to the pre-broadcast agreement that Daniel Zion would speak in Ladino (so that broadcasters could amend his message as they translated into Hebrew), once Zion got on the air, he spoke in Hebrew. Of course, he used the opportunity to call on his fellow Jews to believe in Yeshua. This caused a storm of scandals in the Israeli press and the state media administration, which banned him from ever speaking on the radio again. Journalists called for the resignation of an unnamed person from the ministerial administration that allowed Daniel Zion to speak in breach of the censorship, as well as that of the radio technicians who did not interrupt the radio broadcasting.<sup>1</sup> Newspapers related the*

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<sup>1</sup> Agnes Waldstein, JCG Nr .194 February 1953, [http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/aw194\\_0253\\_kon.pdf](http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/uploads/Poljak/aw194_0253_kon.pdf)

*speech tendentiously and omitted the parts where Daniel Zion claimed to believe in Yeshua while remaining a Jew. Here is an excerpt from his polarizing broadcast:*

More than twenty years ago, I had the first opportunity of reading the New Testament. It influenced me greatly. The ethics of Yeshua spoke so much to me, and it became the root cause of my faith in Him. I began to speak about it in a small circle in Bulgaria. I always regretted that Yeshua HaMashiach has been estranged from the community of Israel. Yeshua HaMashiach did nothing but good for the Jewish people. He called them to repentance, proclaimed the Kingdom of God and the Divine Love, a love towards all men, even one's enemies. He often emphasized that He had come to do the will of His heavenly Father. To our great regret we have had to pay a heavy price for the sin of rejecting the true Messiah.

But I must confess that my position as a rabbi did not allow me at once to come out openly before the world in order to declare this truth, until God, in His great mercy, set me free from rabbinism. He brought me into this country of Israel and sent me to Jerusalem, where for a whole month I engaged in fasting, prayer and supplication. It was then that I asked God to show me the right way, and the eternal God heard my prayer. On the first of Shevat, 5710 (January/February 1950), the Holy Spirit revealed to me that Yeshua is indeed the true Messiah, who suffered for us and sacrificed Himself for our sin. A burning fire in my heart gave me no rest until I had publicly confessed my faith.

In spite of all the difficulties, suffering and persecutions, which I have endured incessantly, nothing could dissuade me from my faith. On the contrary, God to whom I had given my heart and to whom I turn in all my needs, has given me the strength and power to continue my witness. He spoke to me through a verse in Isaiah 41:10—'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will keep thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.' By this I understood that a great and important task has been given to me by the Eternal God, which I must accomplish at all costs.

Do not think that I have left Judaism. On the contrary, I have remained Jewish, and have become more Jewish because Yeshua Himself remained Jewish. I follow the Torah commandments performed by the Messiah Yeshua. If you want to know my faith in brief, read 1 Corinthians 8:5-6: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Yeshua HaMashiah, by whom are all things, and we by Him.”

It hurts me so much that there are so many false religious teachings and superstitions around the world, and that every day the sects are multiplying, and each one thinks it is telling the truth. This is a danger to the life of faith. I wish only one thing—that the world would unite under the true faith. I ask the Heavenly God to remove from this world all the lies and the teachings that harm the true faith. May His Messiah Yeshua be willing to return and unite the whole world under one faith so that all men be prepared for the Kingdom of God in fulfilment of the words of the prophet Zechariah in chapter 14: “The Lord will reign over the whole earth” through Yeshua HaMashiah.



## APPENDIX II

*On December 8 and 9, 1950, a conference was held at the YMCA building in Jerusalem to establish the Union of the Messianic Jews in Israel. Here is the recollection of Moshe Immanuel ben Meir (1905-1978), one of the leaders of the Jewish Messianic community in Israel, who in turn quoted Yedioth Ahronot:*<sup>1</sup>

There were two hundred Messianic Jews (and more) from all over Israel, and a number of non-Jews were also present. Although the press had not been invited, the news of the convention had somehow leaked out. Nearly all the daily and weekly newspapers published reports which, whether based on fact or fiction, mirrored the excitement that this convention and the establishment of a “Union of Messianic Jews” had caused in Israel, for the convention had resolved to call on all Messianic Jews in Israel to unite in a single union, under the slogan “Together we stand, divided we fall.” The detailed report of the daily newspaper Yedioth Ahronot was nearest to the truth, and here are some quotes from its issue of December 21, 1950:

“Ninety persons took part in the convention, among them ten non-Jews, including the Haifa seamen’s Pastor Hansen, a Scandinavian, and the American journalist Lanovik, who publishes the periodical The Jews in the News. However, voting at the convention was restricted

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1 <http://israel-pro.org/wiki-de/pmwiki.php/Poljak/MosheImaBenmeir>

to Jews only... According to one of its initiators, the convention represented at least two hundred Messianic Jews in the country.

“Delegates came from Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Jaffa, Petach Tikva, Safed, and Ramat Gan. The strongest delegations came from Tel-Aviv-Jaffa: eight persons. The official languages of the convention were Hebrew and Yiddish. Speeches were translated into English, French, Spanish, and Bulgarian. With a service, probably unique in its way, the convention opened with a Shabbat Evening service, in which Daniel Zion (formerly the Bulgarian Chief Rabbi) recited and sung the prayers passionately. This was the traditional Shabbat Evening service, followed by Christian confession. Daniel Zion prayed without a hat, but in the audience many wore kippot.

“The leader of the Haifa Group, Ben-Meir, gave an enthusiastic address in Hebrew, calling upon the members to practice brotherly love. Such an appeal seems called for, since those assembled belonged to the most diverse denominations. There were Catholics of Jewish birth, and Protestants of all shades, and finally the radical group around Daniel Zion and Ben-Meir, who decline any connection with any church, considering themselves as the “Jewish community believing in Yeshua the Messiah.” In that they follow in the footsteps of two remarkable men: Joseph Rabinovitch (died about 1900) and the Chassid T. Lucci from Stanislaw (died about 1912), who were the first seeking to combine their faith in Yeshua with their Jewish national consciousness, and who had belonged to the Zionist movement.

“The Shabbat evening service closed with the singing of “Hatikvah” to which was added a verse proclaiming Yeshua as the King of the Jews.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANIEL ZION was born in Bulgaria in 1883, and was later laid to rest in the newly reborn State of Israel in 1979. Between his birth and his death, he intervened to save the lives of his nation's 50,000 Jews—and met his Messiah in the meantime.

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Because life is a vapor. Because death is gain. Because obedience. Because “do not take My Name in vain.” Because life is Christ. Because faith. Because Gospel. Because it’s for His glory’s sake. Because the King will return. Because “the greatest of these is love.” Because Psalm seventy-two. Because Revelation twenty-one. Because hope. Because this story isn’t done. Because we’re going to make plowshares out of all our swords and every gun. Because barrel bombs shouldn’t fall. Because He took on flesh and blood. Because He said “go tell them all.” Because He still does. Because nothing matters more than this. Because every nation needs a witness. Because the unreached deserve it. Because so many haven’t heard yet. Because the manger. Because He knelt to wash our feet. Because grace. Because His blood still intercedes. Because the prophecies. Because Jerusalem and “blessed is He.” Because it’s not because He needs us. Because Zion.

**because Jesus.**

A generation after the devastation known as “the Holocaust,” stories and first-hand accounts are yet being told. Perhaps one of the least-known miracles of the Holocaust is the story of the small, fledgling Balkan nation that came out of the years engulfed in Hitler’s fury with more living Jewish citizens than when the Second World War started in 1939—despite being an *ally* of the Third Reich. In the center of this incredible drama are King Boris III, a Greek Orthodox priest, and a largely unknown rabbi named Daniel Zion.

Hear directly from this man who forged a friendship between the Church and the synagogue, and bravely forced the hand of the king to intercede and intervene for his Jewish citizens. Not a single Bulgarian Jewish life was lost in the Holocaust, and the community survived to make Aliyah to the State of Israel following its establishment in May 1948. Yet the most incredible element to this miraculous record of history is Zion’s encounter with the One who will fully save and rescue the children of Jacob, the land promised to Abraham, and the city of Jerusalem at the end of this age.

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