

Chacham, Chaim Bialik
RG-50.120*0358
One Videotape
In Hebrew

Abstract

Chaim Bialik Chacham was born in Iasi, Rumania, in 1935. He was the son of Abraham Chacham, the head of the Jewish community, and a local Mizrahi movement leader. His father gave much-needed attention to orphans, the elderly, and the sick.

On June 29, 1940, a pogrom killed 11,000 Jews, and had a great impact on him and his family. He was only five years old but still remembers terrible scenes. His father was detained and disappeared, so Chaim and his sister looked for him among the many bodies. The father survived.

He believed that the victims died sanctifying the name of G-d, and that they preceded the living on the way to Heaven.

Almost all Jews who were not killed during the pogrom were put on trains after it, but Chaim and his family did not go. (No explanation given)

Punishment of the Jews consisted of shootings and hangings. Chaim says Jews seemed indifferent when witnessing fellow Jews being hanged in public places.

Jews' bribes to the Romanians and the Nazis saved many lives.

It was hard to accept walking on headstones of dead Jews, which the citizens had to dig up to pave the streets.

With liberation, Chaim and his family moved to Bucharest because of rumors that the city would come under American and British rule. Instead, the Communists took over.

In 1950, the wife of the head of the Romanian spy organization proposed an exchange: the Chacham family's home for a trip to Israel. The family accepted, and they were met in Haifa by the leaders of the Mizrahi movement.

Chaim's mother refused to talk about the war but his father wrote a lot about it.

Oral History

- 01:00:00** Chaim Bialik Chacham was born in December 1935 in Iasi, Romania, a town with 100,000 Jews, a community that was very Jewish, Zionist, and nationalistic. All children born after the Jewish poet Chaim Bialik died were named Chaim if male, Bialika if female. Chaim's father headed Iasi's Jewish community and was also the local representative of the Mizrahi religious movement. Chaim's family was very observant. The Nazis saw this community as the symbol of all the Jews. Although there were no concentration camps in Romania, there were pogroms, forced labor camps, and trains transporting Jews to the camps.
- 01:04:38** Chaim's father documented the watershed event in the community: the major pogrom that killed 11,000 Jews on June 29, 1940.
- 01:05:29** Chaim describes his residence and his neighborhood.
- 01:06:21** His father had a textile plant on the same street as their home. Chaim had a sister who was four years older than he.
- 01:09:00** Chaim recalls memories of the pogrom and the confiscation of goods before it.
- 01:13:03** He recalls his father's fate on the day of the pogrom.
- 01:16:40** Almost all Jews who were not killed during the pogrom were put on trains after it, but Chaim and his family did not go.
- 01:23:09** He describes a case of a crazy Jew who did not abide by the anti-Jewish laws.
- 01:26:08** Jews were forced to dig up the memorial stones of the Jewish cemetery and pave the main street with them. He remembers Jews' indifference to Nazis' violence against fellow Jews.
- 01:28:00** After the war, as head of the community, Chaim's father brought the children who had survived the camps back to Iasi, where his family took care of two of them. After a while, it became clear that the two children were Chaim's cousins who had lived in a different city. The children would later perish on the *Struma*, a ship chartered to carry Jewish refugees from Romania to Palestine. It was torpedoed and sunk by a Soviet submarine.
- 01:30:00** As the war was coming to an end, in 1944, most of the Jewish community had been decimated in different ways: death trains, pogroms, ghettos and camps in Transnistria (an area now in the Ukraine). Chaim and his family moved to Bucharest. All the leaders of the Zionist youth organizations were arrested.
- 01:31:00** The Germans were withdrawing. Because there was almost no gasoline, fleeing Jews huddled on top of a huge truck that pulled several other vehicles. But the

Germans bombed the vehicle and killed them all. Iasi survivors were going to Bucharest, rumored to have come under American and British rule. Jews feared the Russians as much as the Germans.

- 02:00:00** There was very active mutual help in Iasi.
- 02:04:00** Non-Jewish Romanians loved money, wine, and women. Chaim recalls seeing Jewish activists carrying suitcases full of money through the city when a new anti-Jewish law would take effect. When there was no money, the Jews plied the gentiles with other valuables. The Jews also went to Bucharest to bribe Radu Luka, a noted personality.
- 02:07:00** Chaim gives his opinion on the verdict against Rudolf Kastner. Kastner, head of the Hungarian Aid and Rescue Committee during the Holocaust, had been accused of being a Nazi collaborator.
- 02:08:00** Chaim describes the struggles his father faced on whom to save.
- 02:12:00** Romania's punishment of the Jews consisted of shootings and hangings. Chaim says Jews seemed indifferent when witnessing Jews being hanged in public places.
- 02:16:37** Chaim's sister was sickly then and now.
- 02:17:41** While Chaim's mother refused to talk about the war, his father wrote a lot about it.
- 02:18:11** The entire family moved to Israel in 1950.
- 02:19:00** Bucharest was under Communist rule, so it was impossible for the family to leave for Israel. One day, a woman showed up at the Chacham's home. She said that if they left the house as it was and gave her the key, they would be put on the ship *Transylvania* the next day and sail to Haifa. She was the wife of General Iaconescu, head of a Romanian spy organization, The Chacham family accepted the offer. They were closed up in a compartment of the ship, so they would not be seen. In Haifa, they were met by Mizrahi movement leaders, including Dr. Burg z"l. Two or three years later, the family read in a Romanian paper that General Iaconescu was tried and executed for allowing the emigration of the Zionist criminal Abraham Chacham, Chaim's father. The general's wife had been Jewish and wanted the Chacham's house.
- 02:20:00** Chaim describes more about his father's work on behalf of the orphans, the old, and the sick.
- 02:27:00** As a child, after seeing so many deaths, Chaim believed that those victims died for the sanctification of G-d, and therefore they only preceded the living on the way to Eden. That made it easier to accept the deaths.