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## European Rabbis name Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria 'most promising'

Written by The Sofia Globe staff on June 4, 2019 in Bulgaria - Comments Off



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The Conference of European Rabbis has named Rabbi Yoel Yifrah, Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria, as the most promising Rabbi of the year for his commitment and outstanding achievements and responsiveness to the community's needs.

The award was presented in the city of Antwerp in Belgium. Rabbi Yifrah subsequently received formal congratulations from Associate Professor Alexander Oscar, President of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom" and Sofia Cohen, President of the Central Israelite Religious Council of Bulgaria.





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*Associate Professor Alexander Oscar, President of the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria 'Shalom', Rabbi Yoel, and Sofia Cohen, President of the Central Israelite Religious Council.*





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In becoming a rabbi, he has followed the path of his father. Rav Yoel graduated from Yeshiva Pachad Yitzchok in Jerusalem, and studied history at the Hebrew University. He received his training and qualification as a rabbi at the Midrash Sefaradi, where he was a student of Yaskov Peretz. Rav Yoel specialised in Oral Torah and Halakhah. Qualified to interpret and apply Jewish law, he has completed additional courses, such as preparation of mezuzah, as a mohel, and in kosher slaughter.

"I very much love Bulgaria," he says, reflecting on the time since his arrival, which was followed in September 2016 as his official election as rabbi of the Sofia Central Synagogue. "There are many things I like here – it may be strange, but I love the winters – the nature, the beautiful landscapes, the warm atmosphere, the compact centre of Sofia, and last but not least, the Jewish community in Bulgaria, which I would say is an example in many areas."

As the only rabbi in Sofia, his tasks are diverse. "I often have to lead religious events of a radically different nature. One day I may have a funeral in the morning, and in the evening, celebratory prayer".



Photo: Moni Frances





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He speaks highly of the community and its leaders, saying that he is impressed by the members of the Bulgarian Jewish community taking an active part in its life. "Here, everyone comes for the holidays, and that is already a good and positive sign."

The community leaders, he says, are doing a lot to revive the connection of the members with Judaism. "The examples are the frequent Shabbatons, the programme of preparation of mezuzahs, the programme at the Synagogue for the preparation for and acceptance of Judaism, and of course, the creation of the new Jewish school. That – the school – is a very important step in this direction," he says.

His work is not limited to Sofia. One of his tasks is the issuing of kosher certificates, which means travelling around Bulgaria, with the benefit of meeting Jewish communities in other cities. "One example I can think of is that during Hannukah we visited the community in Rousse. I occasionally visit the community in Plovdiv. I wish I had the opportunity to work more with local Jewish organisations."

He loves receiving questions about Judaism. The seeking of answers is, in itself, interesting and challenging. "The truth is, no day goes by without receiving some questions."

Asked what, beyond serving in Bulgaria, what important goal he has for himself, he replies that it is that everything he does should bring him closer to the Most High. "To study Torah and many other new things related to history, philosophy, sociology. I want to do good, to live in accordance with the Jewish laws".

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