

Message from

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Today we remember the dead of the Shoah but we also thank God for the living. We remember the cruelty that man can inflict on his fellow man but we do not forget the acts of bravery of those who do not give in to tyranny.

I still have vivid memories of a visit Estelle and I made to Bulgaria together with leaders of World Jewish Relief. The old people of Plovdiv took us to see a simple monument – not a monument to the dead but a monument to the living.

These old men and women told us how on the 3rd March 1943 they were made to gather on that spot and from there, buses would take them to the concentration camps. They waited and waited for hours but nothing happened. The buses did not arrive. Eventually, the following day, they were told “go back home”.

The old people told me this story in Ladino “Aqui aqui rebi estuve, era manzevo” – “It was here, it was here that I stood: I was then a young boy, scared and petrified.”

They were not taken to concentration camps because Czar Boris III and Bishop Cyril of the Orthodox Church simply refused to carry out the Nazi orders. Bishop Cyril threatened that if a train of Jews tried to leave the city, he would lie across the railway tracks.

As Dr Michael Bar Zohar puts it in his book, “Beyond Hitler’s Grasp”, the Bishop went to the school where the Jews had been gathered and tried to speak to the Jewish leaders. “You cannot enter, Father” an officer said. So he climbed a fence and jumped into the school yard. He said to the Jews, “wherever you go, I will go.”

And now, on that very spot, a modest monument has been erected which says “with gratitude to all who contributed to our salvation on 3rd March 1943 from the grateful Jews of Plovdiv”.

At a time when Nazi ideology is again raising its ugly head we remember the atrocities of the Shoah and equally we remember the good behaviour of the decent, God-fearing few.

May their memory be a blessing and an example.