

# Manfred Swarsensky: Oral History Transcript

www.wisconsinhistory.org/HolocaustSurvivors/Swarsensky.asp

**Name:** Manfred Erich Swarsensky (1906–1981)

**Birth Place:** Marienfließ, Germany (Prussia)

**Arrived in Wisconsin:** 1940, Madison

**Project Name:** Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust



Manfred Swarsensky

**Biography:** Manfred Erich Swarsensky was born in Marienfließ, Germany (Prussia), on October 22, 1906, to a rural family where his forbearers had lived for many generations. He was educated in Lutheran theology during his primary school years. Between 1925-1932, Manfred did rabbinical study at Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (Academy for Jewish Studies) in Berlin while simultaneously pursuing a Ph.D. in Semitics at the University of Würzburg.

Upon ordination, Manfred was appointed to serve as a rabbi in Berlin's large Jewish community. He used his sermons to speak out against the Nazi regime from the time of its rise to power in 1933. Following the anti-Jewish rioting of Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938, Rabbi Swarsensky was sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. In spite of hard labor, humiliation, and torture, he was able to offer comfort to his fellow inmates. Three months later, the rabbi was unexpectedly offered freedom on the condition that he leave the country.



Rabbi Swarsensky arrived in the United States in July 1939, after spending several months in Holland and England. In 1940, after a brief stay in Chicago, he accepted a post at a newly organized Reform congregation, Beth El Temple, in Madison, Wisconsin. He remained there until 1976. Rabbi Swarsensky was instrumental in helping many other Holocaust survivors reach Wisconsin and re-establish their lives. In 1952, he married Ida Weiner of Chicago, with whom he raised two children. The rabbi died in Madison on November 10, 1981.

**Audio Summary:** Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

## Tape 1, Side 1

- Family
- Connections in the U.S.
- Religious life in Europe and the U.S.
- First days in Madison

**Tape 1, Side 2**

- Learning English
- Building Temple Beth El
- Madison's Jewish community

**Tape 2, Side 1**

- Reception of displaced persons
- Immigration procedures
- Manfred's family

**Tape 2, Side 2**

- More on family
- Jews in the U.S and Israel
- American attitudes toward the Holocaust

**Tape 3, Side 1**

- Holocaust education efforts
- Ecumenical relations
- Inter marriage

**Tape 3, Side 2**

- Attitudes toward Israel
- Religious views
- Reading habits

**Tape 4, Side 1**

- Holocaust depictions in the U.S. media
- Travels in Wisconsin

**Tape 4, Side 2**

- Comparing American culture and politics with Germany
- Anti-Semitism

**Tape 5, Side 1**

- Visits to Berlin and Israel
- Attitudes toward the Holocaust in U.S.
- Rabbi Swarsensky's photographs

**Tape 5, Side 2**

- Comments on photographs
- Joseph Rothschild
- Jewish life in Berlin

**Tape 6, Side 1**

- Grandparents and childhood
- Marienleiss, Germany
- High school
- Religious life

**Tape 6, Side 2**

- Youth
- Religious practices Germany
- Rabbinical student

**Tape 7, Side 1**

- German rabbis
- Self-estimate
- Leo Baeck
- Secular government

**Tape 7, Side 2**

- Separation of church and state
- Religious education in Germany
- Studies in Berlin and Würzburg

**Tape 8, Side 1**

- Religious practices in Germany
- Rabbinical appointment in Berlin
- Synagogues

**Tape 8, Side 2**

- Berlin congregations
- Decision to become rabbi
- Manfred's religious studies

**Tape 9, Side 1**

- Zionism in Germany
- Jewish life before Hitler
- Jews in Berlin
- American Jews

**Tape 9, Side 2**

- Student days
- Rise of Hitler
- Book burnings
- Nuremberg laws
- Anti-Semitism

**Tape 10, Side 1**

- Jewish responses
- Zionism
- Remembering Kristallnacht, Nov 1938

**Tape 10, Side 2**

- More on Kristallnacht
- Hiding, arrest, jail
- Gestapo
- Sachsenhausen prison

**Tape 11, Side 1**

- Conditions at Sachsenhausen
- Torture, resistance
- Killings
- Pastoral efforts

**Tape 11, Side 2**

- More on Sachsenhausen
- Miraculous release
- Gestapo
- Exile, March 1939

**Tape 12, Side 1**

- Ellis Island
- More memories of Sachsenhausen
- The Jewish resistance
- Fate of family

**Tape 12, Side 2**

- More on family
- Immigration to the U.S.
- Rabbi Swarsensky's children
- Jews in America

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**About the  
Interview Process:**

The interview was conducted by archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky over nearly 12 hours during seven sessions in the spring and summer of 1980.

This interview is long and complicated. It does not proceed in chronological order because archivists first requested information on specific subjects for a presentation that spring and summer. Therefore, the interview is disjointed.

Rabbi Swarsensky's story is valuable not only as an account of a Jewish rabbi who endured the Holocaust, but also because it preserves the philosophy and voice of one of Wisconsin's most highly respected religious leaders.

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**Audio and  
Transcript Details:**

**Interview Dates**

- Spring and Summer 1980

**Interview Location**

- Beth El Temple, Madison, Wisconsin

**Interviewer**

- Archivist Jean Loeb Lettofsky

**Original Sound Recording Format**

- 12 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

**Length of Interviews**

- 7 interviews, total approximately 12 hours

## Manfred Swarsensky: Oral History Transcript

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### Transcript Length

- 198 pages

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### Pictures:

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## Transcript

The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

### Key

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**JL** Jean Loeb Lettofsky, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist  
**MS** Manfred Swarsensky, Holocaust survivor

#### TAPE 1, SIDE 1

**JL:** Before we go into other matters, I'd like to ask you a bit about your family background. Your place and date of birth, if possible names of parents and grandparents, their places and dates of birth. Whatever you remember.

**MS:** Well I most distinctly remember my birthday, at least I was told that I was born on October 22, 1906. I was born in a tiny village, a family village, named Marienfliess. I don't think it's necessary for me to spell it. Which is located in the province of Pomerania, which in turn is part of Prussia. Which means it is northeast of Berlin, not too far from the Baltic Sea. The name of my parents was, Jacob and Louise Swarsensky. The name of my grandparents, whom I did not know, on my father's side, was Moses and Fredericke Swarsensky. My mother's maiden name was Levinsky and my grandparents, my mother's parents, were Ashur and Rosalie Levinsky.

**JL:** And places and dates of birth?

**MS:** My father's parents they lived in the same village where I was born. As a matter of fact they lived in the same house where I saw the light of the world and not only they but their grandparents and their grandparents lived also in the very same village. My mother's family lived maybe a 100 miles from there in a little town, which was larger, called Polzin, P-o-l-z-i-n, in Pomerania. That place was known in Germany as a place to which people with rheumatism went. We had more baths, that I remember as a child. However I am at a loss to tell you the birthdays. I know my father's birthday, my father was

born on December 29, 1860. My mother was born on April 28, and here I'm not so absolutely certain, 1876 I think. Anyway, my father died in Berlin a natural death, more or less. More or less. I must say he died under Hitler being chased out of, my parents, later on, later on, at the end, moved to Berlin where I lived and that's where my father died in January 1941, which was rather late. And I managed to bring my mother over to this country also in '41. She came over on one of the very last boats that ever left Europe because it was wartime already. Was a Spanish boat. The captain was a highway robber, or a sea pirate I should rather say. Not only had I pay enormous amounts for transportation, but on the high seas he held the people up and asked for more money all the time and would move. Instead of going straight from Spain to the United States he stopped in Gibraltar and other places. My mother told me and I got wires and cables to send more money. It was totally chaotic but it was wartime and my mother finally arrived in New York and I met her at the boat. I couldn't even recognize her. She was just skin and bones. She was small anyway. They had no water. The situation, the sanitary conditions, were just abominable. Anyway, so that's just a little bit about my parents.

**JL:** Now, if we could take a giant length in time and as we agreed earlier, talk a bit about your American experience beginning with your call to serve Temple Beth El. I'd like to ask you why you chose Madison over other places which offered you a pulpit.

**MS:** Well, I first went to Chicago upon my arrival and that had to do with certain visa provisions, which are not so very important, and while I was in Chicago naturally I was eager to get back into my profession. I had been a rabbi in Berlin from 1932, that's the year when I was ordained from a liberal theological seminary, until '32, until '39. So naturally, like any other immigrant, tries to get back into the profession which he had chosen, or which had chosen him perhaps, and I had great serious doubts that I ever would be able to become a rabbi in this country again. For several reasons. Naturally linguistic reasons, I didn't speak the language. We learned Latin and Greek and French in high school for many years but not English. So it was an agony for me of the first order because Hitler had taken my tools away. But not only this, the whole organization of the religious life in this country is utterly

different from the way it is in Europe. It would take a long, long time to really go into all these details. A number of years ago, quite a few years ago, I was asked to give a lecture on being a rabbi in two continents and I took the occasion then to really compare the position of the so-called clergyman, but also the conditions of the religious life. In brief, in Europe they exist even to this day, the principal of the unification of state and church. In this country, may I say fortunately we have the constitution provision of the separation of the state and church what makes religion free, it is not under government domination or influence, it gives the clergyman a freedom of pulpit which he doesn't have completely in Europe, but the total organization is different. In Europe you have, the Germany in particular, but also in Scandinavian countries, and in England, you sort of are born into a certain religious community. You have to pay taxes, the taxpayer, via the government to your religious synod. Ten percent of the income tax collected by the government goes for, as church tax. The government collects it on behalf, not of any one little congregation, but the synod, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Jewish one, and then remits it to the synod and they are free to do whatever they want to do—build churches, build synagogues, support orphanages, hospitals, et cetera So the individual clergyman is not, as he is in this country, someone who has, so to speak, to serve each congregant personally and is beholden to his congregation, the board of directors and all this. In Europe the clergyman, in that respect, is quite independent and yet it has lead this whole system as we saw later on also in the Holocaust, to all kinds of problems. Namely the church and religion in general have become and were always coalescent. Meaning they wouldn't dare to open their mouths and protest and the church did not deal with social or moral questions at all. The place of worship is strictly for worship. One of the things that sort of really I must say almost tickled my funny bone was to find a kitchen here in every church. I never . . . that was utterly unheard of, ridiculous. What has a kitchen to do with a church? Because in Europe you go there to pray and that's the way it is. And religious instruction, because of the setup, is not given primarily in the church or the synagogue, but it is integrated with the regular, secular teaching in public schools, four periods a week are set aside for religious instruction, whatever



religion it is, so clergymen come in from the outside or they are teachers who are trained on those particular religious field who teach the subject and you get graded, you pass exams, just like any other subject. Now you can imagine what comes out of such a situation. So there are many, many consequences and especially coming back to the original question, when you are new and have to get adjusted to a totally different setup, philosophy, ideology, way of thinking, this was the reason why I really was very, very timid in, shall we say even pessimistic in my hope that I would ever be able to sink my professional roots into the religious soil of this country.

JL: But then what was the attraction of Madison?

MS: Oh, of Madison. Well, while I was in Chicago I heard through some American colleagues, two or three older gentlemen with established congregations, of vacancies. Now naturally the vacancies they knew and I heard of, they were undesirable. That is from the point of view of a native American and of someone who graduated here and was ordained by an American theological college and that's the reason why they would even consider a person who was handicapped. And an immigrant is naturally handicapped. I fully [laughs] understand it and couldn't expect to get a pulpit the like the way I had in Berlin. That was out of the question. So, what attracted me to Madison was chiefly the fact I must say not of a congregation here, because there was none, there was nothing, it was totally zero, there were maybe, oh, eight families who were interested in founding in Madison a non-Orthodox congregation. They were dissatisfied with the existing Orthodox synagogue simply because they felt it didn't quite fit into the general intellectual climate of this community and what attracted me therefore, as I said, was not the congregation here, which didn't offer any security or I doubt it was a matter of like Abraham going [laughs] on totally on faith. Not wanting to compare myself with a patriarch, however. But what did attract me was the community. The fact that here was a university and since I had a PhD, since I have certain academic interests, I felt Madison is just a fine place, quite aside from the natural beauty, which Madison has. And so in those days I was unmarried, I took

my little briefcase and my umbrella, that's all I had salvaged, and arrived in Madison, Wisconsin, and stayed a couple of nights at the then Lorraine Hotel.

JL: When did you arrive?

MS: I arrived here in February in nineteen hundred and forty, on a very cold, dark, dreary day. However, May I just jump ahead and say that I am thankful to my lucky stars whoever guided me to this country and particularly to Madison.

JL: We have you in Madison. Who was your welcoming committee? Did you have any?

MS: Well, [laughs] my welcoming committee, yes. There were two gentlemen, to whom I am indebted because they insisted when I was reluctant for awhile to come to Madison they sort of made it very urgent that they needed me and wanted me and also in those days I liked to smoke cigars, not too many, and one of them was a great smoker and whenever he saw me and especially after every Friday evening service he would light his cigar. I didn't smoke on the Sabbath and well he gave me a cigar that attracted me tremendously. I thought that man really has a great heart. Yes, I wouldn't like to name names in these respects and I will also say that another gentlemen of these two, who sort of mothered me or fathered me or patronized me or whatever, or helped me, got me a little room in the University Club and that was quite a feat. It was war, housing was complicated, we had so many servicemen here and their wives in Madison, a very, very lively, busy place.

MS: And so I was lucky to find one little tiny room like at a YMCA on the third floor of the University Club down in the university area. And what attracted me also there was the fellowship with professors. They came in, they went in and out, many had their meals there, a few unmarried ones were living there also, and I had access to American newspapers. It was a very delightful atmosphere and that developed quite early in, after my arrival in Madison.

JL: And you stayed at the University Club for quite a time?

MS: I stayed at University Club, yes, for quite a time. Then later on the University Club was taken over by I think they were called V12s, those were young fellows trained at the university in foreign languages for

the Army of Occupation in all kinds of languages. Countries fortunately you never had to enter. And then I had to get out. Which was only proper. And I found a very tiny, very drafty [laughs], very uninviting little, little, apartment down in the university area on Francis Street. But I was a free man. I was a free man in a free country and on top of it, I will not deny this, since I had to eat and drink and pay my rent, I was paid \$125 a month. That's all the minuscule congregation could afford and it was a struggle for them and for me. But after all I had a greater possession that was my freedom that was worth more than \$125.

**JL:** Now you talked about the some very pleasant impression, personal impressions, and you mentioned beautiful surroundings. Did you have any other impressions, first impressions, of this Midwestern city and this state?

**MS:** Well, naturally, my contacts, initial contacts, were with ministers and churches and I can almost say this hasn't changed over the years. Among ministers, local ministers, I have found my closest friends. I remember that Reverend Kennedy of the First Presbyterian Church, he called on me, which I greatly appreciated, I was a total stranger to him, at the University Club and we got friendly and so did other ministers—Dr. Swan and many who are no longer in Madison today. And this was very satisfying also because in the country where I came from in Germany, namely, there is absolutely no cooperation, let alone friendship, between religious groups. The Catholics, the Lutherans, and the Jews, they lived in total segregation and isolation. Totally. And not only in that, each group had walls, so-to-speak, around, and whenever anybody dared even to look beyond the wall then he saw not the real Catholic, as a human being or the Protestant or the Jew, then he always saw a theological abstraction. That is a great tragedy. Never a human being. Always the way his religious group and tradition had sort of pictured the outsider in religion. And this impressed me deeply, that this was so utterly different here, that ministers of various religious backgrounds would talk to each other, be friends with each other, socialize with each other and on top of it, I could hardly believe it, that Dr. Kennedy invited me to

speaking from his pulpit. I thought, this is such [laughs], this must be the beginning of kingdom of heaven or God on earth.

JL: In what language did you speak?

MS: I spoke in English [laughs], if it could be called English. Only God in heaven heard how my heart was pounding because sometimes I didn't know the right word or the right pronunciation. But here again, here again, the tolerance of people of accents and idiosyncrasies and all of this is just phenomenal. In Germany, even from my pulpit in Berlin, we would never have tolerated—we, I mean the congregation—a Jew who would speak with a foreign accent. That is absolutely out of the question and that goes for the other denominations as well. This, this, this, this, this tolerance, of course, I know where it stems from. It comes from the simple fact that America is, and has been and still is, a country of immigrants. The descendants of more than 40 Old World nations have come here, each one bringing his own little baggage, including his accent and peculiarities. And people don't laugh when he makes a mistake or when he speaks, quote, in a funny way. Now in Germany people would have laughed and been angry about it to such a degree. This was a revelation to me. I could not, I could not believe it. Well, I may say my German accent has not been a liability [laughs] for me over the years. Sometimes perhaps even an added . . .

JL: An asset?

MS: An asset, an asset. Okay?

JL: Did you have any time or space to notice anything about the physical aspects of the city ?

MS: Well, in the beginning. Since, as I said, I came in winter I really didn't come to know the physical aspects of Madison. The lakes were frozen, it was snow, it was icy. That I discovered perhaps a little later when spring came. But the university was here, summer or winter, I saw snow or sunshine. So that I know was a tremendous asset and when I looked through the catalog of the offerings of the university, I said, oh oh, this is just beautiful.

JL: Did you mention any comparisons that you might have drawn between Chicago and Madison?

MS: Well, depends in what respect.

JL: Different areas.

MS: Well, I didn't personally, although I did live in Berlin ever since I went to the university there. I was born, as I said, in a very tiny village in a farming area so I was used, in a sense, to living in a large city. But Chicago just didn't impress me [laughs]. The traffic and all these things which naturally are inevitable in a metropolis of this kind. I will, however, humbly admit had I been offered a congregation, a position, in Chicago, I would also have taken it and because beggars cannot be choosy. So, I wasn't sitting on a high horse and I couldn't make grandiose decisions where I would want to live. So this is a little rationalization, *post festum*, what I'm doing here that I, if I had the choice, would have preferred Madison and so it worked out that Madison came first. Chicago didn't need me.

JL: OK. I think we better turn the tape over.

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

JL: You have already talked a bit about your first early weeks and months here. Could you tell me a little bit more about your first years here such as how you went about the business of being an American rabbi and the friends you had and how you did master the new language because you speak it very well?

MS: Well, to begin with the language which in, our situation and in my profession of course is basic, due to the fact that I did learn Latin, I had only nine years of it, and you have a certain training in grammar, in structure, in syntax and in many other things, that certainly helps. And I have lived with dictionaries all my life, [laughs] so, and I have a little inclination towards perfectionism when it comes to that. I do not like to print or to write. I do the same things to this day. I go over manuscripts, especially if they are published, a million times over. So this has helped a little bit. Not that it is an easy task. Not an easy task. Nevertheless, aside from the language someone has once said, an immigrant who is not married should, in order to perfect his language, have an American girlfriend and then he [laughs] will learn, without having to pay for lessons, from her. Or he should get a radio. Now I decided on the second. I bought a little radio. And since in Madison we are blessed with this wonderful WHA, the oldest station in the nation, as it was always advertised, so I did listen to the radio more than I normally would. Also to attune my ear to the sound, to the cadences, to the rhythm of English. And no doubt that has helped. My early days in Madison were naturally very, very frustrating, but this was the nature of the situation, namely I really had to look for members. Now, again, as compared to the European setup, you don't look for members, they look for you. The members are there. They are part of the community and you don't have to go out like a candidate for an office or like a salesman of Fuller Brushes and offer your wares to the people. And this, very frankly, I didn't enjoy at all. As if I was a salesman and since I'm a poor businessman and I'm not [laughs] in sales, this was indeed difficult. But I kept it to a minimum as much as possible and let those who were members already, and I had very devoted members I must say, in the beginning

naturally for them this was also a little bit of a revelation that Judaism could be presented in a manner which was not quite the manner, the kind, the theology to which they have been used. So there were missionaries so to speak, and pioneers, in that group and they helped to build the congregation, which when I finally after 36 years retired, had grown from about eight families to close to 500 families. But then the beginning was indeed, rather difficult. It was difficult also because we had no place to hold services and when you come from Berlin there you have tremendously large buildings because nobody would build a little synagogue or a church for that matter for two, three hundred people. They had to be two and three thousand in large cities because the Synod, the community, build those and not any particular group of people. This too I must say in the beginning was quite, well somewhat depressing. When I saw at a service sitting there in front of me, and I will tell you in a minute where we held our services, we had no building, but when I saw about 12 people sitting there. So I said to myself, I couldn't have said this, I wouldn't have, aloud, this is about the amount of people I would bury in Berlin in a week, in a week's time. So I was praying to God that they should live, this congregation [laughs] otherwise there is no future in this. But these things, of course, but you shouldn't compare. But since you are human, you do it. Also, as I said, we had no building. Of course, what building? And so one member who was really the one who urged me most strongly to come to Madison, had in those days on the square, or he was the manager, he didn't own it, a manager of a department store and he really, out of the goodness of his heart, offered for our Friday night services, the tea room of this particular place, located right on the square. It is no longer in the possession of the same family, I don't even know what happened to it.

MS: And every Friday night there was a young fellow, and naturally I, because in this country the minister, this is not uncommon, he has to move the chairs, the tables, turn the light on, the furnace and all of this. In Europe there were people appointed for this purpose. So this young fellow and I we set up the chairs and set up the pulpit and set up the piano. There a lady from the congregation, who died only three, four years ago, played some of the hymns and it was a, shall we say, aesthetically, not very

attractive service because there was no choir, there was nothing. Nevertheless, nevertheless, the positive aspect was that the people wanted it. And those who were members, they came to each and every service that was held. A member of our congregation was a policeman, in those days, whose beat was just the square and in the afternoon I saw him in his police uniform standing there near the Commercial State Bank on that corner, Wolf Kubly, and then in the evening he came, still his gun under his coat, to the service and then his wife. And he later on became a very active member of the congregation. So, but the people meant well there, the enthusiasm of the founder, which later on peters out as time goes on, and we held, for instance, then came the High Holy Day services which we couldn't hold there because that place was open, so we went like the children of Israel wandering in the desert for many, many years where we went from one place to the other. We held the High Holy Days services at the Esther Vilas Hall of the YWCA, which in those days was located on State Street, right across from the new Civic Center. The YWCA has left there. Or we went to the Woman's Club, which I believe is on Gilman Street, still in existence, the building, for the special services. And we went also to the Turner Hall, that is the originally German place, and of course it was trying to hold services there on Yom Kippur because we were upstairs and downstairs was the kitchen and the odor of the kitchen would permeate that hall. That of course, I have overcome other frustrations in life, so that was only a little sideline of the situation. And we met also, and for quite some time, at a place on Stockton Court, which is off Monroe Street where now is the Shalom Center. This is not . . . this little place there used to be the first building of the St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. St. Andrew's now is on Regent Street up on the hill. And they had outgrown this place and for some reason, I don't know how, we rented this from that particular group and we used that also for a number of, for maybe two or three years only. And then finally there was at 41 North Mills Street a little building that was the edifice in which the so-called Workman's Circle held its meetings. The Workman's Circle is a group of Jews, chiefly from eastern Europe, who came to this country, they were plain working people, there were no professionals among them, they're a very, very hard working people, men and women, and



they tried to cultivate and preserve their Judeo-German, or better Yiddish culture. They had a little school there where teacher taught children in the afternoon Yiddish language and Yiddish literature, et cetera, and our small congregation rented this place for Friday night services and also for our Sunday school purposes. We did this for many years until finally in 1950 when the congregation had grown to, I do not know, remember anymore, maybe 150, 180, 200 families, when we bought the little plot of land here, near Lake Wingra and Harbor Drive, and then built the building of what is now Temple Beth El.

JL: Can we go back again to those early years and ask you who were your friends in those years?

MS: Who were my friends? Well, that depends what you mean. I knew a professor here who once said to me, much older than I am, has long since gone, as I look back upon my life I can say I have many, many acquaintances, and he was internationally known, this gentleman, but I don't think I've real friends. Now, this depends how we interpret the term friends. I have had friends and not only acquaintances, but naturally more acquaintances than friends. We all need friends and somebody has said, in order to have friends, you be a friend to others and that's very true. I mentioned earlier that my friends, that means people with whom I could talk without inhibition who would entrust their secret problems, or not so secret problems, to me and vice versa, were always Christian clergymen. And there were also, yes, yes, within the congregation, one, two, three, four, five individuals, usually older than I am, who were extremely kind and solicitous and since I was all alone, I had no one here, I wasn't married, they were always kind to me. And if I may mention one, and I do this with deep feeling and great deep gratitude, it was chiefly one elderly lady, her name was Mrs. Sarah Sinaiko. She lived on Vilas Avenue. She had two daughters and two sons and Mrs. Sinaiko was well known in this community. She was very active in the Woman's Club and all kinds of civic enterprises and she had a real feeling for human beings and I was not the only one. And irrespect of their religion, even of their race, their home was always open for people and you felt it. There was nothing artificial about it. She was one of the finest, sincerest elderly ladies it has ever been my privilege to meet and she

especially during the war when one of her sons was overseas she looked at me and said, you remind me of my son Russell. And since I fulfilled this function also she liked me very much and she was always very kind and always concerned that I ate alright [laughs], like a real mother. So I must single her out and other people who knew her in those days, as I said she is long since gone, will, I know, substantiate what I said. Not only with reference to me, but also in general. There were one or two other newcomers, greenhorns, immigrants here in Madison and she also went out of her way to be always kind and solicitous to them.

JL: Well, let me ask you something completely different. When did you become a naturalized citizen?

MS: I have to think a little harder. Officially it takes five years, that's a minimum. And I would think that I did, since I came in forty, so I think I became a naturalized citizen in 1945, no doubt. And I was most eager to become one and transfer my allegiance. The first thing was cut off possibly without my doing anything or wanting to ever done but I felt, shall we say, like a newborn individual who could align himself anew with some great philosophy which is very akin to my thinking. I often thought of what Justice Brandeis once said when he stated, the ideals of America of the 20th century have been the ideals of Judaism for 20 centuries. I think that's a very felicitous, accurate statement, indicating the spiritual and intellectual kinship that does exist between the Jewish philosophy of life and the general philosophy which underlines our democratic system. And so the becoming a citizen was for me not just a going through motions in a political matter, but really it was a matter of great joy and satisfaction and of somewhat of a new destiny.

JL: Now, I'd like to ask you, what difference did you perceive between the way the Jewish community welcomed you as a rabbi and the manner in which you saw lay refugees received. Do you think there was a difference because of your profession in the way they received you?

MS: Well it's a little hard to answer it but I do believe, as you indicated, because of the position and because even of a limited amount of respect for the traditional office of a rabbi, I would think that I reaped some advantages which others who came here and struggled very, very much, could talk a

great deal about it, really not had, not had. But a number of people of my vintage who came to Madison so limited, so limited, there was just one gentleman here who came before I came and he struggled, struggled very, very hard. In fact he has struggled all his life. He's still living in Madison, he's an elderly gentleman, and I was even able, I don't say this to brag or anything, but just, well I had better opportunities, I was able to help him and assist him in his own struggle for a livelihood and et cetera. So, I think others had it perhaps a tiny bit harder.

**JL:** Now you started talking about the struggle and I would like to move away from your personal acculturation to Wisconsin for a bit and explore your role in helping the settlement of refugees. Instead of asking questions, I would like to ask you to just talk about the arrival of the refugees and how they were received and how were they settled in and the reaction of the community to these people.

**MS:** Now when you speak of refugees I take it that you are referring now to the survivors of the Holocaust who came later than I did come. Who came, in other words, after 1945?

**JL:** Yes

**MS:** That group is, of course, because of their experience and their background rather different from, shall we say, this very tiny group of which I am a part. When the war was over, the concentration camps were opened and some people did survive, not many. They were gathered in Europe by the Army of Occupation, by I forget already the name of the organization at the moment it doesn't come to me, American organization to stay in displaced person camps.

**JL:** UNRRA.<sup>1</sup>

**MS:** UNRRA, UNRRA, right. They were called displaced persons. And these displaced persons of course they were a medley of people from Romania and from Hungary and Bulgaria and from Greece and Poland, Lithuania, from all over. They were in other words not German Jews. The German Jews were either murdered or some had left like myself and very few had survived. Anyway, and some of them

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

were given, I think through a special legislative enactment, the permission to come to this country. And I encouraged in those days this must have been naturally after '45, but could have been '47, '48, '49. I did encourage the Madison Jewish Community, now I use this term with a great deal of hesitancy because it is to a degree a misnomer. There is no community really. Everyone is an individual and yet a congregation helps form a community. Also, people are interested in social welfare. They form a community because of their goals. So, with this in mind, I induced the people here to accept a number of survivors of the Holocaust. They came to this country also through the mediation of certain national Jewish migration societies, such as HYAS, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee and special subcommittees for émigrés in New York. And their job was to help people come to this country and then also to distribute them throughout the country. They neither all wanted to stay in New York nor should they stay all in New York. So then we communicated with these agencies in New York and they said and did exactly what has been done in very recent years with people from Vietnam or Cambodia. Well, if you guarantee that you will resettle a family here in this community then we will send you a biographical sketch of family so and so, and you look it over and then let us know whether you want to accept this family. Now, since here in Madison practically no one had experience with people from Europe and all these problems intended upon this situation, so I was the either self-appointed [laughs] welfare or migration director here. And everybody was very happy that I handled the matter, and I did it because from my religious point of view I regard this a mitzvah, to bring people into a home in a place of security. So I did it very gladly, but it was naturally not an easy task. As people are thrown into a totally new community, they don't know anyone and they struggled with the language and customs and all this sort of thing. I was given, however, this I will say, it cost money. I was given limited authority to expend a certain amount of money for housing and for clothing and food for people and then we had to get the children into school if they had children. And the toughest task was of course finding jobs for them. And with great efforts and help from others we did find jobs. I will always think very gratefully of Oscar Mayer who when I went there and I knew

then in the course of time some of the people there who were good enough to give I would say five, six, seven men jobs in all kinds of departments that exist there and for these gentleman, although they were never butchers and they were never totally used to working with machines the way we have it here. Nevertheless, some have stayed on for a long, long time until they were finally, until they retired with Oscar Mayer. And fine jobs of course. That's the basis for the security of a family, but I will also add that in the meantime I had come to meet ladies, kind, like Mrs. Sinaiko, like others, I don't have to mention names, who would sort of visit with people and take them to meetings and help the kids get clothes or collect clothing for them and household utensils and all this sort of thing. I normally always met personally the people who are, who would arrive here either at the old Northwestern depot or the Milwaukee Chicago line and often they didn't come and we would wait days and nights for their arrival, but this was part of it and many of these people, in fact almost all of them have remained my friends through our personal contact over the years. We...

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

JL: You can continue with your friendships that developed.

MS: Yes, I was saying that quite a few of them have remained friends of mine over the years. We resettled a total of 24 units. Now, units may consist of a family with children or of a single person. Talking about single, once there was a young lady who absolutely wanted to marry me. Now, that I didn't want to benefit, [laughs] didn't want to reap from the resettlement of DP's in Madison, but that's part of this lot of an unmarried rabbi. That's the reason why Jewish tradition has always said a rabbi should always be married.

JL: [laughs] But do you still have special relationships with the DP's that are...?

MS: Oh yes. Let me also add that some later on left Madison again. Either they got older or they wanted to be reunited with *landsleute* [compatriots] living in Philadelphia or Boston or somewhere. It was perfectly fine too because our job really was fulfilled after we resettled them and integrated them and they became Americanized. So that was quite alright. And I hear on holidays still from some and our relation has always been very, very good.

JL: I'm interested, wasn't Mrs. Silverburg part of the...?

MS: Yes, Mrs. Silverburg, as I said, I mentioned Mrs. Sinaiko. You see if I mentioned more, then I would have to mention others too, and I might not think of each and everyone.

JL: No, this is my responsibility. I asked about it.

MS: It is? Yes. Mrs. Silverburg was a fine lady, living in Florida now. She also was always very helpful. There was the old Mrs. Borsook, who was very kind and good. Two South Mill Street there was Mrs. ...well, at one time her name was Kalen. I can't think of her, she remarried. Her husband died. Mrs. ....

JL: Rubenstein?

MS: Rubenstein. Correct. There was Mrs. ...she passed away too, just two years ago. Gruen's mother. Mrs. Gruen's mother. What was her name? You see now. I got myself into trouble. The Lipp...Doctor Lipp's mother. Mrs. ...

JL: Not Doeretsky, is it? Doeretsky?

MS: Doeretsky? Oh, correct. Thank you for helping me. Ja, and ladies of that caliber, background, type, and they were very helpful. They were the group of those who looked for apartments and for clothing and toys for children and this sort of thing which of course is very essential, too.

JL: You mentioned 24 units. That means individual people?

MS: No, the units, by units I meant a family of four, of six or a single person.

JL: Uh-huh. So how many people, do you remember how many there were all together?

MS: Well, I find this difficult to remember, but I would think offhand maybe seventy-five, eighty.

JL: And most of them or all of them at this point were from Eastern Europe?

MS: Yes. All of them.

JL: Okay. How were they received by the community?

MS: Well, you mean by the so-called Jewish community?

JL: Well, yes, yes.

MS: Well, the way it always is. The community doesn't receive them. They're only individuals. Like some of these ladies I mentioned who I think, the people were a little friendlier than to a previous group for a number of reasons. In the first place, those who befriended them had a little bit more in common with them. Their language, their culture. The language was Yiddish. That was the only language they could speak and they, Madisonians of this group also spoke it. Then, of course, there has been World War II plus the Holocaust in between. That of course has softened the heart even of the hard hearted individual. So this was in part their inner response to the trauma of the Holocaust, the feeling that they can help the living. I think it made a great deal of difference. The experience of what happened between '33 and '45.

JL: Well despite all these positive things you're telling me, we heard from some people that they are quite bitter about the reception that was given or the lack of reception.

MS: Yes, it is true. I do not enjoy dwelling on negative aspects, but they are part of the picture. They are.

JL: They are.

MS: Yes, it is true. It is true. They always, you know, the way we have now in our society, some call it a "welfare society," citizens in general who are very, very bitter about helping people who are on welfare. Who are, don't like at all that we cuddle up to criminals or have criminals and to better a -- anti-social elements, because tax money goes for all of this. So by the same token, there are always people too who are so arrogant as to believe that because of their virtue, they are where they are, in pretty good shape. And they don't like to be disturbed, you know, by the presence of people of their own background and kind who are beggars, who are a drain on society and all this, forgetting that when their parents and grandparents came, they came under similar circumstances—only similar, not the same. But they will often say, who helped my father, hmmm? Oh yes. This I've heard. Who helped my father? Nobody paid the rent for my father. We had to live in Greenbush, you know, in dinky little places. And of course the places in which these DP's lived, they were not much better than the places in Greenbush. They were not split-level homes in Maple Bluff or anywhere. But this is part of the "evil" that resides in all, in human nature and in human kind. [laughs] But by and large...so the majority of people certainly didn't actively help the people nor were they actively involved in this whole thing. There's always, always in life a minority of people who do all the work. This is the common experience, in this and in other matters.

JL: Let me ask you this about the group of DP's. Did they form a cohesive whole? Could they be considered a group apart from...

MS: Well, they were perhaps too few in Madison. They had a great many things in common. There's no doubt about it. Because common pain, common traumatic experience does bind people together. And



socially, on a Sunday afternoon they would visit, et cetera, like human beings do, but there was never a noticeable, conspicuous spirit of community.

MS: For instance, if I compare Madison to Milwaukee, and I know Milwaukee best next to Madison, there are in existence to this very, very day two groups that were formed in those days of newcomers. One is the New Home Club, of which I happen to be an honorary member [laughs], that is, was, formed of Jews who came chiefly from central Europe, Germany and Austria. And while most of the members are of my vintage, older now, they have to this day common Hannukah parties an annual Seder, and once a year for maybe 25 or 30 years, once a year, I promised, and I keep my promise, at the annual meeting I give them a talk. And they still sort of stick together. And not only that, they have helped, some of them now are in better financial position, they, as a group, buy bonds for Israel, they have bought ambulances for the Jewish [American?] Red Magen David in Israel and all kinds of things where they in turn, you know, repay a little bit what was done for them. And then there is another group called...

JL: The New Americans?

MS: The New Americans, right, and that group also exists and that comprises more members of DP's, those who have come from Eastern Europe. But they still exist to this very day. Naturally, one doesn't have to be a prophet to predict that these things will peter out as time goes on because I see in the New Home Club that the number is going down from year to year and that their children, grandchildren, simply have very little in common and don't take any interest in it. But that's natural and that's not to be decried.

JL: Let me ask you one more thing about the DP's. You mentioned earlier that the previous group was not, you mentioned, just alluded to the previous group, I assume you mean the refugees, were not as well-received, relatively, as well-received as the DP's.

MS: Yes. Yes. People had no experience with them. They...came here and, and, as I said the Holocaust was a great teacher, you know. And a leveler. And a moralizer. And all this. That helped unfortunately, and that wasn't in evidence in, for some of the earlier ones.

JL: But there was apparently, as I understand it, there was no organized reception.

MS: No. That is correct. That makes a difference, too, you're right. There was, the number was small and there was no organized...as a matter of fact, not until I came was there, what was later on called the Madison Jewish Welfare Fund, it just didn't exist.

JL: So where did these . . . refugees were given, as far as you know, they had visas?

MS: Well you see those had to come on individual visas or affidavits, better. An American citizen individually had to guarantee the government that the immigrant would not become a public charge. Individually. But, as far as the second group, the displaced persons were concerned, they didn't need individual affidavits. The government had issued blanket affidavits so to speak for 10,000 people let's say, or whatever. So, they were then in a sense, the second group, the real responsibility and charge of the community, which had accepted them. And the others they were freeing, I mean flying free around like a bird, but they didn't have that contact except maybe with an uncle in Cleveland, you know, or a cousin or a third cousin, you know, who had out of the goodness of his heart sent a distant relative. It had to be relatives to sign affidavits, had given a guarantee and they sometimes didn't like it when they finally showed up that even he would have to pay for the first month's rent but some naturally did. But others the total relationship was different between these two groups and therefore their reception.

JL: I would like to go back to your personal adjustment, away from your role with the a DP, you've talked about yourself as a bachelor. Now, when did you get married?

MS: Well, I finally broke down and got married in October 1952, I think. Yeah, I think so. Alright?

JL: And your wife's name?

MS: My wife's name is Ida Swarsensky, nee Weiner, a native of Chicago.

JL: And her occupation?

MS: Before she had the privilege of getting married to me she was a high school teacher in Chicago.

JL: Now could you tell me the names of your children and their dates and places of birth?

MS: Oh my. Well, my elder child is a daughter, Sharon. She was born in Chicago because my wife's mother wanted her daughter [laughs] to give birth to the child in a Chicago hospital over my protest. I think she was born in '53. My son, Gerald David, was born in Madison, I think in '56.

JL: Now, do you speak English at home?

MS: Yes. Well, I'm forced to speak English because all the three inhabitants of my home, speak English, that's their native tongue. However, I do speak also German. In fact I do it deliberately because I want my children to know German. They do understand German. They speak it to a more limited degree. My wife, who comes from a Yiddish-speaking family, has no difficulty understanding German and speaking it with a tremendous accent, Chicago accent [laughs]. So I do this of course sometimes when I'm either tired or when I'm angry I fall back into German. But more seriously I think it is an advantage for anyone to know more languages than one. And this language can be learned relatively easily, without going to school and without books.

JL: Would you say that you speak more or less German now than you did when you first came?

MS: No, I speak less German.

JL: And at home?

MS: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, I prefer speaking English, I think, which I would never have believed. Even to it for the most part it comes more easily. But I do write every once in awhile, I have hundreds upon hundreds of friends and acquaintances all over the world so I write, if their native tongue is German, I write German to them, too. But, by and large, I use more English than I do German. As a matter of fact, next month I have to give a talk before a non-Jewish German group in Chicago and I find it rather difficult to get my language and all that goes with it together. I nowadays can think, and this I would never, never have believed, more easily in English. Yes. That I would never have believed. If somebody

would have told me this years ago I would said that's just impossible. But that is peculiar how that, yeah, I think, how that works I do not know.

JL: When your mother was alive, how was the language situation?

MS: Naturally I talked to my mother in the same language I've always talked to her, in German. But my mother, who was not a PhD and who had never attended the university, she was a very hard-working housewife, she went, when she came here to the vocational school and learned English and worked with dictionaries and she was in high sixties or seventies in this, but she was eager to become *ein ganzer Amerikaner* {a complete American} [laughs]. That she didn't want to be left out. I mean she wanted to read the newspaper and know what is going on.

JL: Did she live with you at any time?

MS: Yes, before I was married she did. Yes.

JL: When did she die?

MS: Oh, oh, I don't know. I think she died in 1968, or thereabouts.

JL: How much do your children know about your experiences during the Hitler years?

MS: Well, I think they know most of it. Not all of it, not all of it. I don't think I ever sat down with them and said now I'm going to tell you. It's rather peculiar that I never did this, but it's the truth. I never did this. But since I have talked publicly on these matters and written about it so they must, I would think, know most of it. I don't think it's even necessary or good for them. Although I do not know. I do not know, well this is maybe not even a question. They know as much as they, I suppose, care to know about but I have never made it a point, and sometimes I wonder why not to, as I said, sit down with them and talk to them for hours, this happened, that happened. My wife knows I think more about it and she was more interested in it and I've talked to her more extensively about the experience and about my . . . than my children.

JL: You mentioned to me at one point that your son was more interested than your daughter.

MS: Well, yes, in a way it is true. Well, as a father may I say my son is more like myself. My daughter more like her mother. In their attitude, in many, many respects. But that is maybe unfair also. I don't think I can make and defend this statement. But my son has a profound sense of Jewishness, Jewish responsibility and also moral responsibility. He is, I must say, in many respects more perfect than his father is. His father wouldn't mind using a white lie, but my son, never. So those things, he is very principled, not peculiar, very practical, very principled, he is also more practical when it comes to working with his hands than his father is. He can repair a car just like anything and his father doesn't know [laughs] the first thing about it. So he's alright [laughs].

JL: Do you perceive that the children then have faced any problems at school because of the family background? I mean usual family circumstances, I'm not having on your side, at least, a large extended family.

MS: No, no, I don't think they have because of my European background faced any particular problem. They have been exposed as all Jewish children in public schools are to the lacerations which come. And traditionally his father, or their father, had the similar experience when he went to school. I don't think it is ever, been ever a Jewish child in this world that has not been exposed to anti-Semitic innuendos, remarks and little digs and all this sort of thing. But, they have overcome it and as Jews always have. These things are meaningless, but they are there. But not because of their father's particular background. That I don't think, is...

JL: In comparison to other families do you see your children overachieving?

MS: No, not at all, not at all.

JL: Do you think your family is closer than other American families?

MS: No. I really have nothing to go by. I know other families are very, very close and I know other families not close at all, where nobody gives a hoot about the other. I don't think I could make any such statement. I think we are just average.

JL: You talked about your son's sense of responsibility. I'd like to ask you if you feel that their sense of responsibility is greater than that of other children because of your background?

MS: No, I would have difficulty backing that up, any such statement. No. I think they are just average and what we call more or less normal, whatever normal is. No, I couldn't make any such statement.

JL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than others?

MS: No. No.

JL: Not due to the experiences?

MS: No and I don't think . . . concerned in what sense, about their welfare?

JL: Well, their physical security.

MS: No, no, no. I'm very average too.

**END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

JL: What contact do you have with surviving family members?

MS: You mean with my own or with others?

JL: Yours.

MS: Oh, my own. Well, I used to have more contact than I have now, also due to the fact that some of course have passed away. I have had maybe five cousins and their families survive, two in Israel and three in South America. I must admit as long as my mother was alive she kept the contact up more faithfully than I have. But we write each other every once in a long while. But the contact is, I hate to say, not a very close and intimate one.

JL: And your brother?

MS: It's about the same.

JL: We did talk about friends earlier. Would you say the assessment you made of friends and acquaintances can be applied to the present also?

MS: Oh yes, yes.

JL: How many of your friends are survivors?

MS: Well, I have maybe in New York and Chicago a few friends who are survivors. Their number is limited. As a matter of fact, last week I buried a friend in Chicago, a man whom I, at whose wedding I officiated at in Berlin 43 years ago and he had left in his will that nobody ever would bury him but I. But as time goes on and as we grow older, I think in my situation the contacts have lessened, have become weaker. But it's I think understandable. In the first place, as I said, people do die and it's an effort also to keep up contacts and in addition the interests change and therefore we grow apart. And I think that's unavoidable.

JL: And other close friends besides the clerical associations?

MS: I wouldn't say that in Madison, Wisconsin, I have any real close friends. Even though I have been in the city for these many, many years but I have again a great number of acquaintances but I couldn't think of any so-called close friends.

JL: Do you think this has anything to do with role as a Rabbi?

MS: It could be. I have never had, number one, time to socialize a great deal, a Rabbi is usually very busy and he doesn't have regulated hours from eight to four-thirty so he's busy all the time, which I don't mind at all; and I am not by nature a social butterfly. I don't need this for my enjoyment to play cards or go to taverns [laughs] or places of sociability so that is partly then my own fault that I don't have friends. And the great majority of people I see they see the very same people all day long, talk on the phone forever and ever and friendship is a very tenuous relationship as I see it for the most part. I hope I'm not cynical when I say this, but there are in this world good, close and sincere friends. But I cannot say I have any of this nature in Madison.

JL: There's been a traditional animosity among eastern and western European Jews, have you ever felt it and do you feel it now although you are all American Jews?

MS: Oh yes. I feel it less and I hear less about it but I could cite many instances where people, even in my own congregation, have had some questions, I think especially of one gentleman. Before after I had been in Madison for a year or two the questions came up, I wasn't present, at a board meeting of my new congregation, who said, why should we really have a German Rabbi. Yes, he said this and he became, not a friend, but an acquaintance and he was a nice fellow. He was an elderly, an older gentleman, nothing wrong with him, but this was in his bones. He felt why should we fool around [laughs] with someone. Why not bring in our own kind. And on top of it this happened in a so-called Reform congregation, which is supposedly [laughs] based on the classical German theology. But of course theology didn't mean anything to the gentleman so he had just the social reaction which has existed and the animosity between these two groups. But I don't think it has ever played any serious role in my relation to the congregation. I must add that as I trace back, the origin of the majority of



the members of my congregation I don't think there has ever been more than one or two percent of German Jews from way back. They are, for the most part, a part of the eastern European wave of immigration to this country.

JL: Do you belong to any organizations of survivors, or *landsmanshaft*?

MS: I do belong to the Leo Baeck Society in New York, which would come under this category. I do belong to the organization called Jews From Central Europe, there is an additional title, Association of Jews From Central Europe, I believe. I'm even on the national board and I am, as I said earlier, an honorary member of the New Home Club in Milwaukee. But other than that I am not a member of any such organization. However, I am a faithful and an avid reader of the *Der Aufbau*, which is a German-Jewish language paper, edited, written, published in New York which is of interest to me because it emphasizes news that are of a great variety—political, belle-lettristic, and otherwise which is of particular integral interest to people of, Jews from central Europe.

JL: Are you active by the way in any of these organizations?

MS: No, no, I am not.

JL: What is the Leo Baeck Society?

MS: The Leo Baeck Society is an association, headquarters in New York, that has made the collection of material pertaining to Jews from central Europe its major concern. They have archives, they publish lectures, papers, even a yearbook on the historic experience, chiefly of German Jews and those publications are very, very excellent. They are, contain the work of academicians and people who do not just explore the Holocaust, not at all. But they trace back and keep records of the history of Jewish, political emancipation for instance. They have exhibits on Moses Mendelssohn<sup>2</sup>, whose 250th birthday was celebrated last year. And they have books and documents and they are always very eager to receive and then keep memorabilia going back to a total history of the symbiosis between Jews and Germans.

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<sup>2</sup> German Jewish philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

JL: I'd like to talk about you personally again. Of course you have contact with American Jews, American-born Jews, through the congregation. Do you think they understand what you personally went through?

MS: No. To me, I make this apodictic statement because to me it has always been of interest that not even once, not even once, my own congregation or a group in the congregation such as a social group or a study group or a breakfast club, has never asked me to speak about my own experience. While any number, a tremendous number, of non-Jewish groups, churches, civic clubs, et cetera, and even now, after all these years, are eager to hear about my experience. Why this is so I do not know. I have never thought about it too deeply but in speculating I would be inclined to say is not because people want to spare my feelings, they don't spare my feelings in other respects, but rather it is often for Jews upsetting, frightening, even demoralizing, to hear about trouble, Jewish trouble. They don't want to hear about it. Because when they hear about it, it makes them, them themselves, feel insecure. They say could it happen here, too. And understandably and I respect this people don't like to engage into such weird speculations and so they don't like to hear about it. On the other hand, I will say this, in 1970 I was invited by the City of Berlin to return for a weekend to participate in celebrations that were held in commemoration of the downfall of Hitler, 1945 to '70, 25 years, plus the reconstruction of the Jewish community in Berlin. And when I came back and I landed here, I remember this, on Thursday morning, and then Friday evening we had a service, it was the Sabbath of the Hanukkah week. There were more people here than at the service than I'd ever seen in a long time during a regular year except for the high holy days and they were eager to here from me what I had experienced there and what I had to say. And I did say it, that it was the longest sermon I have ever given. It lasted 90 minutes and held by general standards is just unbearable. But so there was interest in hearing that, now, but it was different.

JL: Why was it...?

MS: Yeah. I didn't speak about the horrors. I spoke chiefly, but exclusively, about the reconstruction, the new life going on. It could be that and I just do not know, I just do not know. But this has happened too. But how often would it happen, once in a lifetime.

JL: Do I understand correctly then that there has been no change in the reaction of the Jewish community wanting to understand from the time that you came through now?

MS: No, no. As a matter of fact, let me add, maybe oh twice, maybe three times, I don't know, I spoke before Jewish groups here in Madison, after all there are Jewish groups outside of the congregation, also on a favored subject of mine, you mentioned the Leo Baeck Institute, that is named after my most respected, favored, beloved teacher, Leo Baeck. About his most interesting life, his philosophy, his theology, his fate, his martyrdom, et cetera., and each time when I spoke hardly anybody turned out. Very, very few people came. Either they have never heard of him, but the fact that I presented it made no difference. I was somewhat mildly disappointed that there is no real interest in this particular man whom I regard one of the greatest that have ever lived.

JL: We have talked a bit about the responses of American Jews to you, and I still would like to talk a bit further. What do you think are the general feelings of the American Jews about the Holocaust?

MS: Well, if one can assess it properly, I don't know whether I can, as always, there's a minority of people sometimes younger people whose parents didn't necessarily live through it, who are deeply moved by what was going on, what befell their people. I've seen students in college, not too many, but a very fine, concerned group, read every book on the Holocaust, take courses in it and study it and I know some who are going to go into Holocaust Studies themselves in the hope of teaching it later on. Yes. But by and large, whether I speak about the masses of the people, they don't like, this is my impression, I could be wrong, to be reminded too much especially nowadays of what went on. They are in the sense one might say almost like the Germans, but for very different reasons of course. I can fully understand that present day Germans absolutely do not want to be reminded of the sins of their fathers. That is human. That I understand. But Jews, for reasons which I alluded to earlier, don't like

to have the troubles regurgitated and brought to the light again, it makes them feel unpleasant, insecure and therefore the great number of Jews, so is my impression, would not like to hear about it. More people would like to hear about the positive aspect of the Holocaust, which is the rebirth of Israel. Because I don't think we can ever separate the crucifixion from the resurrection, if I may use the theological terms, meaning the death camps from the new life that has come to Israel because it would never have come had it not been for the Holocaust. I'm convinced of that. So there is something positive people can identify themselves with and therefore we have organizations, Hadassah and others, who cultivate the interest in Israel and the future of the country. So I will say, if this comes out of the tragedy of the Holocaust, this particular aspect of Jewish interest, one should be satisfied with that. Certainly only to emphasize the so-called negative, I hate to use the word negative for it, because it's reality, but only the dark aspects, human nature cannot stand it for a very long time and it is not redemptive in any way. So to think of positive aspects such as Israel, which is the Jewish answer to destruction, I think that is quite positive and should be appreciated.

JL: Now what do you think that most non-Jews feel about the Holocaust?

MS: Well, here, too, it cannot possibly be, it's humanly impossible, that the great majority of non-Jews should even take an interest in the Holocaust. As I look for instance at those people I know best in their thinking, ministers in Madison, there are three and there have never been more, and these three are still living, they are still in Madison. These men are as interested in the Holocaust as any Jew ideally could be. I know one minister who last year, in '78, went at his own expense to a Holocaust conference in Philadelphia, which was called by this great Methodist clergyman and professor of theology, Dr. Franklin Littell, at Temple University in Philadelphia, who is perhaps the most knowledgeable and most concerned non-Jew when it comes to the matter of the Holocaust in which he sees an event not of Jewish, but of Christian history. I know this man who told me that he keeps a file on the Holocaust. I know another gentleman here in town who will speak, and especially after he had come to Madison only five years ago, and we got friends or acquaintances and he collected and

he got excited and he read the books by Elie Wiesel. And he in his church he has given sermons. He's the only one to my knowledge who has ever given a sermon on the Holocaust here in Madison. As such, there are three here in Madison. It's a small number. The great majority, and I meet with them and I see them, they are somewhat embarrassed and also since the Holocaust has a decidedly theological implication, especially Lutherans and Germans in their majority are Lutherans, they shy away from it, they don't want to hear that Luther for instance said exactly what Hitler said. Indeed Hitler took his slogan, "*Die Juden sind unser Unglück*," "the Jews are our misfortune," right from the writings of Martin Luther. Who also said that the synagogues ought to be destroyed. I am quoting almost literally. That they be driven out and expelled from their homes and all the rest. Now this is definitely a source that has poisoned the psyche of the German people and culminated in the Holocaust. So some of the men know this, they don't want to touch on it and don't want to talk about it. So this is already a select group I'm talking about, ministers, who should also have a certain religious and moral motivations. The masses of the people certainly don't know about it. Somebody was asked, I read it somewhere, what is a Holocaust. He said, a Jewish holiday. I mean this...so why should they . . . do I get greatly excited about all the troubles in Vietnam and Cambodia? No. Of course it's very different, the Holocaust, but nevertheless, this is part of human nature. Yes, as I said earlier I have been asked and I'm sure others too any number of times to speak on the Holocaust on my own experience. Sometimes of course people invite me to speak simply because they have to fill a program. The program chairman has to have a program for next month so he turns to somebody who rarely says no, so, that is the reason. But some have a sincere interest also in some churches. Next week for instance I am invited to speak on this matter in a small I believe Methodist church near somewhere not far from Madison. So a young minister he is interested in it. But these are, this is a normal situation. It is not pro- or anti-Judaism, it is just how, in how many things, how many causes, can the average human being really be involved and be actively interested? So I'm not surprised that this is the prevalent situation. I think the interest in Holocaust is relatively minimal. Now in following

the showing of the docudrama Holocaust in April '78, there has been, I would think, a greater interest generated in the Holocaust. People have been exposed to things they have never read or heard about it and deeply moved by it. Also, in some high schools where the teaching of the Holocaust has become part of the regular program. And yet I don't think this will go very far. I think this will peter out also. We must candidly admit. Because so many new problems and concerns have moved on the stage of our interest. The situation in Iran, the horrible problems we have with arrogant Communists, the whole question of war and peace and there is so much nowadays that is of real immediate concern that in these events have eclipsed the interest of the Holocaust. That is also understandable.

**END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2**

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

JL: At our last session we were talking about your views on what most non-Jews feel about the Holocaust. Now I would like to ask you what you have told non-Jews about your experiences, both socially as well as from the pulpit and lectern. You did mention that...

MS: About my own experience? My own, personal?

JL: Your own and in general.

MS: I have told everything in great, great detail because that's what they wanted for the most part.

JL: They being the non-Jews.

MS: My own experience, incarceration, liberation, the suffering of other Jews, everything under the sun. I've never held back. And those who asked these questions, they were interested in it, and I have never found an adverse reaction in any way. Meaning what adverse reaction can it be. But it could theoretically come from American of German descent who resent the sins of their countrymen brought to light. But I cannot resent it and not recall having ever run into such a situation.

JL: Generally when you speak about the Holocaust you speak from the pulpit. Have you ever had the opportunity to speak socially with people?

MS: Well, of course I don't, I have not talked from the pulpit. I would never use the subject in a Christian pulpit. I have naturally as a Rabbi over the years spoken about it and alluded to it as anybody would. The speaking, public speaking, was mostly in churches but in a more social setting, meetings of kind study groups, women's luncheons, et cetera. Socially, oh yes. I have spoken with a great many people about the Holocaust over the years, not that I initiated the subject, I wouldn't do. But only if they want to hear about it and the thirst for knowledge among certain groups of Christians is considerable. I believe I told you last time when we met that my own beloved congregation has never asked me even once, you know, they should even speak on it. One would assume that they would be interested in my personal experience. If they are not interested in *Klal Yisrael*<sup>3</sup>, at least they might be interested, one

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<sup>3</sup> Community of Israel.

would assume, I would, in an individual who was supposed to be a Rabbi. But this question as never, not even once, come up.

JL: How has your American rabbinate been formed and influenced by your Holocaust experience?

MS: Well, I would think it has been influenced considerably, not only because it is my own experience, it is the experience of the Jewish people. Our whole history, our whole theology even, the most difficult part of it, there naturally has been profoundly shaped by the experience of the Holocaust. If we had never gone through the Holocaust, our total outlook would probably be one of liberal optimism the way they used to have it in the olden days when we felt that the world would be coming better and better and that we will move closer to the days of the Messiah. But since the Holocaust has revealed the dark side of human nature and the great perils adherent in history, naturally our outlook on these matters has changed. Not in the sense, I would think, that we have become suddenly cynical and pessimistic. But rather not as enthusiastically optimistic as we once were.

JL: Have you had any unpleasant experiences with non-Jews?

MS: In this country?

JL: Yeah.

MS: Well, in that realm, the only, the only really unpleasant experience were with some Fundamentalist ministers. For instance, there is here in Watertown, Wisconsin, a seminary of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod. They publish a magazine called the *Northwestern Lutheran*. The head of the school is a certain gentleman by the name of Reverend Carlton Toppe, T-o-p-p-e. Mr. Toppe over the years has written editorials in the publication which are starkly anti-Semitic and each time I have answered him. We have a whole correspondence with Mr. Toppe, who is a Lutheran who follows in the footsteps of the late Martin Luther, not the young one. He is convinced and he feels and he has expressed himself to this affect that the Jews must be converted. They must disappear as Jews. And the Jews are deserving the suffering that has been meted out to them over the centuries, including the Holocaust. In a statement maybe a year, year-and-a-half or so ago, he said, while he, himself, would certainly not hurt



anyone or persecute anyone, but the persecution of the Jews is deserved for the unforgivable sin of deicide. I mean he holds to the traditional Christian line and will not deviate from it. I normally do not answer to anti-Semitic slurs, also not publicly because I always feel all we give them is a free forum and then they rub it in even more. But, since the *State Journal* and the religious religion editor of the *State Journal* saw fit to write also an article on Toppe several times, so I felt that this should be answered. Then a correspondence developed between Toppe and me and...

JL: Public or personal?

MS: Personal. The thing was made public. The Wisconsin Council of Churches, now called Wisconsin Community of Churches, which is an overall organization of the middle-of-the-road Protestant churches, asked me for the correspondence and they published it and with great approval of my point of view and because they don't see eye to eye with the Wisconsin Lutherans who are even more conservative and more fanatical than the Missouri Synod Lutherans are. So they published this, and yet this very problem, theologically, has never been really straightened out or really approached even by the more so-called liberal Protestants. How they feel about conversion I do not know. I do have deep down in my system a feeling, that even some of the more liberal ministers who are personal friends or acquaintances of mine, that they have an ambivalent feeling about this matter because after all it is the commission of the church to go out into the world and convert the unsaved. And I think they have never really relinquished or changed this theological point of view. Within the Catholic Church there is a discussion on this matter far more openly than amongst Protestants who just are silent about it or think their way and never publish it. And within the Catholic Church there is one trend nowadays and there's quite a bit of literature has come out to replace the word conversion or missionizing with a term, witness. Some of the more liberal Catholic theologians say, the church should not try to convert the Jews, certainly not forcibly as they did in the Middle Ages, but not even set up projects for this purpose. But the word "missionizing" ought to be replaced with the word "witness". They should nevertheless by the very presence and for that their very teaching witness to

the truth of Christianity. On that basis I think we can meet because then they say lead to exactly the same. We also witness the truth of Judaism, anyone who wants to accept this so-called truth is free to do it but we don't go out and make this a matter of a public theological appeal or saying that all those are damned to perdition into eternity, to not accept our truths. This discussion is going on in the Catholic Church. It began a little bit with the Vatican Council where this, a distinction, also was first made.

JL: Now a bit more to the home front. How would you feel if your children married non-Jews?

MS: Well has this anything to do with the Holocaust?

JL: It might.

MS: Well, first there are two questions really implied. Certainly I would oppose it, I would be against it, but I am not different from other Jewish parents. I would not disown them, I wouldn't sit *shivah*<sup>4</sup> except in my heart. I would try to make the best of it which is not easy for me and far worse for my wife. I suppose I would reluctantly accept the situation since I do not see what any parents can do and I have enough of experience in seeing what other parents can do, meaning nothing. That's part of the spirit of the time and I fully understand why young people marry outside of their faith. I mean I could give you 50 different reasons why it happens—sociological, psychological and all of this. Now, I think more germane, our discussion is the question whether children of survivors have possibly a different attitude, a different motivation, for intermarrying consciously or subconsciously. I have felt it a peculiar hurt to me personally because of the Holocaust when a Jewish young man for instance come on and they want to marry someone who is German, and I've married people, girls, whom they met during the war in Germany. I have also officiated at weddings where they married non-Jews who had come over, the Christian parents, after the war. They have great, hundreds of thousands of Germans, have come to this country. So they meet here and of course to these kids who intermarry, makes no difference, whether the parents holler it's this or that, as long as you fall in love with a young lady. Not

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<sup>4</sup> In Judaism, a period of seven days of mourning after the death of close relative.

so much the other way around. I have a feeling, in each instance, and I've studied these a little more carefully than others, I sensed that speaking of young Jewish fellows, they had for the most part of German Jewish descent, and not only of German Jewish descent but of American, American borns, whenever they met or wanted to marry a German they've held deep down in their system what they ought to feel, that marrying outside of the faith is already a problem but now the problem is aggravated by the fact that they marry someone who in very recent decades, a member of a group that has inflicted such horror on the Jewish people. Each time they tried to sort of justify it to me, even better, apologize in a sense that they went that far to marry a born American non-Jew is one thing. But now to pick someone whose parents speak German and could possibly be former Nazis or come from such a family. That is felt by these young people, not to speak of their parents, for the most part the parents are utterly.. I mean Jewish Holocaust survivor's children will do this. They are disconsolate and yet they cannot do anything about it. Now, why do they do this? Well one could say that it makes no difference to someone who marries a non-Jew whether he was born, the parents were born, in Germany or Norway and all this. I do not absolutely think so. One of the reasons, one of the many, many reasons why Jews marry outside of the group, and I repeat again one, there are many, many others, this doesn't always apply, it's part of the Jewish psychopathology, namely a desire to sort of enact the final solution themselves. In other words, to wipe themselves out as Jews. A great many people on the campus, especially so-called intellectuals and professors and many do adjust for that, I know consciously even, for that purpose so that their descendants they feel will not again be exposed to what Jews were exposed to. They want to escape. And in the case of Holocaust survivors marrying I have sensed this even more, that they experienced themselves or vicariously through parents and grandparents, the dark side, the tragedy, the burden, the problems of being a Jew in a gentile world that they felt this is it now, this is it now. They cannot see any value why a person should continue to make himself a possible victim by maintaining his and her Jewish identity. So they run away. It is a form of self-rejection, there is not question about it. In almost every marriage, intermarriage situation.

But I have a feeling, I could be wrong, that it is more so in the case of a Holocaust survivor, a child of a Holocaust survivor family, marrying outside of the faith. That's a hypothesis, I have not looked into it deeply enough nor do I know whether studies have been made on it. This is solely based on my own experience.

JL: Now I'd like to change the subject again. What political and/or cultural clubs do you belong to?

MS: I do not belong to any political clubs. Whenever I have been asked to join any one or to come out for a candidate or make any political statements, I have, as a matter of principle, stayed away from it, especially when it's partisan politics. I don't think I should as a rabbi come out for this president or for this mayor or for that alderman, et cetera. I have supported some quietly but without ever coming out. I think that's poor policy. However, if and when issues are at stake which have a bearing on the quality of the community and especially of Jewish interests, than that is a different story because we are custodians so to speak of Jewish values, the way we see them, we see them often differently. But by and large there's a certain consensus among us Jews what is not only good for Jews but also what a Jew really should support.

JL: Could you give me an example?

MS: Well, when it comes to matters of the attitude toward black people for instance, I mean there are no two ways about it. I was very, very active after the last war in the organization called United World Federalists. I believed almost with messianic fervor that that would be an instrumentality and one way of establishing peace and of course that's naivety and that's also the messianic Jewish complex which I share, you know, to be a little savior who wants to save the entire world with little mechanisms. Unfortunately it doesn't work that way. But other than that I have participated in any number of non-political movements. I just threw a letter away from Red Cross, I mean Red Cross is a mild organization so-to-speak, and in mental health association, in, I don't even know—and Cerebral Palsy and I can't even think of them all. And not just in a sort of as going through motions or being a do-gooder, I literally have participated quite actively in many organizations especially when they relate to

the City of Madison. For many years I was on the Police Commission, a police, what do they call it, Public Relations Committee, and far more importantly on a project working with others like the [sounds like: citizens] from Madison. What should be done in economic and the environmental and all these fields for the City of Madison. How it lines up with these reports which stretched over years. They are probably gathering dust now in the City Hall. That's also what happens.

JL: Are there any other clubs?

MS: Oh clubs you mean? Well, I'm a member of Rotary Club, was a board member one year; I joined, reluctantly in a sense but I do not regret that I joined it at all. It's a good association.

JL: Why reluctantly?

MS: Well, reluctantly because number one, I couldn't see that all of a sudden on Wednesday at 11:30 I take off and go religiously more to the Rotary meetings than I go to church and church would never, or the synagogue, check up on me as a laymen, but Rotary you have to attend or out you go. So the attendance restriction are quite stringent and frankly also it is an extremely expensive club to belong to and I really don't belong to that economic category. The great majority of people are business executives chiefly, lawyers, doctors, some university professors and in most instances their dues are paid by the organization. They don't even pay it themselves. It's a legitimate business expense because they make contacts and I don't need business contacts for that purpose. But I have enjoyed the contact with people who are setting the tone in Madison and being a Jew I always feel it's good for the Jews. And I just don't see this lightly, it is true. It is true. If you represent and become known and through you they respect Jews a little more, at least this is what I believe. But I think it's true. Other clubs. Well, I'm a member of the Madison Literary Club, I'm a member of, what else, clubs, I don't belong to any social club as such. I haven't got time for that nor interest in it, but there must be more. I mean I belong to many organizations. I belong to Jewish organizations, too. There's one called B'nai B'rith. I do not know why it exists in Madison, but all my life, my adult life, I have been a member and because I have I think they, while they are very weak on the local scene, but they have their

activities of course on the national scene. I do believe in the work of the ADL<sup>5</sup>, Hillel<sup>6</sup> and the many, many other vocational guidance and those things I think are practical even though we don't see too much, I mean locally.

**END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1**

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<sup>5</sup> Anti-Defamation League.

<sup>6</sup> Worldwide Jewish campus organization.

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

JL: [inaudible]

MS: Well, because you said if a person who has gone, or a Jew, through the so-called Holocaust but he has special interests, I mean special affiliation and interests of course come out in our affiliations. I have always had a very strong and positive feeling for the Jewish National Fund because they purchased land, they planted trees and did something concrete for the country. Years ago, I raised funds here single-handedly for many years for the Jewish National Fund. Nowadays it is reduced to clearing boxes I think once a year and doesn't amount to much. But we had dinners here, we went to Milwaukee and we sold golden books and raised quite a bit of money, outside of the welfare fund that is, and there were, oh, I would say four or five people and I we went all out. Also, I have always taken a special interest and I will emphasize this and say in a minute why and why not in others in sending bonds to Israel, which is a very frustrating and very difficult matter in Madison, Wisconsin. Nevertheless I have taken often the leadership and a great interest in it. Now I might say that I do not consider myself a Zionist. Of course, on the basis of the definition of the Zionist is to be...I just, ideologically. This has nothing to do with my feeling for Israel or what I do or do not for Israel. I have always contribute relatively, considerably through the Jewish appeal and all this, but I ideologically I say I do not believe in [sounds like: *shil li ha olat galut* ] in the negation of the Diaspora. I do believe with others that the Diaspora, living for Jews and this is not to justify my living under the Diaspora, that this is beneficial, tragic though it can be. But I do not believe that all Jews should actually live in one country. In the first place, in terms of simple history, the Jews have lived longer outside of Israel than actually in Israel. I do believe that the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, is so-to-speak a safety wall so that if Jews are attacked as they are in the Diaspora, but they are not all attacked or wiped out. Some go further and say this is God's will, their being scattered. It might be, I do not know. But I can see from the pragmatic point of view that this is the way it worked. Number three, I think that the tremendous creativity of Jews is in large measure a consequence of their living outside of a national

home because it seems to me the mission of the Jew always to build bridges or to creates syntheses. And I think in this Jews are strongest. Jews by virtue of the Jewish tradition on the one hand, thousands of years old, have whenever permitted, be it in Spain, be it in Babylon, be it in Alexandria, be it in Germany, have always synthesized the values of Judaism of thousands of years with those of a given country. I don't think there would be an Einstein. We don't have to speak of Einstein, I mean he is a unique phenomenon. But all the other creative achievements of Jews, be it in philosophy or in architecture, in economics, in literature, in whatever field, to me is a function of their peculiar ability to create syntheses between Judaism and the world around. And therefore I think that while Israel is often thought, not by me, nowadays, the center of all Jewish life, I rather see it, Israel and the Diaspora, as two ends of an ellipse and both are to me important. I don't want to go so far as to put it on an even financial basis, Israel just couldn't exist if it were not for the financial support of Jews in the Diaspora. This I will discount for the minute. But on a deeper level, it might be an act of providence, I do not know, that I am a Diaspora Jew. I believe in the *Hiuf Ha Golah*, the affirmation, the positive position which living in dispersion has. Somebody was saying it's only a temporary arrangements, all the dangers that we set our situation, well my answer is the Jewish *Galut*<sup>7</sup> which I do not deny, will end only when the universal *Galut* in which the world finds itself will come to an end. Because in Israel you can live in *galut* just as well, and you do live, as living in China or in Norway or in the United States. So I cannot see it, the Herzlian<sup>8</sup> way. Although I respect him greatly, he reacted toward the anti-Semitism of his time and he was a great visionary and without him Israel would not exist. I say I've a positive feeling, a very strong one, to Israel and have done in my very limited way whatever I can. But I cannot say that Israel is the sole salvation for the Jewish people.

JL: I know that you feel that religion is coextensive with life itself, but as a Reform Rabbi how large a part does religion play in your life in terms of synagogue attendance, rituals, et cetera?

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrew term for exile or captivity.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), father of modern Zionism.



MS: Well, yes, religion is coextensive of life, that's a reason why I cannot limit it to the synagogue and I can also, although a rabbi always likes to see in attendance, this is part of his professional aspiration and even prejudice, I have never said in my life that people who do not attend services that they are lesser Jews in any way. I know ever so many people who have lived their Jewishness, Jewish ideals of charity and justice and love and decency and concern for other people even though they do not show up or rarely in the synagogue. We are not Christians, we do not make that synagogue or church attendance now the measuring rod of the loyalty of Judaism. It is, unfortunate, that according to most recent statistics, which a minister just showed me last week, only 20 percent of the Jews attend services regularly. But I'd rather have 80 percent of them stay away and practice we will come to that or not practice Judaism than people running to services just like sheep because they feel it has to be done. It is true that about 45 percent of Protestants attend and 60 percent of the Catholics. But that is because of their particular tradition. Unfortunately I say they do not see that religion is life, that their life is to be religion. Now there's another question which you ask. And that is, as a reformed rabbi you said, to what a degree is service attendance and also the observance of *mitzvot* essential. I think it is essential and here I would have to develop -- but I will not do this -- my limited philosophy of what I think of services, worship, they are tremendous problems attached to this intellectual habit, psychological, sociological and what. Nevertheless I do believe that worship which in its original meaning of the English word worship, meant worship, is an affirmation on the part of man that life is worth living. Now I will not deny that this affirmation can be made elsewhere also, but I think there is an impoverishment of the individual and of the Jewish community to take worship lightly or say what difference does it make. The same applies also to observances of *mitvot* in the more practical sense, not in the social or ethical sense. They are also essential. However as a liberal I am of course eclectic. There's just no gettin' away from it so I do not subscribe to the [sounds like: *t'yak mitzvot*] and say this is now the yardstick by which a religious Jew should be measured. If Orthodox feel differently about it, I respect it absolutely but it is not for me. I just am not built this way because to me there are

gradations in *mitzvot*. I accept *mitzvot*, I like *mitzvot*, which are aesthetically appealing, that's the reason why I greatly dislike the breaking of the glass at weddings. If I had my way I would abolish that pagan custom. I have never, I must admit, in my life, my adult life. . . I've always taught children in Bar Mitzvah class for instance the *telfillin*. But only for a very limited period in my whole life did I personally lay *telfillin* because it has never somewhat appealed to me. But this is a totally, as I said, on a totally personal basis. Other things have a great appeal to me. I think a ritual should be beautiful, should be meaningful, should be expressive, should establish a sense of continuity for that purpose is also important. And there are many, many other functions and we Jews are rich, Jewish religion I mean, is rich in symbolism and that is very good. We need this language of symbolism. It is vital and is necessary and often it means more to people than even ideas because it's visible. But I would never go so far as to say that not observing or even violating a *mitzvot* is sin. I cannot see that for a Catholic eating meat on Friday could ever consider it a sin. Of course he gave that up recently probably for this reason. But from their point a view it used to be considered a sin. For a Jew, to eat not Kosher I respect it, I was brought up that way, I've not always lived up to it and I don't observe kosher except at home, my wife insists on it, but I could not say if a Jew eats, I don't know, cheese that is made by some cheese maker in the state of Wisconsin, in a pot which was not koshered or whatever, that is a sin. I, those ideas are alien, absolutely alien to me. I think I interpret sin as something not of a ritual nature but rather if I harm another human being, if I dehumanize him, if I don't expect and respect his humanity and in all that goes with it. If I destroy him through gossip, through malicious attitude and what not, that to me is sin of the first order and of the only order. But to drink Manischewitz or something of this sort, which is fine, that's part of our culture and people ought to have certain culture, ways of culture, by which they live and it gives their life some color and some beauty, et cetera, that is fine. But that to me does not belong into the realm of that type of *mitzvot*, the violation of which would be regarded a sin. So I confess publicly, [begins to recite the *Vidui*] [laughs], so I can

say the *Vidui* [confession] with conviction on Yom Kippur, but when it comes to these matters which the people, the masses, both of Christians and Jews, regard as sin I just, I am sorry, I cannot go along.

JL: Now let me ask you what type of religious education your children have had.

MS: Well, my children I cannot say that they've had the best religious education. They attended, faithfully, without being forced, the religious and the Hebrew school of Temple Beth El. They were Bar and Bat Mitzvah and confirmed and they, especially my son who is Jewishly very interested, very sensitive, motivated, even self-motivated without his father, he. . . of course he went, I forget to mention, to camp, Jewish camps, also and belonged to Jewish local youth organizations, which have never been too strong in Madison. They both, since they live in our home, see Jewish books. They read certain magazines, especially my son, Jewish magazines, I mean. And so it's a mild liberal education. They have naturally they haven't gone to a yeshiva nor a parochial school, et cetera, but neither did their father. I didn't have a profound Jewish education, I mean as a child. Just the normal run-of-the-mill.

JL: The following question has been answered in part throughout, but I'd like to ask you more specifically, how have your feelings about religion been affected by your Holocaust experience?

MS: My religion?

JL: Your feelings about religion.

MS: Well, absolutely, actually not. The only question with which I have been. . . I'm still a Jew, I still see the value of religion, however, the one question with which I have not been able to come to terms is the question of all Holocaust survivor, where was God. And in fact I spoke on that last night. Not too much, but a little bit. If, in fact let me first say, nobody can give the answer of course. However, a Christian fundamentalist has the answer. And the answer is, it's punishment, deserved punishment, for Jews. And a great many, even non-fundamentalists, feel this deep down in their system because they have been trained and conditioned in such a way that they feel that Jews did not accept Christ; in fact they murdered him. There is something wrong with them. The Jews have done something to the world by setting this example and by being stubbornly clinging to their position. So they have an

answer. There's also a Jewish answer, there's, I just read somewhere about it, an old saying in the prayer book for the Shalosh Regalim, for the three pilgrim festivals, [in Hebrew] "*Meep nay ha toteinu galeno may hatzenu.*" Because of our sins we were pushed out into exile. Jews themselves have, it's in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere, very, very frequently said, even in the Middle Ages at the height of persecution during the Crusades, and elsewhere, it is because of our sins. Now, this is for me the most difficult philosophical or theological problem I have. I cannot, nobody can really in his right mind, simply accept this easy mechanism and say that the Holocaust was a punishment for the Jews. For what? I have heard, even in the state of Wisconsin two Orthodox Rabbis tell their congregations that the Jews suffered through Holocaust, murder and persecution because they didn't observe *kashrut*<sup>9</sup>. But to me this is absolutely obscene, idiotic, sinful, to make such a ridiculous statement. I countered by saying, and they referred to the German Jews, where this was correct to a measure, how about the Polish Jews? They were the most traditional, orthodox if you will, Jews on the face of the earth in Europe, et cetera. They suffered too. So I cannot even engage in such ridiculous dialogue. This, nevertheless, nevertheless, we do not know. Those who have written on it like Elie Wiesel, Herkenheim, and others they have not, not to talk about Rubenstein, they have not been able, and nobody can come up, with an answer. Somebody has said that the answers to the most important problems of the Holocaust they will be answered maybe a generation or two or even three from now on. Because the bible also wasn't written down that it happened actually, but from the point of view of people who lived hundreds of years later. Now whether this will come or not I do not know. So I say, "*ignoro et ignorabimus*", -- "I do not know and I think we will not know."

JL: Could you tell me a bit about the kinds of things that you read, what do you like to read?

MS: Well, right in front of me is the *Catholic Herald Citizen*. That's the newspaper, the weekly of the Catholic diocese, which I do read, every week. It is perhaps not the best known newspaper under the sun. I read a number of Jewish magazines. I cannot always say that I read them thoroughly. Simply, I

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<sup>9</sup> Jewish dietary law.

do not have time. I read more now than I did when I was a practicing rabbi but I absolutely couldn't find time for it except here and there. Well, many of the well known Jewish magazines, and as far as the general newspapers are concerned, naturally I've always read a local one. For many years the *Capitol Times* and then when I became a Republican and more affluent [laughs], I started subscribing to the *State Journal* which I think is a paper of a higher quality and that's the reason why I read it. I think it's well edited. There were years when I subscribed to the *New York Times* and that I gave up because of frustration. I haven't got time to go through it and throw the money out with the Sunday edition, et cetera. But that I would read if I had time.

JL: What types of books?

MS: Well, that's a good question. I do read, I've always bought, quite a few books. Not that I even those that are around here I have not read by any means. But I like reference books of course, chiefly of Jewish, chiefly of philosophical nature in general. These are more or less my major interest. And, well, there's a great variety of books coming out on Jewish subjects, some more popular and others not so popular. But I feel the literature that is being produced now increasingly in this country, the Jewish literatures, is improving in quality. I do not read, simply because I haven't got time, just fiction. That I have never done much.

JL: And what language, what languages?

MS: Well, I read mostly English.

JL: Some German, too?

MS: Very little, very little. I get publications like this from Germany. I get many from the German government and so on. I recently read a joke book written by a Berlin humorist which is absolutely, incredibly good. But this was once in 40 years. So I don't read this stuff regularly.

**END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2**

TAPE 4, SIDE 1

JL: Now I'd like to ask you what is your reaction to books and articles on the Holocaust which you have read?

MS: Well, I must say whatever I have read on the Holocaust I never found anything that was either factual nor was it presented in an unpleasant way. I remember one book which was poorly printed, but nevertheless I think the major works by Jews as well as non-Jews, they were most acceptable.

JL: Now what was your reaction to the Holocaust TV series?

MS: Very positive. Unlike others who said, not others, not too many in fact. . . Wiesel himself, you know, objected strenuously and from his point of view I can see this, he says it's obscene even to try to put it on the screen and put it in a sentence and the story and all this. I understand what he has in mind. Meaning, that no picture, no words, can recapture the reality correct. I look at it from the more educated point of view. I think it was a tremendous education for the average Jew and non-Jew, especially the non-Jew, but the Jew too that he saw on the screen and millions saw it, I forgotten the number, the estimate. They came face to face in their living room with this horrible reality and they would never had that experience because people simply don't read books on the Holocaust. Or the books that they read are maybe just horror stories, but the totality of the picture, of the situation, I think was most adequately portrayed with all the natural limitation of the subject, but nothing else has ever been done. And so I think it was a great thing.

JL: Did you watch all of it?

MS: Yes.

JL: So we did think about the influence of the program before, but let me ask you again. Did you find that people became more interested in your personal experience after?

MS: Also, as a result of it I got many more invitation again for sometime the thing had become dormant.

JL: Now I'd like to switch a bit to talking about Wisconsin. Where have you traveled in Wisconsin?

MS: Well, the question should be where have I not traveled in Wisconsin. I think I have made, that is like a comedian with a touring cast, a tremendous number of cities. I think all of the cities in Wisconsin, including towns, towns such as Darlington, where I'm going to be next week again; New Glarus—I don't even know—Lake Mills. I don't want to enumerate anyone. Waterloo, Watertown, and all the rest. And my main contacts were churches and ministers who knew me and invited me or civic clubs, et cetera. And that still goes on. I could be out of town everyday. This is not in any way necessarily related to the Holocaust nor has it anything to do with my person either, it is simply because program chairpersons have to fill a program every Thursday noon or every Tuesday evening, or once a month at least, and so there is a program available at no cost and who would not avail themselves of such an offer. So, that's the way I've always worked and it still continues to a degree.

JL: In your travels, besides the lecturing you had to do, did you ever have a chance to look about you and notice...?

MS: Look about what?

JL: Look about in a sense noticing the physical aspects and...?

MS: Oh yes, yes. I'm interested in wherever I go. If I have time I'm interested in looking up, I'm interested in the ethnic composition of the community and the religious composition. I'm interested in their economic situation, what do they make their living from and what cultural activities exist in a given community, what is of interest to people. That is of interest to me too. So I'm not just a visitor who comes in for a half an hour and then he leaves again and doesn't give a hoot. I mean, time permitting naturally, yeah.

JL: What parts of the state have you liked most?

MS: Liked most? I like most German and Scandinavian parts of the state. I like Scandinavian people, although I hate to generalize and present a stereotype. They are hardworking, they are for the most part rather decent, for the most part, they have a certain humane streak as far as can see, they make the best coffee available and they are Lutherans but they are mild, LCA and ALC Lutherans. They are

not fanatics, et cetera. I have always. . . but again I don't want to make such a statement and say this at the exclusion of the average Catholic churches. This wouldn't, certainly wouldn't, be fair. I've always with our differences been able to establish a rather pleasant often jovial relation to Americans of German decent and especially when I talk a little German and crack a few jokes and sing a few German songs, then we are one heart and soul [laughs]. And often I pull these little tricks [laughs] to make them feel at ease. Of course, some have never seen a rabbi in the flesh.

JL: Physically speaking what parts have you liked the most?

MS: Of Wisconsin, I like best Green County, which is the Swiss part and I completely neglected to mention the Swiss settlements here who are very, very, the settlements, topography, the work, the type of people, very, very congenial individuals. And I have a feeling that they settled in New Glarus and Monicello and Monroe simply because the topography reminded the early settlers of their own, their homeland. And they are hardworking, industrious people and for the most part rather pleasant.

JL: How much does Wisconsin remind you of your home in Europe?

MS: Of my home? Well, not very much really. The circumstances under which we lived at home were, compared to here, primitive. The type of crops we raised at home, we had a farm, were very different from here. We raised rye and potatoes and wheat and oats, et cetera and corn, which was called *mais* or maize, is alone, there. So when I see a herd of cows something in me clicks [laughs]. Sheep I see rarely around here, of which we had many. But, by and large, there is little that really reminds me of my own home.

JL: Would you consider yourself to be a Midwesterner?

MS: Yes, I like the Midwest, yes. I wouldn't like to live in the East at all. But this is my own, personal predilection, it is maybe just a rationale because I was catapulted here into the middle east but I like many, many features of this type of life here in the middle east. I have no, I must admit, experience of the West Coast or the South. I've never been in either places.

JL: What feature of the Midwest do you like best?



MS: I liked first the landscape, I like the climate, I don't mind the winter. I like a certain middle-of-the-road stability or whatever it is. People are not, I hate to generalize in these terms, but they are for the most part not four-flushers, which are found in the big cities. They are more down to earth and honest and their whole mode of living and their philosophy is a little bit more germane to my own.

JL: You did say that you like the Midwest better than the east. But Jewishly speaking, how much happier do you think you would have been living in an area with a greater Jewish population?

MS: I wouldn't. It is interesting, ever so often people come to Madison from the east for whatever work they do in Madison to live here and they sort of bemoan the fact that there is no Jewish neighborhood. Or they ask me if they are totally new, where is there a Jewish neighborhood? And then I tell them that there is none. First they don't believe it. In the second place, after they convince themselves that there is none, there's none today, the Greenbush was at one time, that's past history, then they are a little unhappy about it. They feel isolated or insulated and I always tell them, I don't feel this way at all. I do not need to maintain my Jewishness, whatever that is, a Jewish environment, from childhood on. Maybe that goes back to that. I have never lived among Jews. The majority of the friends I had were always non-Jewish, probably also due to the fact that there weren't any Jews around. Relatively few. And I just don't miss this at all. Whoever is my neighbor or who lives on my street, he can be anything under the sun. Where I live there are quite a few Chinese, they happen to be professors, there are some blacks who also belong more to the group of intellectuals, and there's the general mixture of people I don't . . . I'm not a *Rassenforscher* so I don't try to find out where their ancestors necessarily came from. But sometimes it comes out in their names and church affiliation and all this sort of thing. I could live in a totally Catholic neighborhood and wouldn't mind this at all. It makes just no difference to me because I think there are two types, two ways, in which Judaism for Jews sort of asserts, or affirms, itself. Some are Jews by virtue of the environment in which they live and others are Jews by virtue of their own individual conviction. And my Judaism is not dependent on the environment, on the milieu. It is in me and I know only too well that Jews who can live in Brooklyn,

New York I mean, not Wisconsin, in Brooklyn they're totally un-Jewish, totally un-Jewish. As a matter of fact, according to statistics, if they are reliable, the least Jewish affiliation with Jewish organization including the synagogue and the rest is found in the most densely populated areas of the country. So what, I mean what influence does it have? But it makes some people feel good and secure that they live with people of their own background, although they all eat *treif*<sup>10</sup>. I remember the joke where in Brooklyn from the tenth floor a mother at 3:30 is yelling down to the kids, "Isaac, come up and have your ham sandwich, it's time to go to cheder." This type of Judaism I don't need that or miss it.

[laughs]

JL: How satisfied are you with the cultural climate of Madison? Does it offer you more or less than what you had in New York?

MS: Well, it is different but I'm very satisfied and in a sense it offers me more even than it offered me in Europe because it is an easy access. In Madison is more condensed and maybe, I don't know, I have a little more time than I ever had in Europe. Which Europe I don't mean the days when I was a student, but later on. So I am very, very much satisfied with the cultural climate in Madison. I do agree with all those who praise Madison that it is indeed an outstanding community and I thank my lucky stars without my effort on my own, I was just catapulted into this environment.

JL: We did talk about the ethnic pluralism in your neighborhood and I'd like to ask you how you feel about living in Wisconsin with its large percentage of ethnic Germans?

MS: Doesn't disturb me either. Really not. I am neither afraid of them. In fact those I meet, how many do I meet, I get along fabulously with them. And the moment they hear by my accent or by my declaration that I have a background going back to Germany we have already a platform on which to meet. I have not had any adverse, I mean affect, any friction, any tension because of it. Naturally I don't go around and curse [laughs] [tape stopped for interruption]

JL: You were talking about the ethnic Germans in Wisconsin.

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<sup>10</sup> Food not in accord with Jewish dietary laws.

MS: Well, as I said, I have not, at least those I met, and most I have never met, I cannot say that we have not pacific, pleasant relation. In this connection I might mention something else. A number of months ago I got a telephone call from Milwaukee and someone answers or wants to talk to me, and the moment he mentioned his name, which was quite unusual, I break out in a shout and says, "How in the world do you come to America?" Who was he? He was one of the children of our neighbor in this little village I was born and then he, I asked him, "how do you know I am in Madison?" "Well, I saw your name in a Milwaukee paper and I know exactly who you are so I called you and do you want to get together? Now I must tell ya', you know during the war, I was in the army" and of course I don't know what he meant by the army. I had a feeling there was something coming but I don't want to hurt his feelings or not bore for the truth, and so I said, so he told me after the war he came to this country, he became a baker, I remember him and I told him, gave him the name of his grandfather, his grandmother, his father, his mother, his sister Ina, and all the other *kleiner bruder mit der schuodder-nose* [literally, "little snot-nosed brothers"], which I remember, whom I remember when we were kids, et cetera, real neighbors. And we played together and this together. It is next to unbelievable. It's not the first experience, I have other experiences of this kind with former Germans, et cetera. So he's a baker, works for Heinemann in Milwaukee and of course we have to get together. And I said, I will. I frankly haven't done it yet, but I'm going to do it. I just didn't have the occasion. I wouldn't want to make a special trip and tire myself out. But when I happen to be in Milwaukee I will give him a ring, maybe some Sunday and get together with him and have a little confrontation after. So, honest to goodness I must say, well, we were children.

JL: Confrontation?

MS: A meeting. I don't mean a confrontation. No, no I meant a friendly, I'm not confronting anyone. And I don't hold the sins of his father against him, and his father was too old anyway. But he is a little younger than I am. I mean he is no youngster, the guy. So [laughs], strange things happen in this

world. Who knows how it's going to be in the next one. Might be more *schrecklich* [terrible] and surprising. Yeah it could be, could be, I'm not sure.

JL: What kind of effort have you made to become acquainted with Wisconsin history?

MS: Well, in a limited way, but I have. When I wrote, or compiled, some material for the history of Madison Jews, naturally I had to expose myself also to the history of Madison in general. Some of the best almost the only books are written by Thwaites, and in connection also with the history, in a superficial way I will admit, of Wisconsin and its population. I have never consistently kept this up of course, it's not a major interest of mine but as some background I'm surely interested, I want to know who my neighbors are.

JL: Now I'm going to ask you to be immodest.

MS: Oh yes.

JL: Yes.

MS: I don't have with that at all.

JL: What contribution do you feel you've made to Wisconsin?

MS: Well, since I am not great enough to afford humility [laughs] I will answer your question. I do believe, others tell me this, but I think even if I am modest or not, immodest, I do believe—did you say to Wisconsin?

JL: Yes. And in Madison.

MS: Alright. Yeah. Madison more than in Wisconsin in general, I have been engaged in sort of, consciously or unconsciously or by force of circumstances, by presenting to the non-Jewish community a picture of the Jew and of Judaism the way I see it. And trying, again consciously or unconsciously, demythologizing as it were, their tremendously deep-seated misconception of Judaism, be it of the fallacies, be it of the attitude towards Jesus, be it to concepts Jews teach an eye for an eye, and all this that goes with it. And after the war there was a good opportunity, in part enhanced by the Vatican Council a little bit when the Catholic Church developed a greater openness, so I didn't do it myself,

there has to be a fertile soil on which to do. There was an interest after the war about Germany, about the Holocaust, and there's a continuing interest on Jews. What are Jews, what do Jews believe, and all these. And I have been engaged a great deal, more...sometimes my parishioners who don't need me so badly but they resented this also, they said I am more an apostle to the gentiles than to the Jews. The truth of the matter is that I would always have loved to be an apostle to the Jews too, but they don't need my ministrations and my teaching so much and this has always been the source of distress to me, to realize how limited, how really limited, even in this congregation which is academically rather high, but their interest in Jewish learning is tremendously limited. Whether it comes to the Bible or anything of the sort. So, therefore, not therefore, but on the other hand, the interest on the part of non-Jews is considerable. And even today, even today, every week I go to this group and that group and what not in Madison and I said next Monday I just think of Darlington and other places. I have to go Neenah, I'm going to be next week also and they want to hear about the Bible, the Jewish view on the Bible and that is a women's club. So there is a considerable interest in Judaism and I think it is our responsibility as Jews and especially rabbis, to do this. And since I have to say my colleagues, especially those in Milwaukee, maybe they are too busy or for whatever reason they do very little of this and they are of course living in a larger Jewish environment so I can understand that too. Here it's wide open, I think in Madison, and quite exposed. I don't mind this at all so naturally I'm called upon, but I think others should do more, especially in a city such as Milwaukee.

**END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1**

TAPE 4, SIDE 2

JL: How great an obligation have you felt towards Wisconsin for giving you an opportunity to start a new life?

MS: Well, I think that's a very good question. Yes, I do have a deep sense of gratitude to America, to Wisconsin, and to Madison because they have done for me more than I can ever repay. They have given me a new chance to rebuild my life and for this I shall always be grateful and the little I have done for the community is, not consciously but in a sense, a way of repaying, or better, paying my civic rent.

JL: Have your children remained in Wisconsin?

MS: Remained in Wisconsin? Well, my daughter, no, my daughter's in Chicago, my son is in Madison, but this is not consciously a matter of ideology [laughs] but of practicality.

JL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi Party planned to march in Milwaukee?

MS: Nothing whatsoever. It never frightened me. I have given talks to Jews on this matter. It is natural for us to overreact, but fortunately, fortunately, the number of these kooks has been very small. I have been encouraged by the reaction I have seen and even heard from pulpits, from Christian ministers, about this, in Madison only and somewhat out of town. I've always felt and many people just don't agree with this, that the quarantine treatment is the best treatment for them. By quarantine treatment we mean it is like naughty little children, don't pay too much attention and that's all they want. And these fellows wanted publicity and we gave them publicity and they wanted to be, and the moment this whole business stopped, they sort of crawled back in their hole. So I have given several talks on that matter, subject. But it. . . not that I like it, but these things are inevitable. All kinds of expression come to the fore. Some I like, some I don't like et cetera. It's inevitable; they always, not everybody conforms to my hopes and wishes. There are people who are maladjusted and want to appear as big shots and that's one way of become a big shot and especially if you put them on TV and interview them, then they become real big shots.

JL: Wisconsin has a tradition as a progressive state. Have you found this to be true?

MS: Well, yes and no. I don't think one can. It is true, of course, it had the Progressive Party and has a more progressive political climate than other states in the Union. But, and in many progressive social programs were initiated even in Madison. Nevertheless it was also true, again, that you find the opposite here. You find strong, conservative pockets, political. . . [stopped tape] I think Wisconsin has a very good liberal climate, better than many other states but this doesn't mean that everyone naturally has liberal or progressive social views. People often determine their attitudes on the basis of the economic situation. Give a person something to conserve and he becomes a conservative, including myself.

JL: Now how satisfactory do you find the American system of government to be?

MS: Well, this of course can be answered only in the terms of comparison, as compared to the European situation, the German presently and past. This is simply closer to the Messianic Age than anything we have ever seen on the face of the earth—yet, and we should work and hope that this system will persist and improve.

JL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society, like in politics and arts?

MS: Well I think Jews have, as they have in other free countries, made a very decisive contribution to American culture. Naturally this comes relatively easy to Jews. They have a long intellectual history, a wide-open interest in the improvement of society, which is the messianic component in us, and also perhaps the deep-down hope, the opposite is fear, that America is really the last chance, and last almost bastion of freedom for the Jewish people. So therefore they are perhaps a tiny bit more active in progressive movements hoping that their own fate will depend on an open society, liberal attitudes, social concerns, more than perhaps others. I believe this are concerned about them because history has proven this indeed. So the many factors have, but I think the most important is our long intellectual tradition from way, way back. Drives Jews into those fields where they become most creative, from writers to comedians.

JL: What would you say is the most important issue facing America today?

MS: Facing America? Well, I have the wisdom to make very clear-cut statement today. I think the one major problem before us is America is to lose its position as the world's number one superpower. That's a negative way of putting it. If I put it positively I would say that America has to realize that it will have to share positions of leadership with other countries, and I'm afraid there is no way out from this. To withdraw from a favorite position is always very, very traumatic and I think we are going through this trauma right now. I'm not justifying the evil of terrorism or the oil piracy and all this, but that's part, that's only part of the problem. I think that Elie Wiesel has expressed it very beautifully when he said, America is becoming existentially ever more Jewish and that is absolute true. More vulnerable, more alone, more forsaken by it's friends, more dependent than ever, and there are evil forces which like to look and work for America's final solution and make the world *amerika-rein* [free of America] and I think there is something to it. And this has to be very, very seriously considered by the government and all its direction. It's a tremendously complicated, tremendously complicated matter because so many facets are woven into one: economic and social and power-wise and with all these many new nations coming to the fore. We have never had to deal with this multitude of varying concerns. Just look at the very serious matter of Arabian oil and America's so far favorable attitude toward tiny Israel. One is a moral problem, the other is a stark economic problem. So how in the world, how do you reconcile these things? Nobody can and nobody. . . so it's always a day-to-day relationship and I do not. . . I mean not relationship, day-to-day decision to be made. Long-range decisions almost are impossible. The President says one day before he is elected he will never go into an armament program and there he is. And I don't blame him for it. He's driven by the forces over which he has no control.

JL: To what extent do you believe there's anti-Semitism in America?

MS: In America, well there is anti-Semitism in America as it is elsewhere. I would be surprised, a country probably wouldn't be normal if there were not anti-Semitism because anti-Semitism is basically the



animus, even if I put it mildly, of the pagan in man against the moral and social values which Judaism as brought about. There is a rejection of these things. Hitler said the Jews invented conscience and I think he's absolutely correct. I mean not each and every Jew, but the Jewish people through their tradition. So what they really resent about the Jew is the Jewish ethos. Or you can put it also and someone put it differently. He said what the people who are anti-Semitic resent is that the Jews imposed Christ upon them. It curbed, you know, the violence of the original pagan and barbarian in men and now they have to submit, you know, to some authority figure and his demands. And they don't want that. And therefore a national socialism was the most flagrant outbreak of a recrudescence of paganism in the modern world. It's paganism and we don't have to go into all the details about it, but that is what it essentially was. And this type of paganism always expresses itself in sentiments against Jews. Not against the individual Jew who is just like everybody else, but against the Jew as a theological concept and the Jew as a mythical figure. And since this is a type of thinking, mythological, we will never, never free the world of anti-Semitism or of any other anti, but especially of anti-Semitism. It is too deeply embedded in the human psyche and in a sense it has nothing to do even with the Jews. I could argue that point, too. But the Jew are the visible embodiment and of what people reject. Some say the scapegoat. A scapegoat is even not sufficient for that. So anti-Semitism will be here. Now the Jews have some levity stated that a mild anti-Semitism is good for the Jews, you know, it keeps us alert and conscious of what we are. But I can get along without, could get along very well without mild, medium, rare [laughs] or gross anti-Semitism.

JL: Let me ask you how secure do you feel in America?

MS: I feel in America not a sense of absolute security. Such a thing no Jew can ever, such a Jew can never feel absolutely secure because that would be for us the Messianic Age, with the equilibrium of Shalom, and that isn't there. America is for us, I see the whole world as a *golus* [or *galut*, place of exile] and there are variations, varieties, of *golus* and America is the best of all the *golus*. There were *golus* in Hebrew originally. *Galut* means to be naked, to be helpless, you know. So we are helpless. If,

for whatever reason, in America the majority should make a decision. I don't think it's going to be, but should the way the Germans did the final solution of the Jewish problem. We would be as helpless in America with our six million American Jews as we were in German with 520,000. Makes no difference. We would be helpless. But the situation, I don't, it's a long, long dissertation, which I could give and would like to give, on the subject. I don't think that these fears, which every Jew has, are justified. I can only say, first I will say we have no right to say never. That right is gone. We just cannot say it ever in life and nobody can. But Jews particularly not. And then after I've said this I must add America is not Germany. The conditions of the time, but also the national German character plus the history is utterly different from the character of the American people and the national history of America. Democracy an experience Germany has never had. And now comes something else. Namely, in America Jews have, as Jews, some, however limited, political clout. They can speak out for instance for Israel. They can express themselves and be leaders in this country, always sensitive to the reaction of people because they have to be elected. In Germany we had absolutely no political clout whatsoever because nobody depended upon the Jews or the Free Masons or on this or that. It was an autocratic government. They did what they want to do anyway, irrespect of what anybody said. Plus the people were not in the habit of speaking out on political and social issues. They took it, and the Jews had to take it too. If the Jews had been the only one to speak out they would have been persecuted even longer and before, as troublemakers. As a matter of fact, Treitschke<sup>11</sup>, the American [sic] historian, called the Jews, that's a very felicitous phrase, from their point of view it's correct. An "*ein Element der Dekomposition*," an element of decomposition. In other words, the Jewish mentality, the Jewish social outlook, constituted such a force which was to decompose, change, poison, uproot, undermine, Germany, the German thinking. An element of decomposition. That is a . . . from their point of view they were correct. So the more Jews were vocal as individuals, there was no political

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<sup>11</sup> Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), nationalist and anti-Semitic German historian; this expression was actually coined by Christian Mommsen (1817-1903), Professor of Ancient History at the University of Berlin, in reply to Treitschke's anti-Semitic statements.

Jewish community, but there were a few in later years, individuals. They were felt and they spoke out because they were outsiders. The outsider speaks out always, here too. But there were no other outsiders but a few Jews, like Toller, like Rosa Luxemburg, like Landauer, like Roddick and a few others. And the Jews were up in arms. I too when these guys came forward and opened their *Maul*, their big mouth, and spoke out, every Jew trembled because they create trouble for us. And they did, and they did. And they didn't accomplish anything, nothing. They were these pseudo-messiah, these Jewish pseudo-messiah. They wanted to change the world overnight and their intent was not a bad one really, but there was no climate for it. It was just impossible, it was dangerous and they helped create, aggravate, anti-Semitic feelings. There's just no question about it. But on the other hand you cannot expect people just to be quiescent either. But in Germany everybody was quiet. In this country I think the situation, the political situation, is more favorable because Jews, through their organization, American Congress, American Jewish Committee and whatnot, they can speak out of the Zionist organization and tell Mr. Carter a little bit here a little bit there. Now this did not exist in Germany at all, neither for Jews nor for others. Therefore, I think even from the pragmatic political point of view the situation is a little securer, a little healthier but there is no total health and there's no total security. *Punkt* [full stop].

JL: In this climate, do you foresee a situation arising in which you might again be threatened?

MS: I can never say never. It could be, it could be. If the frustrations, as they exist today, internationally leadership, Tehran, hostages, communist invasion, expansion, oil shortage, inflation. If all these social ills and political ills rise, I am certain that there will be forces in America wherever they are who will use this to unburden themselves, point their finger at a scapegoat and do this. Whether they can get away with this and whether this will have any political consequence the way it had in Germany that I will doubt. But I am almost certain, I hope it won't come true, that those forces they will always be there. Conservatives and even liberals who are not necessarily our friends, in years past I always thought they were our friends, this is not always so. But all kinds of evil elements that exist and that

look for a shortcut. So it's easy to say it's Carter, it's the Jews, it's this or that. So they no longer can say it's the Catholics, they have become too influential and I don't think they will dare to say it's the Negroes because they fear the Negroes, nobody fears the Jews. So the Jews are an easy target, even here, even here. And all our goodwill and all our interfaith and all this will maybe mollify the situation to a degree but will not resolve it. That I cannot see. This is the *golus* fear of which I fear too, yes.

JL: What are your feelings about Germany and present day Germans in Germany?

MS: Well, I must say on the basis of my relatively limited knowledge, the Germans adopted their first democratic constitution in 1949, it's a different world than when they had their first feeble attempts at democracy in 1848 and in 1919, these two attempts were aborted. There is a new climate because of the proximity, I mean ideological proximity, to the United States, friendship, and also mutual assistance and all the rest, I think there is in politics, in education, from what I read and hear and heard from some personally, there is a different climate which I believe we have to support because it's very, very important that Germany recuperates, that's the only hope from the inside. And nobody can really change the Germans or anyone for that matter from the outside. But this seems to be in the making. This doesn't mean that there are not flare ups of Nazi feelings here and there, but one cannot be too scared about, the courts and the government is watching these aberrations or these flare-ups, that do exist, surely. So you will never see, I mean a totally pure, morally pure, world. There is no such thing, it doesn't exist.

JL: Do you have the feeling of your children's reactions to Germany, how they feel about Germany?

MS: Well, I have never really discussed this matter with my children. Normally I wouldn't want to put any hatred into my children, even not to Germany, the present Germany I mean, nor would I want to have my children live by this fear that being a Jew is always a dangerous matter. That might reject it because of it. With our emphasis on America, on happiness, you know, and the great and good life, you know, who wants to be bothered by troublesome ideas? And I don't think it is. . . it wouldn't help, it wouldn't do anything good. I couldn't even say that I prepare my children for a catastrophe. If a

catastrophe comes, it comes like it did in Germany, were they prepared are we not prepared, there's nothing if he can do anything about it there it is. I think a Jew just should have a knowledge and appreciation of Jewish history and also try to understand its essence plus its precariousness. At the same time we have to live with ambiguity and the sense of precariousness. That's the way life is. Every individual has to live with this because I might be dead tomorrow. I hate to scare you, but [laughs] Ja, ja.

JL: What types of restitution from Germany have you received?

MS: Well, I got five marks paid for every day, marks, in the concentration camp, that is all. And I get a little restitution now.

JL: How do you feel about accepting it?

MS: I have never had any qualms about accepting it. I must say however to me it is a miracle, an absolute miracle that Germany or any country would even consider ever paying restitution to Israel and to individual citizens. This has never happened before in history. I think it all goes back to the immediate reaction on the part of Adenauer, I understand, who was a decent fellow. And I also am informed that Adenauer's friendship with Baeck had something to do with this because why should this ever, I mean why should it be done and why should they keep it up? I have always said that I think the time will come when they will start it. And now I don't know, I haven't discussed this with them or with anyone. I could conceive that a newer generations, you know, will someday say enough is enough and why should we forever and ever have even the financial burdens upon us and especially should the economy, the German economy, which has fortunately been very, very sound, should it deteriorate as an economy can, I am certain that there will be voices clamoring for the abolition of any kind of reparation. I do not know, I do not know. It is part of the German constitution so it cannot be easily, readily changed. But in this world what is constitution, what are laws, things can be changed. The climate is different. I say it is a total miracle, absolute since there is no precedent of this kind anywhere in history. Now I do not say that they shouldn't pay it because whatever is paid in money

certainly cannot undo the horrible, horrible, horrible harm done to human beings, for which there is no reparation possible to begin with so I don't want to overrate the importance. But I still feel it is rather --

**END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2**

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

JL: When we finished the last tape, we were talking about Germany and restitution from Germany. I'd like to go on further with Germany. You mentioned that you have returned to Germany. When was that?

MS: I returned in December 1970 and in June 1979. I returned the invitation of the mayor and the senate of the city of Berlin.

JL: What kind of things were done for you?

MS: The first time, the group of which I was part was rather small. I would say not more than ten individuals who at one time were actively associated with the Jewish community in Berlin either as rabbis or chiefly as administrators of the congregation. The occasion was twofold—1970 was the 25th anniversary of the end of the Hitler Reich and at the same time the 25th anniversary also of the reconstruction of the Jewish community. So both these events were somehow commemorated in speeches, in certain festive acts, et cetera. And the mayor of the city was always the chairman for the most part of these meetings which were very instructive, very informative and in many ways very moving. The second trip, however, was essentially different. For that purpose individuals were invited who were over 70 years old I believe. Men and women who had never returned before and yet who had no official connection with the city or the Jewish community, only as a goodwill gesture. There were 700 people invited from the United States, from Canada, from England, from South Africa, from South America and from Israel. Was a good medley of people. I met many people whom I hadn't seen in all these years and the purpose also was again creating goodwill and a little bit moral restitution so to speak and they did this. Outstanding were indeed the many addresses that were given by high government officials and I must say, and I hope I can discern the difference between shallowness or superficiality and genuineness and sincerity. They were given brilliantly and with a real sense of wanting to stretch up our hands again to those who had lost their homes. In addition to all this there were tours through the city. There were invitations to an opera and to another art festival I remember

of one kind or another. And there were time, of course there was free time left for people to look around in the city on their own and perhaps meet with former friends.

JL: Who paid for this?

MS: The German government paid for most of it. They paid for the trip, they paid for the trip, for the fare. They had a group fare it was some, well, they paid the fare from New York, not from here or anywhere else to for Americans. For the others, I do not know. And they paid for the hotel room. That I remember. You had to pay some additional amounts and because of the German inflation and, or better, not the German inflation, the American inflation, and the high German currency, the expenses in Berlin are very, very considerable by American standards. But that's totally beside the point, okay.

JL: Did anyone in your family accompany you?

MS: Yeah, my wife went along.

JL: Your children, not?

MS: No.

JL: By the way, what are your children doing?

MS: My daughter is in Chicago, she works in the office of a law firm, and my son is still in Madison trying to finish another year-and-a-half I guess of work in law school and in the accounting department or whatever that is.

JL: You have two lawyers.

MS: Yeah, I don't like that. But anyway, that's the way it is.

JL: May I ask why you don't like that?

MS: No, I'm not going to. . . I don't like the profession [laughs], no, really not. I don't like it.

JL: By the way, to get back to Germany, what were your feelings when you were there?

MS: [pause in tape?] The feelings were very, very different. The first time I battled with myself for sometime that I should accept the invitation. Finally I rationalized perhaps by saying, well if they come forward maybe we shouldn't sit back and be angry and bitter all the time. But I was. And it took me some time



to get cured of this feeling and of course what I saw helped, but yet at the same time I cannot forget the past. Because of Berlin I know, it's a large city, almost every corner and every street as well as I know those in Madison. The second time I have no compunction whatsoever. I changed entirely already and some of these early thoughts didn't even flash through my mind.

JL: Why do you think that was?

MS: Well, I think in the first place the lapse of time, which had to a degree if I may say so, it's not too well-put, healed wounds. Wounds of those kind cannot be healed. But the pathos of distance to the events absolutely change and shape your ideas and thoughts and the second time I thought more in terms of what ought to be done. And the mere thought of the future didn't preoccupy me totally.

JL: Have you ever been to Israel?

MS: Yes, I've been in Israel twice.

JL: When were you there?

MS: I was in Israel, oh, I can't remember in the sixties and in the seventies I was there. Once, the second time I was there, to attend also the annual meeting of the conference of American rabbis. I'm not much of an attender of those conferences and attended very few, but I felt since it happened to be held in Israel I should give myself a push to go.

JL: Are you planning to attend the 1981 conference of survivors?

MS: I've never heard of it yet. Where is that going to be held?

JL: In Israel.

MS: Really? The 1980 conference?

JL: Nineteen eight-one.

MS: This coming year? What do they want to do? What is the purpose of it?

JL: Just reuniting people and have them reminisce their experiences.

MS: So. Well my dear, this is a new idea. I think I could be interested, but first of all I have to pay my doctor bills and to see that things are favorable medically speaking. I don't make any promises or plans at the moment, but I am receptive.

JL: Do you think it's easier for you to talk about your experiences now than it might have been five years ago?

MS: I would say perhaps but I don't think five years ago would have made so much of a difference.

JL: Oh then perhaps a bit longer.

MS: Yes, I think yes it did, yes, yes. I think it would have made a difference then.

JL: In what way?

MS: Well, as I indicated, the past recedes and the past doesn't hit us with the same force the way it does when it's closer to us. It's comparable to the experience of the loss of a loved one. It's the same thing.

JL: This is a subject we have talked about somewhat already, but how do you feel about the increasing awareness in America concerning the Holocaust?

MS: I wish there was more of an awareness of the holocaust and other historic events relating to it, not just because it concerns Jews. But I'm afraid we cannot expect it. We cannot expect it, number one, very few people, relatively few people, ever place themselves and certainly not for a long time, in the shoes of the others. This continuing empathy is I think humanly impossible. Secondly, and more importantly I think, in the meantime so many other crucial, urgent, devastating new experience have moved on the scene of history which so totally preoccupy nowadays the American mind, what is going on in Middle East, Iran, all these other many, many problems we have but certainly they eclipse the Holocaust totally and I don't think we can expect more. We should perhaps expect that it is placed into the teachings of high school history or sociology or social psychology, et cetera, and I understand it is. When I was in Cleveland last week I met two ladies who told me that they do teach the Holocaust in high schools.

JL: [inaudible]. Yeah.

MS: So.

JL: How do you feel about the latest Nazi trial?

MS: Against this French guy?

JL: Yeah.

MS: Well, had it not been for Mrs., whatever his name was?

JL: Klarsfeld?

MS: Yeah, Inge, wasn't it?

JL: Beate.

MS: Oh, Beate Klarsfeld and her husband, this Mr. Lischka, would not have come to trial. She is certainly a courageous lady. Well, I feel that these gentlemen should be brought to justice and they cannot certainly even after these many years shouldn't get away with murder. And this murder means murder in the literal sense. So fortunately by the end of last year the statute of limitations was extended, so that is legally possible now.

JL: I have some final overall questions, but before I go into those I'd like to go back a bit to several questions about earlier tapes. You mentioned three ministers in Madison who are as interested in the Holocaust as any Jew ideally could be. Who are they?

MS: Should I name them?

JL: Yeah.

MS: Well, one is the Reverend Stewart Kauffman of Christ Presbyterian Church, the second one is Reverend Lee Morehead of the United Methodist Church and the third one is the old stalwart Reverend Alfred Swan, Reverend Emeritus of the First Congregational Church.

JL: Okay, now I'm just going to jump around a bit. I would like to probe a bit more about the reception that the DPs received. You mentioned that the Madison community was generally friendlier to those who came after the war, many of the DPs had the same language and customs after of course the Holocaust and WWII had happened and people were showing that basically humane response to help

those people who were still living. I wanted to probe a bit further into the reception of the prewar arrivals compared to the reception of the DPs in terms of the human reaction.

MS: On the part of?

JL: Of the community.

MS: The community. Well, what can I add to what I have said? In the first place their number was small, really, so one should logically even have accepted, expected, that a community is willing to absorb a smaller number more readily. But I suppose they were not trained really in this type of experience and no experience and moreover I'm afraid that a Jewish refugee makes another native Jew also to a refugee in the sense. Jews were not, when the first boat load of some 430 Jewish refugees arrived from Europe in South Africa, there was a hullabaloo among South African Jew about these fellows who came to their native land. This only indicates the Jewish insecurity, or if you will, golus mentality, that since we deep down in our hearts feel we are not totally at home so we don't even have a right to bring somebody else into a home which is not our own. So we become unsettled by the unsettledness of others. And I psychologically I understand it. Humanely, that's a different story, or morally.

JL: I would like to probe further the side of the story told by the DPs themselves. We discussed the reaction of the community to the DPs and in taping several people we have found that many of them were very distressed with the reception. Could you talk about that side of the resettlement in terms of the way that the DPs themselves perceived of them? There must be a reason for the discontent.

MS: Well, the discontent naturally grows chiefly out of the fact that the DP who comes here is no child or no teenager and no youngster. He is usually, was usually, a person who had already established his family and not only his family, his career, his profession, his occupation, whatever it was. Then suddenly he finds himself a pauper. He finds himself totally dependent on the goodwill, on the dollars, on the good graces, the smiles, of others. That humiliates any human being because human beings just don't like to say really thank you, superficially yes. But *al tatz-richeinu, lidei matnat basar*

*vadam*, what the ancient Jewish prayer, the *Birkat Hamazon*<sup>12</sup> says, that is utterly true and applies here and always in human life. So, and especially if someone, let's say who was somewhat accomplished already in his life and someone who was also perhaps a little bit more educated than a native, all of a sudden in poor English and in cussing tones and in a rejecting voice says to him this or that. That hurts. So, that is, every immigrant will have to put up with this. An immigrant has to do those things which a native doesn't want to do, initially, yeah. So he gets the, not the best, but the very worst jobs. I could tell you jobs people had in Chicago when I came, whom I knew. Unbelievable types of jobs. I knew a fellow whom I had married in Berlin when I . . . he was here before I came, I had met him by accident, I said, what are you doing. He is cleaning latrines in a beer place frequented by blacks. That was for quite some time he had to do this, his job and he wasn't used to that. And the whole thing is a humiliating experience. It doesn't have to be cleaning latrines. It can be something else also. Um, well anyway [laughs].

JL: Anything else?

MS: No, I better not. I have some good stories, but, no, okay.

JL: How do you feel about the fact that part of the funding for this project has come from the federal government.

MS: What project?

JL: For what you are doing this taping.

MS: I don't even know that.

JL: The oral history project of survivors?

MS: This?

JL: Yeah.

MS: From the federal government?

JL: From the Wisconsin Humanities Committee, which is . . .

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<sup>12</sup> A Jewish prayer said after meals.

- MS: Oh, that is federal government. Well, I will pay with greater alacrity my tax in April 15, now since I heard this. Well, I am pleased to hear this because this is part of what America ought to learn and since the Humanities Foundation does so much good in many other respects I think this is part of its fine work as well. So I'm glad to hear that this is the case.
- JL: Why do you feel it's important to participate in an oral history documentation project on the Holocaust?
- MS: Well, I think the past should not be forgotten, but recorded for the future in the hope that future generations will learn from the past, and I trust that historians might even reach back and try to find a mine of information in what the oral histories have recorded.
- JL: I'm finished with my formal questions.
- MS: I too.
- JL: Is there anything that you'd like to add.
- MS: No, I want to go home to mama [laughs]. No, my dear Ms. Lettovsky I thank you very much for using the Socratic method on me and drawing that limited knowledge and information I have out of me.
- JL: If we could just talk a bit about these pictures, then we will be finished. [MS sighs and then laughs] Could you tell me a bit about this one?
- MS: Well, this picture was taken in Berlin maybe two weeks, three weeks after I had been released from a concentration camp, and I do believe that the purpose was I had to use it for some official purposes. I don't think I would ever have taken a picture if I . . . I mean I wasn't in the mood to have taken pictures. It had to be for a purpose.
- JL: This one here.
- MS: This one?
- JL: Yeah, 0269 written on the back.
- MS: What?
- JL: I'm just recording the number behind.
- MS: Yeah, what is that?

JL: 0269.

MS: 0269.

JL: Was it February '69? Is that it?

MS: On no, no, no, no, has nothing to do with the number. I can't even identify that. Oh yes! That was taken in England. Yes. On my migration track I was in England for awhile and that was taken in a garden somewhere.

**END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1**

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

JL: If we could go on with photographs. What is this group photo?

MS: This is one of the first pictures of my growing congregation in Madison, Wisconsin, taken at the Unitarian Meeting House at which we met, which was located downtown. They had a beautiful old church there and it was at one time at the place where Manchester's parking lot is now. Those were the *Gründerjahre*, the founding years when there was still a great enthusiasm which no longer exists after all these years. Meaning then they really wanted . . .they were all the breakaways from the *alte Schul*, [old school] *Agudas Achim*, the children, you know, they had enough. Just enough.

JL: Do you recognize some of these people?

MS: Oh yes, all of them.

JL: Are most of them still here or not?

MS: Well, some have passed on, of the older ones. I see quite a few still here, some are even grandparents now. One or two divorced, not too many. But I recognize each and every one of them. Because by golly every member I have *in Watte gewickelt* [literally, "wrapped in cotton"] [laughs]. So we were very close, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was surprised, there's even a colleague of mine in there by the name of Rabbi Shapiro. Well, you don't even know who that is.

JL: The Milwaukee rabbi?

MS: No. It is Shapiro, yeah, there's Sonnie Kaiden, he had just had that little thing and next to her is her sister, her sister Lela, was married to Rabbi Shapiro, was a rabbi in Green Bay and then he . . . are you taping this? Oh then I better say what I was going to say [laughs]. I am a terrible *Schwätzer* [blabber]. And then he gave up the pulpit. He didn't care for it, he didn't need it, his wife was a millionairess and with all these [inaudible], and he, a good, dedicated gentleman. He lives in Florida now. But other than that, here Lou Paley is here, who is Ann Paley's brother. He is gone. And just a few. It's interesting that not too many, I see three here. There's George Stewart, who at one time, he was married before. Absolutely. Look at that, George Stewart was a member and then when he



divorced and people sided with, oh God I shouldn't say, but. Well, alright. *Leben soll er!* [may he live!]

Yeah, look at that. Anyway, the group wasn't large. I think the occasion was a *Purim*, as I remember this. There's Mrs. Wolff, just had surgery.

JL: Just now had surgery?

MS: Yeah

JL: By the way, you mentioned that quite a bit earlier that you met in a tea room in the early years, where was that?

MS: We met, we met, we met, we met . . . on the square, the very first meeting place, was... That dates this picture. It was known in Madison for many years as Baron's Department Store. There were two department stores, Manchester's and Baron's. And then much, much later, Manchester's took over the Baron's Department Store. The manager of Barons Department Store, co-owner, Mr. Joseph Rothschild, was actually the man who urged me to come to Madison. The man however turned out to be a convinced member and supporter of the American Council for Judaism. We clashed on this, unfortunately. He was uncouth, rich and had a complex. He said, I want the service to be of such nature that any of my Christian friends can feel at home here. And this he fed me all the time. And at first I took it and then I said, well I am sorry, we have to part, this I cannot do this. I have a different philosophy and when we try to sing "*En Kelohenu*"<sup>13</sup>, *hat er sich aufgeregt* [he got mad] ja, not even the battle hymn of Reform Judaism was tolerated and I, in those days, I was more conservative than I am today because that was my background. I mean not this baloney. Anyway, today I would laugh about it, and well. I can afford to laugh. In those days I couldn't laugh, couldn't afford to laugh, it's a serious business. And so I told the congregation I would have to say goodbye, and then a group like this they insisted that I stay and we parted. It was terrible. The service I have gone through and only Jesus knows.

JL: So this was a [sounds like: kernel of...]

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<sup>13</sup> Ancient Jewish hymn.

MS: What? Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja. So then they carried on, insisted, no, no, you have to stay. Of course a schmuck like me, whom they can get for nothing they wouldn't find it in Cincinnati. Anyway, then I decided this and I decided, I thought about it, and many of these fellows said, you must, don't be angry with him. Okay, I mean, I can easily be appeased. But we broke with him and he kicked us out of the store and he dropped out of course and the major supporter was out, too. After all the 125 dollars were hard to come by, you know. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy was that a battle.

JL: The \$125? That was your salary?

MS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And then it was raised to \$150. So, anyway, but for me it was a million. So, anyway, then we moved into a rented this place, which was adequate, had a beautiful church auditorium. Nothing goyish, it was just nothing. And we used the Sunday School rooms, that's an upstairs room. They had plenty of room. They had so much room, they didn't have members in those days. The Gentiles had no members. They were also folding up. So we cripples got together [laughs]. *Gott im Himmel!* [God in heaven!]

JL: What year was that?

MS: Well, you see now, this is, is a little hard to tell, but it must have been, wait a minute, I would say '42.

JL: [inaudible]

MS: Yeah, they still have number one. And he didn't have the millions then yet. But I should have made him president, that was my mistake. *Ach, ist das ein Geschäft. Das Rabbinergeschäft, ist das ein Geschäft. Gott.* [Oh, this is some business, the rabbi business, this is some business. God.]

JL: Here is?

MS: That is a poor picture, but I know exactly where that is. It is very, very poor, it doesn't come out. It is . . . read the back. What does it say there?

JL: "*Dem Rabbiner Dr. Manfred Swarsensky. Zum Andenken an die Synagoge Prinzregentenstrasse*" [For Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky, in memory of the synagogue on Prinzregentenstrasse]

MS: Yeah, I don't know, maybe one of my students probably mailed it to me. This is the background, the bimah of the altar. But a very poor picture, nothing comes out, there's nothing beautiful about it. *Die Synagoge Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Prinzregenstrasse* which was the synagogue where, one of the two where I officiated. That was the very, very last one. What was the year? Is there a year?

JL: This has a dateline of London, June 1939, Ernst Levandovski.

MS: Really? Thirty-nine. This picture, the fellow must have probably gave me in England, must have taken '39, shortly. . . no, this . . . well, he fled. This is not the destroyed synagogue. No, no. No. So, he took it probably before he left and he probably left before the Kristallnacht. So, it's a beautiful place.

JL: And this was totally destroyed?

MS: Of course, yeah. I have other pictures. I couldn't find them in a hurry. Here, here now there's the front entrance.

JL: To the same synagogue?

MS: To the same, this big one, yeah.

JL: What's happening outside?

MS: This was a *Shavuot* service and somebody took it, I am not a photographer. And so help me, I once met a fellow in Chicago, we had a little reunion there, the old Berliner, and I showed him the picture and says, *da ist meine Mutter, ja. Die war schon tot, ja. Da ist meine Mutter.* ["That's my mother, there. She was dead already. There's my mother."]

JL: Now there's a dog out here?

MS: Yeah, he always. . . we were very hospitable.

JL: They brought dogs in synagogue?

MS: I don't know why. Just running around.

JL: Dachshund?

MS: Why not? Well on the street.

JL: You think people were leaving the service here?

MS: Yeah, yeah. They just were walking out and those were the happy days when no one suspected anything ever to happen. Just when I look at that picture, those good days, you know. Boy, was it a Jewish life in Berlin. Boy, oh boy. Second to none. Second to none. Never again.

JL: Do you have an idea about what year this might have been taken?

MS: Well, I can only guess. I should have written it down when I got it. I don't do those things. This must have been, I would say '36, '37, '35.

JL: And at that time there was no idea...

MS: Why?

JL: Hitler was around?

MS: Oh Hitler was there, that must be even earlier. Or not. Because things were going on. Things were [inaudible in part: "...synagogenleben"] for a long time. For a long time. It was a slow attrition. Slow, a real slow. . . it really didn't begin, I would say, until the Anschluss, which was in '35. Was it '35? Thirty-seven, I don't know.

JL: It was '38.

MS: I don't think it was '38. When the Austrian Anschluss, then, the whole thing came down. After all, the final solution, so-called, was decided only in '42. I mean why should they have to discharge people from concentration camps as late as '39. Hmm? I mean in retrospect, an absolute miracle. I mean when you see this whole fury, how it ended up, they wanted to get rid of the Jews. Honestly. I mean honestly, you know. Someone with *Gewalt*. [authority, power] Nevertheless they wanted to get rid of them. The whole idea of the total extermination hadn't dawned yet. No, no, why should they have let people get out?

JL: Just one more thing. On this picture of the inside, this is the ark?

MS: Yeah.

JL: And the...?

- MS: The candlesticks, there's the *shulchan*, a tremendously large ark, all marble, all marble were reaching way up, and then I remember there was the organ and the choir. And what a choir.
- JL: And was the choir here behind the . . . ?
- MS: Yes, it's a very poor picture. I mean it's so bad, it's so bad. I have many better pictures.
- JL: What was on the curtain?
- MS: Oh I guess there were lions, I don't remember. But I can't read this, there was something written down, a couple of lions, that doesn't look too conspiring. And there were candlesticks..
- JL: Are those actually real live candles? Or were they bulbs?
- MS: What do you mean? These?
- JL: Yeah.
- MS: That I don't remember. I see in the *Kiddush* cup, isn't that standing there? And this is where *der Herr Rabbiner drin gesessen hat. In der Box. Und da vorne hat gesessen Leo Baeck. Und der arme Swarsensky, wenn der predigen musste, und Baeck sass da. Ach, jede Woche, das Herz ist mir im Leibe aufgesprungen vor Angst. Hm?* [where the Rabbi was sitting. In the box. And Leo Baeck sat in front. And poor Swarsensky, when he had to preach, and Baeck was sitting there - Och, every week, my heart burst of fear in my body]
- JL: Did he criticize you?
- MS: Oh no. *Nie, nie, nie nie.* [Never, never, never, never]. As a student yes, but later on, no.
- JL: Oh really?
- MS: He *Wie geht es, Herr Kollege? Wie geht es, Herr Kollege? Wie geht es, Herr Kollege?* ["How are you, dear colleague?"] [laughs]. And that's the way he was. The other, there were two more rabbiners. I wasn't the only one there, who were older. I was the youngest. With them it wasn't. . . they were no good anyway. Except one, one was good, he was very, very learned. But the other one was nothing, so *das war kein Problem* [he was no problem]. He didn't have to live up to Baeck's teaching, you know. When you have a teacher present, *soll Gott verhüten* [may God prevent it]. But, boy, he never

permitted us, never, to use a note, never. He wouldn't do it. Did he have a memory, not only for this. We must preach without notes and never had I, until I came to this country when *wenn das verdammte Englisch mir solche Schwierigkeiten gemacht hat* [when this damned English caused me so much trouble]. Never a note, we were not permitted. I don't know, he says you may write it out but you have to memorize, you have to know what you're doing. *Die Arbeit! Die Arbeit!* [the work! The work!]. Well here it was, I mean, impossible, I didn't know their language.

JL: So you mentioned that you sat up here, was it up here in the box?

MS: Yes, this kind of balcony. It's the sort of [laughs] box.

JL: Is it elevated?

MS: No. Elevated, yes.

JL: Like in a church?'

MS: Well, a little higher. There's the ground floor and this is a little higher, right and left.

JL: Oh so this is, I see they were not boxes, but they went around the synagogue. Why was that? Were women sitting with men?

MS: This was the only synagogue in Berlin where women and men would sit together. No other Liberal synagogue, *alle, die Weiber immer oben* [the women upstairs always].

JL: I assume that it had been built for having women upstairs, that's why that was made?

MS: Upstairs?

JL: Oh, in this balcony part?

MS: That is not a balcony, you don't see the balcony. The balcony is way up.

JL: So this is indeed separate for the rabbi?

MS: Yeah, the rabbi and the cantor has a level where he sits. Yeah, that is not of great consequence, but its all parterre. Yeah, this was the only synagogue in, liberal synagogue in Berlin, where women and men would sit together. Otherwise in all the other liberal synagogues they were still segregated. *Und immer mit dem Hut. Immer mit Hut.* [And always with a hat. Always with a hat]

JL: Women and men?

MS: Oh yeah, men too. That was difficult for me at first. To sit *ohne Käppchen* [without a hat]. And one *verdammter Reformrabbiner* [damned Reform rabbi] in Chicago, I shouldn't have said this but I said it, it's a little reformer, a well known man, well if you don't like it then you have to join another group. Yeah, *sagte der. Ich als schwacher little Mensch sagte, würd ich doch nie einem Menschen sagen* [That's what he said. I as a weak little man, I said, I would never tell someone], you know, in a hurtful manner. Didn't like it. But I, *Idiot*, shouldn't have said this to him either. I mean I just, we'd been schmoozing so I said it. But he got bitter. Some of *diese alten Reformer, die sind reine Grenadiere. Die sind so schlimm wie die Orthodoxen.* [these old Reformers, they are mere infantrymen. They are as bad as the Orthodox].

JL: And this was built, this . . .

MS: This was built, I was there for the dedication. It must have been I think in '36, maybe '35. Thirty-five, '36.

JL: This?

MS: Yeah, was the last synagogue ever built on German soil.

JL: Okay, this is all I have for this session.

MS: *Es tut mir sehr leid. Aufrichtig leid.* [I'm sorry, I'm really sorry].

JL: [Laughs] Thank you very... *Vielen Dank*

MS: *Gleichfalls. Hat nichts zu sagen.* [Same to you. Nothing more to say]

**END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2**

TAPE 6, SIDE 1

JL: Now in earlier sessions we discussed your first years in Madison, your involvement with settling DPs, your adjustment to Wisconsin. And we also talked about attitudes towards the Holocaust, that is yours and that of others, and about your family. And today I'd like to go back to Marienfließ. Do you have any special recollections of your grandparents? Could you tell me a little bit about your father and mother, the type of people they were, type of relationship you had with them.

MS: Well, I do remember, vaguely, three grandparents. My father's mother and my mother's parents when I was very young, but I have a complete picture. I know how they looked. I know, more or less, what they did and how they lived. My mother's family, they were all, on both sides, natives of Pomerania, which is a part of Prussia. My maternal grandparents lived in a little town which was known—you want to know that?

JL: Uh huh.

MS: Bad, B-a-d, Polzin, P-o-l-z-i-n. Why was it called Bad, which is bath? Because it was known for its moor bath. And remember that people from various parts of Germany who suffered rheumatism and arthritis, came to that little place. As a matter of fact, there was one such bath, connected naturally with a hotel, very modest, which was operated by the cantor of that little city. Maybe out of necessity since the Jewish community was rather small; maybe the whole town was 5,000. So it was known, that little place, as *Kurhaus Finkelstein* because Mr. Finkelstein, *war der* [was the] cantor, and *Kurhaus* is the place for cure. I mean, so I guess there was a lot of mud around and they exploited the situation and people were rather faithful. They came back every year. There was a second place which was favored by Jews, but not exclusively Jewish that was owned by an uncle and an aunt of mine that was not, shall we say, strictly kosher [laughs]. *Sondern jüdisch-deutsch* [but Jewish-German] kosher, in between [laughs], et cetera. Although my grandparents, they were strict observant, really observant. But that was Kurhaus Moses, because the owner of the place was my uncle. I forgot his first name now. His last name was Moses and his wife's name was Rosa and she was my mother's sister and she



was really the heart of the whole business, very popular. Jews from all over the country came to that place. But there were many and the great majority naturally were in non-Jewish hands. And so that is all I remember. I do remember also that my grandparents, my mother's parents, I believe they had 11 children of whom all of course survived until the Holocaust and the majority, however, were all murdered. And their children as well because they simply were all settled in that entire area. So that is all. I do remember of the little town of Polzin and naturally we visited there as children every once in awhile. My main recollection, however, is naturally the place where I was born and there only my grandmother, my father's grandmother, who's name was Franziska, Franziska I believe—no, Friederike, Friedericke Swarsensky.

JL: Your father's mother?

MS: Yeah. You want to know all of this?

JL: Yeah, go on, go on.

MS: God, I haven't thought about this for ages. Swarsensky *geborene* [nee, maiden name] Levin. But she also came from that area because the Jews they all married, you know, that was *die Armen in der Kirche* [the poor in church], that was understood, they married only amongst themselves and from that area because they didn't travel a great deal and of course the families probably knew each other as well. But while I do not know my mother's grandparents, incidentally my mother's grandparents were Ashur und Rosalie Levinsky. Now my paternal grandparents, the grandfather, I happen to know this, was born in 1832 simply because that was the birth year of Goethe and that's why I remembered it. His name was Moses. That's the man after I am named, M. Moshe, *auf Deutsch* [in German] Manfred and Moses, and as I said earlier, Friederike Swarsensky. Now my grandfather had died before I was born. However, my grandmother was still living when I was very young and she lived with us at home and helped around the house. She was tremendously hardworking, but far more hardworking than she was my mother. My mother could, was of course, number one, the housekeeper and wife and a mother of children. She never went to college. She could do almost anything, any [inaudible] does

not have to be Jewish, housewife was expected to do. She was the cleanest housekeeper I have ever encountered. There must be others like her. Every morning she got up and dusted, very early, the whole house, from A to Z. Just think of it. She dusted it. And then she did all the other things. We had a large farm and we had animals of all kinds. They raised potatoes and grain and she could do anything out in the garden. She raised her own flax, made her own linen, she raised geese and in the long winter evenings, in December chiefly, the neighbor wives, women, came and helped pluck the downs or whatever that was that was used for stuffing beds and *daunendecken* [eiderdown quilts]. I remember this because then my mother would make Pfannkuchen, which is filled donuts. And as children you certainly would partake of them. And that was always and they had them at the end of the evening, coffee, et cetera. We had no electricity at home, no indoor plumbing. We had just a kerosene lamp. And in the evening if somebody ever came, not very many people came, and it was dark, eight, nine o'clock, nobody was up at ten anymore. My father would go to the door and just pick up the kerosene lamp and see who was there. Later, when I had grown up, then we of course, well of course then we had electricity. Across from our home there were only about 1,000 people living in that village called Marienfließ. That's an old, old way back Catholic and then later on Lutheran when they took over settlement, with a big church. In my day that church was of course strictly Lutheran. But the same building was way back Catholics after the, what is that 30 year war they changed hands, and across from our house, exactly across, there was only one long street and a few side streets, that was all, there was a school. And that was a school with eight grades, girls and boys together. That was the only time when I ever had girls in my classes, never again. Later on and teacher Wilhelm Nachtigall, Nightingale, *mit einem kleinen Spitzbart*, sehr [inaudible] [with a small goatee, very...], of a terrible fury and the ever present *Rohrstock* [cane] presided over this one room. It was absolutely red brick. It was one room and maybe 70 or 80, I don't know, little children. And if we didn't do our homework he would mercilessly beat us. That was common. This was common in my high school gymnasium classes as well. Now for high school we had to go to the next larger city, city which was

maybe, I don't know, 50, 60, 80 miles away, because the high schools simply were not in existence in the smaller town, only grade schools. And the schools were not operated by the local community but by the federal government. So, later on when I was nine I had to, I didn't have to, I could have continued until I was 14 but my parents had greater objectives, they felt I should attend a high school and not finish with just eight years of grade school. So they sent me to the Gymnasium, the high school, in Germany, in Stargard, S-t-a-r-g-a-r-d, in Pomerania. And there I completed, we would say until the twelfth grade, the school and was graduated from that school. If you want to know its name, had a long complicated name— Königlich Preußische Peter Groening Gymnasium. Königlich is royal; Preußisch is Prussian; how came the name of the gentleman from whom the school was founded, was named; Peter Groening; and it was what we call one particular type of high school, namely a humanistic one. There are two types throughout Germany. Either the humanistic which stressed the humanities and Latin and Greek, et cetera, at the expense of physics and chemistry and the sciences of which I learned next to nothing. And the other type of school was called Realgymnasium, which concentrated on the science. It so happens that three weeks ago I got in a sort of round about way a plea invitation to return to that school and help them celebrate the, I believe, 350th anniversary of the founding of that school. How that came about is a little mysterious to me because another one, the part of Prussia, Pomerania, where I was born and my family had lived, I forgot to mention that I lived and was born in the same little house in which my great-grandparents had already lived. This great-grandfather of mine, understand his name was Salomon Swarsensky, was *ein Bäcker*, a baker, and probably generations before of whom I have no knowledge. Anyway, a number of years ago this...oh, oh I should add here now, this part of Germany was incorporated into Poland. Part of Germany became East Germany. The Deutsche Demokratische Republik, East Germany, which is communistically dominated but by Germans. But that part, which is a little east of Berlin where I was born Pommern, Pomerania, like the other provinces, the Poles kept it and they are not expected like the Jews in the West Bank to move out again. That is understood that they stay there. And therefore

the town in which I was born and the town or the city where I went to high school, so I learned after the war, was totally destroyed, burned down, in the attacking Russians because the Russians came from the east to meet the Germans and defeated them and my dearly beloved teacher Nightingale, was hanged on a tree. Maybe in expiation of all the beatings he administered [laughs] to us. But what I wanted to say is this, the population of Pomerania, Silesia and East Prussia, the Germans, they migrated into West Germany and their brethren accepted them, resettled them and everything is hunky-dory. I wish the Arabs would do this with their brethren. But that's too much expected. And they are quite prosperous and they didn't stay, but they went west. And now, coming back to my school, the school, the high school, is gone. However they carry on the tradition of that school and once a year the alumni, or whatever there still is, they gather for some festivities or commemorative services in the City of Essen, which is in Westphalia. So, should they invite me I do not know whether I have the strength to go. I would like to do it as an act of, what shall I say, not vengeance, but just tell them that we are still here. Because a number of years ago they published a yearbook and listed all the alumni and someone who was a classmate of mine, not Jewish, sent me the book, I was not on the list and it indicated I graduated in 1932 and the names are all listed and after the name the present whereabouts are given. This one killed in war, this one, that, died. Now there is Manfred Erich Swarsensky and right behind his name is "*Aufenthalt unbekannt*," whereabouts unknown. Well, they didn't know where I was. I didn't keep in touch with him and I must say my personal attachment is very superficial and minimal because... I'm indebted to the school, there's no question about it, yet the number of Jews ever attending the school was very, very minimal, very minimal, and I was maybe the only one in the class, maybe there was another one, et cetera. And as the situation was, I had, well my only friends were non-Jews because there weren't any Jews around and there was a mild anti-Semitism but not unpleasant, not unbearable.

JL: Were you actually the only one in the school? The only Jew in the school?

MS: There must have been . . . no, I wouldn't say the only one. I mean there were thousands of students, maybe there were three, you know, or four. As a matter of fact, what's interesting, the one who also went to the school lives in Philadelphia and this man, this person I want to mention him and single him out, because in Stargard, that's the city where, you know, I went to high school, there was a Jewish congregation. Do you want to know about this? Where we were, of course we were the only Jewish family, there was nothing. When I was very young, my parents were affiliated with a little tiny bit of a synagogue and congregation which was closer than Stargard and Stargard was a liberal congregation. We would say Reform, but it wasn't Reform. Was liberal, but my parents, especially my father, just didn't like the organ and all those horrible things which his son worships. So he felt at home in that little tiny synagogue. The name of which, the town, was Freienwalde in Pommern. Which was, as I said, closer, geographically to us also than Stargard. Now in Freienwalde, so it happens, and I still remember most distinctly, the High Holy Days, because on the High Holy Days we had horses and we had a, well I cannot use a word for public relations purposes, I mean a driver, what do you call it, who drove us and the family, to Freienwalde, and then of course riding and driving was just out. Also on Sabbath my parents wouldn't work or do anything. But I'm told on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur so we stayed in a hotel there, you know, over and with all the commotions. And I remember the service exactly. I see even the people right in front of me. Many would wear the *Sargenes*<sup>14</sup>, the *kittel*<sup>15</sup>, you know the *weissen kittel*, you know, for the High Holy Day shroud, for the High Holy Day services. And I remember for the 1927, when I was already in Berlin later on and the Jewish Theological Seminary, I made my first attempts at a sermon in that synagogue because they had no rabbi or cantor or nothing. They did everything by themselves and it was the only service I ever knew. I must say it was neither then nor would it be today very inspiring to me. *Es war ein Geschrei*

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<sup>14</sup> Term used typically in Europe to signify the kittel, the white linen robe traditionally worn by Jewish men on special holidays, weddings, and in burial.

<sup>15</sup> A white linen robe traditionally worn by Jewish men on special holidays, weddings and in burial.

*den ganzen lieben Tag* [it was a clamor the whole blessed day] [laughs] and it was really, what I would say [inaudible], though shall torment your souls. And that indeed it was. But the women were upstairs and my father was down there and my father would always receive the honor of reciting *Maftir Yonah* on Yom Kippur afternoon. So, I mean these are lasting impressions. However, my father used to tell me then when he was younger and when he would travel from Marienfliess to Freienwalde with chickens because he had to have the chickens killed by the then-resident *shochat*, you see. And then he traveled back. Now his son, now an aging gentleman, senior citizen, didn't have those problems. Today, he wouldn't travel. Although my wife [laughs] still travels with the chicken, but with dead chickens. My father traveled with the *im Korb* [in a basket], alive. What people would do. What people would do. My father was a very kindly gentleman. He wouldn't harm a soul or do anything wrong. He was not in the American, but in the old German way, *ein frommer Mann* [a pious man], he prayed everyday, morning and evening. He would get us together for *Birkat Hamazon*, *tishgebet* [grace], for *Havdallah*, et cetera, which we followed through and so those are my impressions of my younger days. It, I just read, just about six months ago, someone, a Mr. Diamond, whom I do not know, wrote in the magazine, the weekly *Aufbau*, that he searched for the Jewish cemeteries in that whole area and lo and behold he mentioned the cemetery which I also still visualize, we visited it. That is where my grandfather Moses, his parents and others in my family were buried.

JL: I'm gonna stop you here because the tape's ending.

**END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1**

TAPE 6, SIDE 2

MS: You have to make sure that the tape is on, I mean control you can't. . .

JL: I have a control here.

MS: Because sometimes I had this . . . it is *bechamen*, for nothing, the effort, it's terrible. But anyway, what I wanted to say that Diamond reported that the Nazis willfully had destroyed that little cemetery as well. So, there's nothing anybody can do. There's no access. I took care of the cemetery of my grandmother because my grandmother is not buried in that cemetery.

JL: Now this is in?

MS: In Freienwalde. She is buried in Berlin because in her later years she moved to her daughter, who was living in Berlin, and so she is buried in that tremendously large Jewish cemetery in Berlin, where my father's also buried, called Weißensee. That also was destroyed, not by the Nazis, but by American *Volltreffer* [direct hits], but from bombs. That's a long wild story. But I went out there and paid for perpetual care and restoration and all this sort of thing. That's in East Berlin now. It's very difficult to get to is. But anyway, so that is my early youth, much more to be said, to be told—Marienfließ, Bad Polzin, that Freienwalde, that little congregation. Oh yes, this is what I wanted to say. You asked me if there were others in my school and then I mentioned one gentleman, who's a little older than I am, who's name is Walter Silberstein. Walter Silberstein, was, is, the son, of the rabbi who Bar Mitzvahed me. Namely in Stargard, in Pommern. There was already the city was maybe 25,000, had a population of 25,000, and I would estimate maybe eighty, a hundred at the most, Jewish families. They had a nice synagogue and they had a rabbi. But the only rabbi who ever presided over that congregation was my teacher, Dr. Emil Silberstein. Who also was a native of Pomerania. But he had already been bitten by the liberal bug of Abraham Geiger. And so he went to the same school in Berlin where I went, namely the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, which was founded in 1872 by Abraham Geiger. Now Silberstein was a very fine gentleman, the only rabbi I have ever known as a child. He was rather liberal, quote, he said to me, we were very close, "*Swarsensky, wenn*

*unsere Vorfahren gewusst hätten, welch ein delight das Rauchen ist, sie würden es nicht am Sonnabend verboten haben.*" [had our ancestors known what a delight smoking is, they would not have forbidden it on Saturdays" [laughs], he loved to *rauch*, to smoke. And whether he did it or not that's of no interest nor concern to me. But he suffered from [laughs], he didn't do it, you know, out of the spirit of Mitzvah. He suffered from those things. Now Silberstein Bar Mitvahed me, with all the trimmings, but in order to be prepared since my parents would send me once a week when I was still even at home, to Stargard, by train, later on by bicycle, to study Hebrew, et cetera, et cetera, with a cantor. We had a cantor there. His name was Joseph Widman, W-i-d-m-a-n, who unfortunately, a nice gentleman, lost his life in World War I. Give it for the honor and glory of the fatherland, but he taught me Hebrew and Maftir, et cetera, et cetera. Now, what I want to say about Silberstein is this, that the widow of this teacher of mine just died two months ago. She, the husband had died in Germany, but she died here in Philadelphia, the city to which she had come shortly, probably before Hitler, with her only son and married and she died recently at the age of 99. It is almost unbelievable. I can hardly believe that a wife of a teacher of mine, you know, was still alive. As a matter of fact twice I visited her, et cetera, and the son is very eager to come to see me again. So, as I said, he was somewhat older than I am. But he is still around. So with this I think, Ms. Lettofsky, I told you more than I know almost about my childhood.

JL: Okay, let me just fill in a couple things. Your father was a farmer. You haven't told me anything about your brother.

MS: Oh. Well, my brother, who is a little younger than I am . . .

JL: Was he also born in Marienfließ?

MS: [Yes.]

JL: When?

MS: In 1908 and he, what did he do? Well, he went through the same Jewish, you know, early childhood, youth training. Also went to Stargard, we attended the same school, attended the University of Berlin,



the University of Freiburg, and he became a surgeon and he, well, had more foresight than I am. But not too much. He left when he saw what was going on and came to this country. He obtained a visa because he had a very excellent position in a big clinic and he operated on the wife of the American consulate who sort of helped him get to get a visa. How I do not know because we have no relatives in this country.

JL: What year was that?

MS: I really don't know. Maybe it was in . . . I think it was early, ja, early '38. Just before the debacle came to the Kristallnacht in November. I think, and he left, he left. And he wasn't married and he went to Chicago. He went to Chicago.

JL: Do you have any special recollections of him as a child, things you did together?

MS: My brother is very different from the way I am. He is a sportsman, an athlete, par excellence. Even as a child he would jump and play and win prizes and do all kinds of things. Even today he's an avid skier and his brother is just like Yachov in the Bible, has no inclinations along those lines.

JL: Okay now, about other family members. You mentioned Kurhaus Finkelstein and Kurhaus Moses. Were there any other family members nearby?

MS: Nearby? Yeah, they were all living in that area more or less.

JL: How long, how many generations, have any idea?

MS: You mean generations back?

JL: Yeah.

MS: That is very difficult. No. That I do not know, I do not know. Especially about my mother's side. I remember all the uncles and all the aunts and they are all dead, all of them dead and a few of my cousins are surviving. A few in Israel, one in New York, two or three in South America and they all have . . . several have died already, et cetera. I have two cousins who were professed Zionists and became farmers in Israel and one lives in a [in Hebrew] and they're just a little younger than I am but they are great pioneers.

JL: You had no family or close friends in the U.S. prior to the Holocaust?

MS: No, no. Why is all this important? I mean for what is this for?

JL: Everyone's background is unique and...

MS: Oh, it sure is by golly. Can spend the rest of your life just delving into . . . yes.

JL: Well, we talked a little bit about the synagogue in Freienwalde.

MS: Yeah.

JL: So would you say that your family was quite traditional?

MS: Yes, but they didn't know any better. I mean, they didn't know anything. I mean, this was the way they were raised. I mean my father would, by American standards, you know, I don't know, of course too many, I . . . he would fit, Beth Israel would be a little too liberal for him.

JL: Hmm?

MS: Yeah. But, I mean the whole setup was, I mean, the divisions as you know, different. Our so-called liberal synagogues were on the order of the conservative synagogue here with the exception of the organ, and men and women would sit apart, the yarmulke was understood, I mean, and all this sort of thing. I mean just no question about it. The services were longer but they had more decorum. That they had, de-co-rum, *kein Geschrei, Ordnung* [no clamor, but order]. I tell you that the symbiosis with Germany. Yes sir, there's not question about that. Wherever the Jews go. You see I am a *Bejaher* of Diaspora [supporter of, believer in], have always been. Silberstein, maybe imbued me with this and my education in Berlin. There is with all the service and with all the *galut* situation, there's something positive in it which I believe has strengthened also Judaism. In other words, it has compelled us to adjust to the world. We have influenced the world around us as Jews do all over and vice-a-versa. We have picked up not only the destructive elements in the society, as we naturally do, we call assimilation, but also positive elements. Well, anyway, we'll not go into that.

JL: You spoke about *Geschrei* [clamor] before and just now you said there was no *Geschrei*.

MS: Yeah, only in this tiny, you know, this tiny synagogue. The *Geschrei war* only, I mean the prayers, you know. They had no choir, they had no regular cantor, you know. I know exactly. Moritz Dobreen. Mr. Moritz, Maurice, Dobrin. He was so to speak he looked around, you know, and be a dictator, you know, and all this. But he did all this in the name of God and Judaism, and so later on I became accustomed to live on [inaudible] and [inaudible] and beautiful art singing and all this and the organ, which I liked, and all this. There was decorum and beauty and aesthetics and in these little synagogues it was lacking. They were a little backward really. I mean they had no facilities. But by and large, by and large, what I saw later in Berlin and in all the great cities—Frankfurt, wherever—boy there were services that I have never seen again in my life. Never, never. Just beautiful, just beautiful. I have missed this terribly in this country. There are reasons for it. The reasons are in large measure the fact that our congregations here are all private clubs. There they are all organized from the top down, people have to pay church tax, I'm against that because I pose a principle of church and state, but there was an order and people respected, had a respect for tradition, even those who were not great traditionalists themselves. And we built synagogues in all the cities. Chiefly Berlin and the larger places. And it wasn't done by a local congregation. It was done by the senate, by the Jewish community. They said we need a synagogue there, Jews are coming in, we need one there, there, this. Not only synagogues, hospitals, old age home, children, nurses, the way Berlin is again in very small measure today. The system is different. So, each synagogue had a cantor, pretty professional, *nicht einen ausgefransten comedian* [not a scraggly comedian], [whistles] you know, who comes on holidays, *und fängt an da rumzusingen* [and starts singing]. Professional. A choir director, you know, everything. Really. Just incredible. And the synagogues also in terms of the size. Not like here. But a little few chairs put up for the holidays. The synagogues . . . I mean in Berlin I officiated at one synagogue had 4100 seats. The other one was *Fasanen*, had 3,200. *Prinzregentenstrasse* had between three and four thousand. The reason is the people didn't pay dues to the synagogue. You could go wherever you want to go. Most people went the synagogue in their neighborhood, or they

liked, or their tradition, and the community build liberal, conservative and orthodox synagogues as the need, and employed the rabbis. And the rabbis were all coordinated, you know, had nothing, you didn't depend on Mintz and Pintz and Schmus and Schultz and Rueben, et cetera, and their goodwill, whether they like you or not, they had nothing to say. It was all organized and this is called the *Kultusgemeinde*, which is a German invention. And I'm telling you, second to none. It is impossible to reproduce it in this country. It's just because America is built on the principle of the separation of state and church, which is much better than that principle, but the results of it were just fantastic. Therefore, a rabbi and Christian ministers too was a sort of semi-civil servant. Semi-civil servant. So when his salary was not the matter of agreement, there were certain categories, you know, a, b, c or what and nobody even debated this and these matters and when that person retired he had nothing to do with his former congregants. If you want to give him something or not give him something. I mean like as if you retire from a private store, from Millen's or you know. Not at all, had nothing to do with this. It was all like the university, you know, a totally impersonal relationship. So you were not beholden, you were free, you were absolutely free. You were not beholden to anyone and, you know, all these unpleasant things which you do obtain in a democracy. It's, you know, they did not exist. So being a rabbi there and here is totally different. I once gave a long, long talk, was invited to do this, in [inaudible] in New York on this matter, being a rabbi in two continents in which I pointed some of these things out but in, shall we say, more elegant style than I am producing it here with a little emotion involved.

MS: So there was. . . oh, there was one experience I would like to mention before I conclude this. In probably 1928 possibly, or '29, I was still not finished. I was ordained in '32. Then the way in this country too, Cincinnati sends out, and maybe New York too I'm sure, rabbis *in nascendu*, you are still not born, to smaller congregations. I came to, I was for three years, for three years, the very first year when I was very, very young, I was sent to a town by the name of Solingen, S-o-l-i-n-g-e-n. Solingen is known in Westphalia for its cutlery. *Solinger stahl*, steel works, produced for all over the world and

quite a few Jews, not in the real big ones, but a little lower levels are involved there, too. They had a beautiful synagogue. Small, but real old and rather beautiful. In fact, I still have a picture of it somehow. This synagogue had only *einen Kantor und Lehrer*—a cantor who conducted the weekly services who was at the same time a teacher. In many of these smaller . . . and they were trained men, an elderly man, a very nice gentleman, with a lovely lady and he had two rather good-looking daughters. And the mother hardly let me out of the clutches when I got there. This was almost my undoing, but I had no marital intentions. In those days I was nothing, et cetera, but Mr. Kantor and Mrs. Koppel, K-o-p-p-e-l, and their lovely daughters. Anyway, I get to Solingen on Rosh Hashanah early afternoon. From the train I took a bus or what not to the synagogue. There was nobody there except die Wischfrau, *die hat geputzt* [the cleaning lady], et cetera, so I ask her if this is the congregation. Yes, what do you want, what are you doing here. Well, I said I'm going to . . . all I could do is preach because he conduct the service. That's the way it was in Germany. The rabbi doesn't, and later on too, only preached, for the rest is the cantor or one or two there and they conduct the service with the choir and all this. There too. So *ich kam augereist mit meinen sechs* [I got there with my six] sermons for Rosh Hashanah because there's always the second day, we always had, I never heard of only one day, and we preached in Berlin, all over, Erev Rosh Hashanah, in the morning, both mornings, Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre, in the morning and then again for Negilah, six times. And, oh yes, and then came Sukkos, the same thing. The Sukkos was always a little difficult with all these days, you know, from the beginning through Simchat Torah.

JL: You mean for eight days you did?

MS: Oh, yes. No, not for eight days. We would preach, no, we would preach on Sukkos an evening, on the first two days, period. Then came Shemini Atzeres, there was also always [inaudible] on Shemini Atzeres, that was three, and Simchat Torah was a little lighter, four times. So you had ten sermons right there to the same audience and that often is a little too much if done at the same time. But anyway, so here it's much easier, much easier. Anyway, but that was standard. What I wanted to tell

you now about Solingen is this, not Koppel and not the little internal situation. It was a pleasant service. Orderly, had an organ and they had a Christian choir. Namely the *Sangverein Concordia*, that is a local singing society, had asked for the privilege of learning the Hebrew songs and then singing them during the service. And they did. And they did really an excellent job because the cantor gave them all the music, and I mean he was not a great cantor or a musician and they really, you know, put heart and soul in it. This was shortly before Hitler. You do not know, how could you, who was a native of Solingen. The name of the man was Adolph Eichmann. Ja, ja.. Think of that, think of that. This was just the years before Hitler, you know. I'm referring to, what was possible, I mean how the people were. Especially in the western and southwestern parts of Germany. The non-Jews were a little bit more liberally inclined than in Prussia where I come from, where the real, the real old, quote, Prussian Junkers, you know, these members of nobility and all of this sort of thing. Well, *so gehts* [that's the way it goes]. Now, well I have many other [inaudible], but why should I take up the tape with nonsense?

JL: It was not nonsense, but I will turn it over right here.

**END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2**

TAPE 7, SIDE 1

JL: Now, about Solingen. Did you travel there just for holidays?

MS: Yeah.

JL: And Shabbat?

MS: No.

JL: Just for the holidays.

MS: Yeah, on Shabbat we couldn't do that, that wasn't done. The way it is here they send young fellows out to congregations. No, that system really didn't exist. I think we were too busy. No, this was only for the High Holidays.

JL: Under the auspices of Berlin?

MS: Well, they had nothing to do with this really. They would recommend names, you know, and they would contact you if they wanted you. Later on, you see in the next two years I was in Wiesbaden, you have heard about Wiesbaden. Boy, that was an elegant congregation. But there was a beautiful synagogue on a hill, beautifully located. What was the name of it? So and so Berg. And there was a fine rabbi, Paul Lazarus, and he asked for me and there was a branch service. In Berlin we had many branch services, too. In Loge Plato, I don't know why they call it that way, I think it was in a building. Loge is lodge, Plato is Plato. So that was already an advance over Solingen, as I said that was a larger, Wiesbaden is a beautiful city. It's a place where this hostage was recently treated. Wiesbaden is the headquarters for the American Army now. Wiesbaden as a word indicates... "bad" is also a bath for some purposes there. And there I was for two years, et cetera. The president of the congregation, what was his name? It was *Kommerzienrat* [councilor of commerce], these dignified old Germans, et cetera, whatever the name was. And then of course the following year and then I was older, then I was kept in Berlin. I mean they didn't let us go because we had many branch service in Berlin too, in addition to these large synagogues. Very, very large ones and there they use many of the . . . we were called *Rabbinatskandidaten*. That means you're rabbinical students. But only the older ones, you

wouldn't. . . Berlin was, they expected more. The Jews were, especially the liberal ones [whistles]. I mean they were, they had *sechel* [brains, intelligence] you couldn't, therefore...

JL: So you had not been ordained yet?

MS: No, no, no. No, no. I was ordained in '32 but this must have been then in '31, '30.

JL: Wiesbaden?

MS: No, in Wiesbaden must have been in '29, '28 or so because that was a number of years before I was *fertig* [finished] in Berlin. And they had beautiful services too, but they rented non-Jewish buildings. I mean there were no Jew, the Jewish buildings were not large enough available. Like, for instance, one was called, just read it today in another context, *Singakademie Unter den Linden*. There was a beautiful, beautiful academy. It's very old academy of music, you know. But they had large places. They always was an organ, I mean where we were. The Conservative, the Orthodox also had that, same setup, under the same aegis of the same congregation.

JL: They had their own rabbis?

MS: They had their own, oh sure. For instance, this guy who's in England now, Yachov Babitz, his father, I remember him, was a Orthodox rabbi in Berlin. There's another one in this country who is Peterovsky, I don't know whether you know him.

JL: Jacob.

MS: Jacob, you know him?

JL: Of him.

MS: Of him, yeah, that's my knowledge. I remember his sister, nice lady. He was a Orthodox. Well, Peterovsky was a little more Conservative already. But when we say Conservative, they were Orthodox I'm telling you. And et cetera. Yeah, he was in Berlin too.

MS: Then there was one maybe you know from Israel. There is a woman who was very active in the youth *aliyah*<sup>16</sup>. Her name is Recha Freirer. You don't know that name? She got many children out of

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<sup>16</sup> Hebrew for "ascent." Used to describe immigration to Israel.



Germany. She was the wife of a Conservative rabbi in Berlin. For the most part the fellows I tell you in Berlin, but also in the larger cities, they were good men. I mean in Munich. In Frankfurt, especially. In Hamburg. Boy, were they rabbis. Really. I don't know, maybe I don't know them in this. . . I really don't know too many rabbis in this country since I don't go to rabbinical conventions, so I've never met a great many except a few in Milwaukee and they don't amount to a row of pins. Now I hate to say this, but [sounds like: Vsichko] and those characters, they're just selfish fanatics. Yeah. I mean I have no, I have no contact with them. In the olden days, olden days, here where there Milwaukee or Wisconsin Rabbinical Association, I used to drive out there with the fellows from Beth Israel and then I stopped going. It was just unbearable, the waste of time. They talked only about kosher fleisch<sup>17</sup> from Milwaukee. Now for that, I'm not against it, I'm in favor of it, I brought some along even for my wife, but to drive out, I waste a whole day and here nothing else. No *sechel* [brains], and no [inaudible], no vision, no interest in real Jewish concerns. But always the same and always being criticizing this hotel and that hotel and that. I mean this is like the Orthodox in Israel, *Es kommt mir aus den Ohren heraus, wer soll das aushalten?* [I have it up to here, who can bear that?]. So then I stopped going and then later on they kicked me out. So, anyway.

JL: Okay, I just want to get some dates straight, I have to be a little picky. You said you were in Wiesbaden, '28, '29 and Solingen?

MS: No, no, no. Wiesbaden must have been, must have been '31, '30. In Solingen I was only one year, '29. And in '28, I was in Freienwalde, *auf das kleine pulpit*. [on the small pulpit] [laughs], *wo Herr Dobrin mich angesehen hat* [where Mr. Dobrin looked at me]. Was I cute.

JL: When....

MS: It was this tiny little . . . what?

JL: You said before that you remembered what it looked like.

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<sup>17</sup> German for "meat."

MS: Yeah. It was a little larger than this . . . no, it was maybe twice as large, had a little balcony I believe, yeah. And seats. But of course that synagogue was not used throughout the year because there weren't any *minyan*<sup>18</sup>. They could get the *minyan* only if my father came. They insisted. Of course he went willingly, not because he had to. But, and there must have been a few other Jews, you know, Landjuden [country Jews].

MS: I am by descent, by nature and temperament, quote, "*ein kleiner pommerscher Landjude*" [a little country Jew from Pomerania]. I really am. I am. I mean [laughs], I will not say I'm proud of it. I'm not proud of what I am. I could be proud of what I accomplished. But that is my nature, very plain, very simple [laughs]. My wants are limited and my needs and I, and basically even, people wouldn't believe it, shy. I have still a certain shyness in me in getting up before people and nobody will believe that. But that goes way back. It's very, very plain. We were not, you know, [laughs]. But I suppose you can overcome it as time goes on. And it was a certain handicap for me. But I overcame it through, shall we say, I never went into the pulpit in those years unprepared. Never. At first, I believe out of fear. Later on, I think out of respect. And number three and mainly so because of the tremendous influence which Baeck had on me, who was exactly the same way and trained us the same way. Absolutely not. Ein hal hat er gesagt... [Once he said...], a rabbi said, well, how did you prepare your speech? Well I didn't. *Ich hab mir aus dem Ärmel geschüttelt. Sagte Baeck, "alles was aus dem Ärmelschütteln kommt ist Staub* [Off the cuff. Baeck said, "all that comes off the cuff is dust."] [laughs]. Huh, good. Yeah, no, I. . . now I am no longer that way today and it isn't good. Also the audiences which I have had here, now this is very, very unkind and arrogant, often do not deserve, you know, the way I used to do it here. One thing I must say I'm not missing is the weekly sermon. Because since people here are simply not used to going to service, okay this I cannot change, I understand why, and since they basically want to be entertained, you know, by a comedian, I mean

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<sup>18</sup> The quorum required by Jewish law to be present for public worship consisting of at least ten males over thirteen years of age.

more or less a religious comedian, et cetera, not comedian that's too strong, really and truly I have so and had so many other things to do, namely work with people individually, et cetera, I think that's more important than sermonize. I not always thought that way because we were trained that preaching and teaching are our foremost responsibilities. And that's a reason I would prepare a sermon. Now, when I came here I had six or eight people, you know, sitting in front of me and when I was in my darker moments I said, well in Berlin I buried more people than I have in my whole congregation. It's true. We had funerals, we had weddings. Sundays, four funerals, five weddings in the afternoon, you know, and during the week too, that was very time-consuming, but very important through the personal contact and all of this. And incidentally the setup was very, very different, also another fact. We were not permitted and we didn't to accept any gratuity individually. And that has bothered the daylight out of me here in this country that it is accepted. And it cannot be otherwise, it cannot be otherwise. The very first time when I had to go to a funeral, conduct a funeral. After the funeral was over a guy shakes my hand and I didn't know, this was the very first time, I didn't know what he was doing to me, but I felt there was something in, I looked after he had left, there were three dollars in it. But whether it's three or 30 I don't care. It was almost as if I had . . . it's so depressing to me [laughs] since I got a tip, as if I had to fall into the grave. Now I don't feel that way anymore because I know this is the American, Jewish, non-Jewish, way of life but I have decided ideas on it but we were absolutely, totally trained. Our salary, which was not tremendous, but I forgot what it was, but anyway that was it, and it was absolutely, it was against the *guten Sitten, contra bonos mores*, and part of it to be prepared, to be prepared.

MS: I had, shall we say, later on in Berlin, oh I must say a certain burden upon me, it was the fact that Leo Baeck, my teacher, after I was ordained and everything, attended my synagogue. That in the early years, you know, you can imagine, I still felt as if I was in a classroom, you know, under his supervision. Now Baeck was kindly as a teacher and yet had a certain . . . when we had to give trial sermons on Friday morning in later years, not in the beginning, he taught what is called homiletics,

the art of preaching, then he would say, it is customary to begin with the shevah, with praise. Then he praised, you know, always Herr. Herr Swarsensky, Herr . . . that's the way it goes, made a valiant effort. I didn't know anyone was coming. To develop [laughs], *ist mir heiss geworden unter dem Kragen* [I got hot under the collar], et cetera. But maybe you could have emphasized this and then the main thing is always, he said in Latin "*Non multa, sed multum.*" Not many, but much. That's a Latin phrase. Not many ideas but much. You know, have to say, only, I have quoted this when I wrote about him once, only if you intend to go to Africa tomorrow and never come back and want to tell your congregation all you know, then you can do that [laughs]. But if you are going to be back in the pulpit next week, and next week economize with your thoughts. I mean, it's true. A younger one, you know, will say everything and anything he knows in one sermon. I mean a *Kandidat*, a young fellow does this, you know, that's forgivable and understandable. So he was a sharp, a kindly critic. And now to have him sit there a week after and listen to you, then Baeck also had two other, I mean little idiosyncrasies. The first one is no idiosyncrasies. He never gave a talk, even when he was in his eighties, with a manuscript before him. Never. He had a memory, it was unbelievable, and he never permitted us, when we gave class sermons, to have a note or anything in front of us. This is the way we were trained and we didn't do it, we didn't do it.

JL: And when he came to your congregation and you preached, what did you do?

MS: When he was where?

JL: At your congregation in Berlin

MS: I didn't. But the responsibility, I mean Baeck inspires fear, you know, to his young fellow. But the people who were there, I mean they were intellectuals and all of this. You had to work like the devil, you know. So Baeck said, you write out your manuscript and leave it home or in a pocket or anywhere, but never in front of you. That's the way he spoke. Now, Baeck was not a great orator. He had a very poor speaking voice, but what he said [whistles], the highest intellectuals came to hear him. They didn't care the way he . . . he was a little...he wasn't, you know, not at all. I mean unlike others. But

most rabbis, except the very young ones. My vintage is Prinz and Nussbaum, they were totally different, but totally. But they were not under Baeck. Different. They were the real orators and good ones.

JL: Where did they study?

MS: Breslau. Breslau, they must had a different training I guess. Not bad either. But anyway I don't want to tell you all this. Your husband would be more interested in that than your archives, this sort of thing. Ah ja, and then there's another thing. This was really. . . he would never, now of course we had Bar Mitzvahs, believe it or not 12, 15 on one Sabbath [whistles], mass movement. We couldn't, it was just fantastic, the number. But of course we didn't have to train them. There were teachers and all this except the final . . . although I did some teaching, everybody else also. For instance, now or at a wedding it is customary that—customary, I mean when the birkat kol anim is pronounced they raise their hands. Now Baeck was utterly opposed to that. He said, we are not priests, we don't raise hands. I agree with him. Yet, the people expected that, that put me each time in such a quandary when I know he was there. He would later on never criticize me again. Each Shabbes, after the service, he would come in front the way I used to do it as a student, and said, "*gut Shabbes, Herr Kollege.*" That's what he would say, equal. He was an unusual man. When I was in Berlin last year, I absolutely wanted to pass the house where he lived. I didn't know exactly, 19 Landgrafenstrasse. It was *abasiert* [shaved off], it was no longer the same house where his very kindly wife, Natalie Baeck, geborene [nee] Wiener, when we called on them on Shabbes afternoon, *die hat immer Tee und Cookies gehabt* [she always had tea and cookies]. Ja, ja, ja, ja. And his granddaughter, Marianne, is married to Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus, who is a big *Macher* [big name, leader] in the Reform movement. Have you ever heard the name?

JL: I know Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus.

MS: Oh you do? I have never met him.

JL: A Conservative rabbi by that name.

MS: Now, I don't think he's Conservative. I think he's a Reform rabbi. Oh yeah, he is Reform. Now he gave up his pulpit in Brooklyn and became the placement director for the Reform rabbis. It's a responsible job and difficult one. He wanted this. Now his wife, Marianne, is the only grandchild Baeck has ever had because Baeck has a daughter who is still living, whom I remember, in London. Her husband Hermann [sounds like: Berlack], passed away in London and this child came over here. Child? As a matter of fact they have already a son who married this Paul Lichenstein here. His daughter married into that family. I don't know the complications, so he can't be so young either. I have never met him, but we have corresponded many a times. Anyway, my dear I am telling you more than you need to know. You don't have to know all these [inaudible].

JL: There's one more thing I'd like to get straight. In your parent's home, traditions were observed but they were not able to, your parents were not able to go to services on Shabbes.

MS: No. No. But my father *davened* everyday. Shabbes was not. . . no, no, there was no synagogue.

JL: Okay, I'd like to ask you now about your religious education from childhood up.

MS: Jewish education?

JL: This Nachtigall was your secular education?

MS: Yes. But not only. Here I have to inject that the German system was and is still that religion is taught in public schools. So, in the larger cities such as Berlin and what not, the teaching in the school is, depending, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish. So in Berlin I taught myself in high schools each rabbi has to do it but many others because there are not enough people, twice or four times a week every school has religion. In fact, religion is the first subject on your report card and it says on your report card also what you are, *katholisch*, *protestanisch*, or *mosaisch*. That's the way they say it. And Jewish is too anti-Semitisch [laughs]. Yeah, not *jüdisch*, *mosaisch* [laughs]. And so, now, what I wanted to say, yes, now in smaller and also this is of interested, the school pays for your teaching a certain fee to the Jewish community, you know. Because that's a service, it's rendered by the. . . they never talked in terms of congregation always community, that's a difference. So now in a smaller town there is a

tremendous dilemma for Jews. In my day and age it changed the whole setup after the Weimar Republic. The Weimar Republic of 1919 initiated in principle the separation of state and church. In other words, you could drop out, you know, drop out. Here you drop in. I mean you apply for membership, [sounds like: "wie viel kost es?" ("how much is it?")] here. There it is utterly different. The system, one has to understand, namely, if you move from city to city, the first thing you have to go with on the first week to the police department, check in, so-to-speak. Here I am, [inaudible]. You put down where you live, what you are, your birthday, your children, and as part of it, also your religion. So see this is the way Nazis could catch the Jews without difficulty. Alright. Incidentally this is a reason why Jews in this country have always opposed in the decennial census no religion is asked. It's important for security reasons unfortunately. So anyway, so that is known, what your religion is. Then, number two, like here you pay your income tax. On the income tax, the first page, form 1040 F, the way it was, is a rubric in the right hand corner, *Religion: mosaisch, katholisch*, this. Income tax. For what purpose? The government. That's the government business, will add to your income tax ten percent, is still the same now, I checked it out, it's always ten percent of your tax, not of your income, your tax. So if you pay \$1200, so it's \$120. Of everyone, you know. And then collect the money for the community and remit it to the community. So money has never been a problem there. They always had more money. Today, too. The Jewish community in Berlin has more money than they know what to do with this. This is because it is sort of compulsory, you know, collected. You don't send out dues bills, you don't argue how much or how little, this that. Okay, that is collected and four times a year, or what not, is sent to the community and then they can fix the roof and build synagogues, they can do whatever they want. I mean from the pragmatic point of view it is second to none. Absolutely second to none. Now, my point. . .

END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 1

TAPE 7, SIDE 2

MS: Do you want to hear this? So, I said, the Weimar Republic, August 11, 1919, said that a person that officially there is now introduced the democratic principle of separation of state and church. Therefore, a person may drop out. Even if it says mosaisch, he can change to none. And that principle exists today, you know. So, in my day, and even today, the majority of people don't drop out, they just, you know, go along with this, let it slide. Except Socialists, Communists, Atheists, you know, and all of this. Now, some intellectuals, you know, like professor so and so. But the majority of people don't. Now, my point. Oh yes, now this being the case, in smaller communities of the pre-Weimar setup, our Jews living in smaller communities, had a dickens of a time. In Stargard already, you know, where there were more Jews, Silberstein, my rabbi, came into the public school also and taught. Maybe he had only three or four students. I did the same in Berlin. But we had Jewish areas. I mean we really had large classes of Jews who were pulled out from eight to nine in the morning, out of their regular class, so were the others, you know. There were not so many Catholics, but the majority were Lutherans. Lutheran, Catholics and Jews, that was all. Protestants were always Lutherans. A priest came in and this and that. Now, a difficulty indeed was in Marienfliess. And the problem was I did attend in my very early days the Lutheran teaching because there were only Lutherans, I was the only Jew. We had no Catholics. I didn't even know that there were Catholics in the world until I was 14. I never heard of them. Who needs them, who wants them? We need only good Lutherans. So, I got this Lutheran training. Not because my parents were indifferent to Judaism, but it was sort of expected. I mean we couldn't . . . and to keep me out . . . here people would do this more, you know, because of the separation, freedom and the conscience. So I took this stuff and learned it and then once a year a Lutheran Bishop came and examined us, or checked it and each year he found out Swarsensky was *der beste Schüler* [the best pupil].

JL: And he knew you were Jewish?



MS: Yeah. The teacher probably told him. I guess, I guess. Although he never made a remark or so. I supposed. And the teacher was very friendly with my parents too. I mean they were right across the street. There are two little things I want to mention. When my mother and her fanaticism to keep every corner the cleanest in the State of Prussia, *war herumgewischt und die Fenster auf* [mopped around and opened the windows], right across the street was the school. Then she heard always, when this *Nachtigall*, who was a sadist, like most teachers were, beat the kids mercilessly [howls] ... *haben sie geheult* [they cried] Oh, and she thought Manfredchen was the victim of his sadism, et cetera, -- I don't remember that I was beaten once even, but my brother [laughs] *mein Bruder, der war ein Wilder, mit seinem Sport, und der hat die goyim verhauen* [my brother was a wild one, with his sport, and he beat up the non-Jews]. Oh yeah, anybody who attacked him *hat gleich gleich richtig geschlagen* [he hit them right away]. I didn't *schlag* [hit] anyone. So she was always a little afraid that there was some trouble when she heard this from across the street came. But *Nachtigall* once a year, *fur Weihnachten* [for Christmas], my father always gave him *eine Box of Zigarren* [a box of cigars] and that settled the whole matter. No, I mean it was no bribe, but you know he liked it as a friend and gesture. So I learned this Lutheran teaching which I in part even remember to this day. I can sing in German all the Lutheran hymns, all of them. *Ich weis sie alle* [I know them all] yeah, and the *goyim*, I have a little fun with them, you know.

JL: Do you sing along?

MS: Yeah, yeah. But I sing in the original tongue, the way Luther did it. I would not translate the lousy stuff into English. So, and then they are floored [laughs]. Here I pull a little stunt sometimes. I mean if I talk before a group and this matter comes up. I don't do it everyday.

JL: Didn't your parents feel at all strange?

MS: No.

JL: Didn't they think of moving?

MS: There was no danger that I could be contaminated or assimilated. It was just impossible.

JL: But they didn't think of taking you and your brother to a city?

MS: Oh yeah, I'm telling ya', I told you, sure.

JL: No, no. Even at that time?

MS: Well, yes, it started then. Yeah. You see, this city of Stargard, you know. Now we were affiliated also with the congregation in Stargard, you know, and Freienwalde. But on the holidays my parents would only go to their little. . . but for all official purposes there was, they would go to Stargard, it was a liberal congregation Silberstein. It was not Silberstein but the cantor. There was Kantor Wittmann, *der war totgeschossen* [he was shot dead], there were and Kantor Lachman, I remember him. He would teach us. He would really give us private lessons, my brother and me. Because, and my parents naturally had paid for it, but I think on Wednesday afternoon, I forgot already, we would take a train. It's very complicated, very complicated. Before we got to the train station, you know, they had to drive us, when we were older we took a bicycle. We left the bicycle there and then came back in the evening. The trouble, you know, we went through with the chicken, you know, with a Jewish education. But if people believe in it, you know the parents, then it's done and you don't ask questions. I mean, you know, as a kid I would never question that, that was understood. Because my father went through the same process when he was young.

JL: Well, wouldn't it have occurred to them to pick up their family to go where there were more Jews?

MS: No, no, no, no. That's the American fear of assimilation. No, you didn't assimilate, you know, because of living among Jews. You maintained and the goyim respected that, you know. And this was not only that. I tell you, there is an interesting article which I read in the, what is that thing called. It's published in Cincinnati by, I don't know. Central Conference Rabbis, is a monthly. Very nice. I wish I had time. Even now I haven't got time to read, I don't know what it is with me. But there is, there is somebody else who is a professor in Cincinnati, his name is Werner Heimann, I believe. I believe. Has written a most interesting article on his experience, which in a way paralleled mine, you know. But he comes from the western part of Germany. And also these [inaudible], you know, where the Jews lived

for a long, long time and I tell you they were rooted, you know. The idea now, you see the mobility was just unknown. Mobility, just. . . this is the reason people didn't make progress, you know. Here you hear of another job the family picks up to move to San Francisco, you know, and you try. That's modern America. That, neither the Jews nor the Christian did. If there was a business in your family, you know, you would keep it up for generation and generation. Here, even in Madison amongst Jews, I know ever so many parents who have good businesses, the sons don't want to go into it, you know. They want to be electrical engineer or psychiatrist, doctor and a lawyer, you know. They don't want good established business. Now in my day and age, now I was never a businessman, but I mean the kids would have grabbed it and the parents would have held a great pride that they would continue the name of the firm and the reputation in the family. That there is little of it. It must exist also but very little of it. It's a different spirit, different spirit.

MS: But, listen, we learned Hebrew and we learned, I remember, even the book by Muller. There was a book in Jewish history, by Muller, you know, like I don't know what's comparable here, publisher. And then the interesting part was always of Jewish history, the climax in the last chapter was what? There was always the history of the Jewish emancipation, how the Jews became citizens and this was Mashiach, yeah. Isn't that, Judaism? That is, I mean the Jewish fate, not Judaism. But it's the Jewish fate. Now, we went through all of this, Moses Mendelssohn, Gabriel Riesel, you know, all these great men who paved the way for building the bridge between the environment and Judaism, between the Middle Ages and the modern times, really. And this is really, that's very much in my bones, you know. I was totally imbued with that spirit. Of course, Zionism we had never even heard about it. I didn't know such a thing existed in my younger days, in my younger days. Because there was no need for it, there was no interest in it. Zionism was limited now to [sounds like: *mishlohim*] who came around. That's an interesting part. My family must have been known, from my grandmother and grandfather, my father was very charitable. He accumulated, he accumulated, once a year, over the year, all the letters and all the approaches from Jerusalem. God, I see all these letters in front me. They used to

send *gepresste Blumen* [pressed flowers]. Have you ever seen that? We got them every year in such a folder and as a kid I liked it. Mount of Olives, in French and Hebrew and Russian and Deutsch and all of this. Well, anyway, Ezra [sounds like: Nosham], this hospital say they existed already. I remember these things so vaguely. And all the other Jewish institutions. They would all write. They would all write. My father would never throw a letter in the wastebasket, the way his son does it now that he gets from Brooklyn, you know, and all this stuff. This was part of his life and before Rosh Hashanah, every year he would sit down and write checks and send them a whole slew, to all these people before the holidays came, to all these organizations. Many of whom of course he didn't even know who they were. I would be more critical nowadays. But there was no Hadassah as such, I mean where we were . . . I mean they called it, anyway, they called it WIZO, you know, the whole thing was different. I think ORT, ORT existed. But anyway, Israel wasn't there, but it was more the Halukah type. It was the old-fashioned religious ties to Israel and all this. But naturally there was no need for the state the way we saw it, and it didn't exist politically, so there was no Israel. I mean that Israel connection just didn't exist. But I was a great Silberstein, not Baeck so much. Baeck was an aristocrat. Of course, in his days things were different. He said, not the little Judaisms, but the greater Judaism. He meant not the little sectarian. Although he was liberal, but he was not a sectarian. He respected the others and he was even the head of the *Allgemeiner Rabbiner Verband*, which took in all rabbis. He was the head of it. They respected him and he respected them and I mean by American standards he was the ideal of a Conservative rabbi. He was not a Reform rabbi, I mean the way, you know, we are, or many are. But anyway the whole situation is different, it's all a matter of the past. Now let's talk about the future.

JL: Oh, I still have to dwell on the past.

MS: *Oy, gutes vey iz mir.*

JL: You studied in Berlin for university?

MS: Yeah.

JL: And you were also in Würzburg for a year?

MS: Yeah. Now this is the way it was done in those days, namely, you had to go at the same time, this was the setup required, to the university in Berlin and to the Hochschule. At the same time. Two complete studies.

JL: And what year was that?

MS: Well, this started when I got to Berlin in '25. This was tremendously, of course, time-consuming, energy-consuming, but it was expected, that's the way it was. You had a full study at the Hochschule. Fortunately the Hochschule was in walking distance from the university. So you tried by hook and crook you arranged your program so at 11 o'clock you could be here and there. But the work at the university was always neglected. It was also neglected because the classes at the Hochschule were small. How many were there? Six, eight, twelve, thirteen, I don't know, et cetera. Heschel was one of them when I was there. Didn't talk to anyone. He was an isolationist, would sit in the library day and night and study, et cetera. We were friendly but in a superficial way. Normally he didn't talk to anyone. I think he had a certain contempt for the assimilated German Jews, the way they were. And he was superior in his Jewish knowledge. There was just no . . . and there was one professor who cultivated him. Not cultivated him, who really helped him financially, as well as otherwise, Ismar Elbogen, the historian. You must have heard his name. Was quite a man, but not a Baeck. He was a practical man and he did many things and a good historian and his children were students of mine and friends and all this. But anyway, coming back to the university. Then we walked over and then okay now what do you study. You took normally, I mean you didn't take engineering, so you took something in the humanities. Chiefly philosophy, history, languages. I mean this is something which helped you. So you asked the teacher at the Hochschule for experience. I mean, if you are a greenhorn you don't know what to take even and there is no personal contact at the university level with a student. That is the most horrible thing. Here everything is personalized. There's a dean for men and a dean for this, a dean, et cetera. You can go and get advice. That does not exist. It is totally impersonal. The professor never knows you, he never knows you. Classes are large, you come in, you

have a book and once a year when the stuff begins he puts his name in and at the end of the semester he puts his name in but he doesn't check whether you were there, whether you studied or whether you not even appeared. And of course often you don't appear. You are totally on your own. That is a problem. So, Torcina Naftali Har Tuosenai. Have you ever heard of the guy? He died in Israel. He was a great linguist, Jewish linguist. He comes from this Zionist Galiziana Torcina family. There's one in Belgium. They are diamond machers and in Israel too, he's a great Zionist this guy in this country. But anyway, he was a Zionist. He was the only Zionist we had, Torcina. A brilliant, brilliant Semitic linguist. He immigrated to Israel, he completed the thesaurus of what's his name, [sounds like: Ozar] by, you know, this tremendous, not Ben Gurion, Ben—*oy Gott*, what's the matter with me—Eliezer Ben-Yehuda. When I was in Israel the first time I visit him as an old man. He showed me with great pride the galley proofs of the last volumes he finished. He was on that level, brilliant. But he suggested to me, take Syriac. I'd never even heard that Syriac existed. So I did, *ich habe gelernt* [I learned it], theorists, et cetera. It is somewhat has roots like Hebrew, but chiefly the Christian theologians use that stuff. We took not really what we needed or wanted or what we wanted. In fact, we didn't want anything. It was a burden, a burden of the first order to keep that up.

JL: And all the students thought that way?

MS: Yes, yes. With the exception perhaps, a very few, a very brilliant, for instance like Fritz Bamberger. Do you know him? No. Who is one of the very most brilliant there ever were. He didn't become a rabbi. He became a professor, et cetera, et cetera. Some didn't go through with the rabbinate, you know, they didn't want to get involved in a congregation et cetera. But anyway, the majority felt. Now that's the reason now. Why?

MS: When the time came, you had to get, Geiger was the one who started this, Geiger insisted, there was quite a vision he had, namely, that a rabbi had to be, we will say a Ph.D. In other words, he felt that secular knowledge was absolutely possible since we live in a secular world and deal with people who are trained this way. I mean, it's absolutely correct. He followed through on Mendelssohn more or less.

Although Mendelssohn was not a reformer, he was Orthodox, but he initiated this emancipatory process. So, because of it, because we were limited in our time and our energy and everything, it was sort of customary that everyone went, left the University of Berlin because also the demands there were just fantastically high. Were just unbelievable...that's like Yale or Princeton or [inaudible], et cetera. So they went to Wisconsin. Maybe the analogy is no longer correct, you know. So, they went normally to these places. They went to Erlangen, to Gottingen, to Würzburg and to another place. So, everyone preceding us did the same. So a friend of mine, a now a retired Conservative rabbi with whom I went to school in Berlin. You might know him, never have know him, his name is Frank Plotke, P-I-o-t-k-e, et cetera, who was a Conservative rabbi in this country in Hammond, Indiana. But anyway, he and I and another guy we decided to go together to Würzburg and there we had to work. Now during that one year, or maybe it was more, we didn't study anything Jewish.

JL: Your saying you were not studying for the Hochschule?

MS: Oh no. Impossible. But impossible. We had to work like the devil, you know, to keep up there with the requirements. But the requirements I would think in retrospect were not as stringent as in Berlin. In Berlin it would have taken us for ages, you know. You cannot do it concurrently; it is impossible. You have to do one thing and then the other and that would have taken ten and twelve years. So this was the setup which I simply followed. I didn't initiate this—I didn't know any better. So then we went there and [inaudible]. I remember that the main professor, now there you had a little bit more contact, they were not . . . and the university was a Catholic university. Was an official university and but it was founded probably by Catholics, what not. Bavaria was strictly Catholic and the priests were running around in *der schwarzen Röcken da* [in the black gowns]. Oh, and the secular guys, there were no women, in a minority, very. It's a beautiful city Würzburg, incidentally, and well there was something I wanted . . . oh yeah, when we got closer to the exam and oh, well here they call it orals, then this guy said to us, we had to learn Arabic. We had to learn...Hebrew was the easiest, Hebrew was part of it. They accepted Hebrew. You see, this was the advantage. You could utilize your

knowledge or lack of knowledge of Hebrew and you usually knew more than he. But, but not quite. These guys, the Germans, I'm telling you they are erudite, learned, you cannot beat them. Then he comes up and says, yah you have to have one Indo- European language also. Persian. Then we had to sit down and learn Persian. Day and night. People often, will not often, sometimes ask, did you date, did you go? Said, dating, what do you mean by dating? I never dated. I mean, whom? And then there's just no time. Then this horrible Persian language we had to learn in a great hurry. And it is, naturally it is, tremendously difficult, but it is not Arabic, it's Indo- European but written in Arabic letters. And this professor was a *Schnüffler* [snoop] [laughs]. And comes the exam. He puts before us a text to decipher in Persian. It looked, I said later on to my colleagues, of the *als ob die Fliegen darauf gemacht haben* [as if the flies had peed on it]. Oh yeah, there was one guy who spoke Yiddish also, he came from Poland, *is mir geworden schwarz vor die Oygen. Mir, too* [everything went black. Me, too]. I am telling ya'. Was that . . . the best exam was the Catholic professor, was the gentlemen Hans Meier, he asked sensible questions which one could answer. So he, what do you want to do with reference to Judaism, a little bow he said—what did he say—what was Philo's concept of . . . Philo, you know. No that wasn't so bad because Philo we had studied. And other stuff which was bearable, bearable. I passed the exam, thank God. And you had to write of course a thesis. That was another thing. That I'd started in Berlin already.

JL: So you actually graduated from Würzburg?

MS: Yeah.

JL: You could use the material you learned already?

MS: No, not, you wouldn't use the, well, you had a little biblical, you had a little semitic language background from the Hochschule, so you took something which was akin to it and not every university would accept this, you see. So you had to select university where they were specialists on this sort of thing. There were some. Another one was Bonn, you know, Bonn. Had a very good faculty, had a great semiticist Paul Kahle. One of the greatest that existed in Germany. But we never went to Paul Kahle,



although I visited him once. I wanted to see, but that would have taken ages. So in Berlin already, this I must say, I started writing a thesis which the guy accepted. I mean the subject matter, the subject matter he accepted. There was another [inaudible]. I mean this secular provision is good, but isn't the same....

**END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 2**

TAPE 8, SIDE 1

JL: Last week we talked a bit about the *Gemeinde*, the function of the *Gemeinde*. But we didn't talk much about the functioning of the rabbi, in the way that they interacted and what their roles were, and I'd like to ask you to describe that a bit.

MS: The term *gemeinde* is not synonymous with congregation but rather with the community, the Jewish community. The total German word is *Kultusgemeinde*, which means the community that is predicated upon a common *Kult*, meaning a religious cult with worship as its center. We pointed out last time I recall that membership in the community was somehow compulsory. In fact, it was until the Weimar Republic of August 11, 1919. Prior to that time the Jew, but also a Christian, had to be a member of his given religious community. Then later on, after the First World War, a person was permitted to resign from the community. Some took advantage of it but a great majority remained loyal or not so loyal members, but in any case, paying members of the community. A community was headed by a board for a given city. This particular board which was elected democratically by the members of the community administered all the affairs of the Jewish community. Meaning they would build synagogues, administer the synagogues, plural, always plural, be it Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, they would appoint rabbis. A rabbi was appointed but not elected by the members and certainly not of the given congregation because he was not the spiritual leader, so to speak, of a congregation the way he is in this country and totally accountable to this congregation. In Berlin with about 150,000 Jews there were maybe 15 to 20 community rabbis. They were all coordinated, meaning there was no chief. The difference of course consisted in the years of service. Normally, there were not younger rabbis appointed who came out of college, out of seminary, but they had to serve in the country in other communities. Frankly, I was one of the very, very few who was appointed right after I was ordained, so I never served in any other community. But, and then after a number of years you were appointed for life and however, you had tenure and you'd never applied to it, all these things worked automatically. Also your pay scale that was always worked like for any civil servant, you didn't

negotiate this. It simply was there and developed. Now, a rabbi had to serve the entire community. In other words, let's give a few examples. If there was a funeral or a wedding or any other of what we call *Kasualien*, that means incidental personal lifestyle events, then a member could go to any rabbi he selected, and some were a little more popular than others and they had more to do, more funerals, more weddings, et cetera. But, by and large, the majority of rabbis were assigned to one or two congregations. In other words, they would rotate and each week a different one or every other week he would preside over the services, meaning he would give sermons in a given congregation. In my own case, I might say this, I officiated at two main synagogues of the liberal type. The names were Fasanenstrasse, which was a very fashionable one, and then the very last one ever built on German soil in the western part of Berlin, which was called—synagogues were usually called after the street, not by any metaphors, titles—the synagogue was called *Prinzregentenstrasse* in the western part of Berlin. And then it so happens I was the only one, I gave sermons also in a Conservative synagogue in the eastern part of Berlin. The people living there were blue-collar workers and by and large they were not as middle class as people were on the west side of the city. For some reason they liked me there and I every four weeks I suppose, sometimes on the holidays, I gave sermons there. The holidays in Berlin in all synagogues were observed on the first and second day of every holiday, which means of course, which means on Sukkot for instance the first two, the last two days, and...

JL: Even though it was liberal?

MS: Oh yes, oh yes. And we had to give sermons at each holiday service and that includes naturally Pesach sermons four days, and Shavuot too and so throughout. There was a lot of hard work and that's...we didn't mind this, this was the tradition and this was observed. Only in one synagogue and that was on the very, very last one, where I served and the last one built, the *Prinzregentenstrasse*, men and women would sit together. That was totally new. In all the other liberal synagogues they were separate, would be separate on the balcony.

JL: In all of Germany?

MS: In all. In all of Germany. In all of Germany we would wear kippot, including this last one I mentioned, and the people were used to wearing a tallis, I mean far more than it's done in this country. And bar mitzvahs and confirmations and all the rest, they were very common and now the important thing is I believe, I said it last time, maybe not, that a synagogue was very, very large by our standards. There was hardly a synagogue below 2,000 seats. That was the smaller one already. Most were 3,000 even 4,000. Simply because it was built by the total community and it was placed in a part of the city where the Jews were living. So in other words the synagogue followed the Jews, maybe vice-a-versa also. But it was not a private enterprise, that anyone who disagreed or didn't like this or that could open his own synagogue. That just simply did not, did not exist. Now there was one group of Jews, not too large, but in larger cities, that did not belong to the overall synagogue structure. We were Liberal, Conservative, Orthodox. But there was also one group called Austritt Orthodoxy. This group was, shall we say, extremely Orthodox. They existed in Berlin, in Frankfurt and in Hamburg, mainly, in those three cities. You had this group of Jews, who really were or should I say, they didn't associate Jewishly with others. They had their own Kashrut, they had their own synagogues, not too many, their own rabbis. As a matter of fact these rabbis, the majority of rabbis, were trained at the seminaries in Breslau, which was Conservative, at the so-called Hochschule, founded by Abraham Geiger in Berlin in 1871 in Berlin with the liberal rabbis. Those were the two major rabbinical seminaries. But then was in Berlin also one that was founded by a rabbi, they were all assimilated Germans, but, I mean like the rest, his name was Hildesheimer. The Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin was in fact not too far from where our seminary was, even on the same street. But we had absolutely nothing to do with them. They trained their own rabbis and were extremely Orthodox. They wouldn't omit any minutiae of Jewish, of the [sounds like *Taliakh mitzvoth*] or of anything under the sun. It is a certain matter of prejudice or ignorance when Americans, often Jews, often say, well the German Jews were so assimilated. That is not correct. Yes, they were assimilated in the sense that they're thoroughly German in terms of culture, including the very Orthodox. But, to say that they were all indifferent, that

they were baptized and all this, a few were, I mean maybe a handful, and naturally some were indifferent, but by and large all of them had a profound respect for Jewish tradition. And by tradition I don't mean just Orthodoxy. A very profound, therefore they didn't drop out of the congregation structure or anything of the sort, but they were both Germans and Jews in the fullest sense of the word. That is something which is hard to understand for Jews in this country. The degree of assimilation is infinitely higher here and nowadays its also the degree of mixed marriages. Is much higher here than it ever was in Germany. After all the number of German Jews at the peak was only 540,000, that's all. Half a million, including men, women and children. So the majority didn't intermarry and some did, et cetera. Well anyway, so much about the synagogue. I should add of course that the *Kultusgemeinde*, the organized community, built not only synagogues but also old age homes, hospitals, schools, there were parochial schools for those who wanted to attend it. But the majority did not, but attended chiefly afternoon religious schools and some had religious instruction like Christians also as part of the regular secular school. So the schools were, I must say, very good, they were very good. Even the afternoon school, not that every child went to an afternoon school, but they were available.

JL: Let me just ask you a question about the Austritt Orthodox. Would you say that they were comparable to the eastern European Hasidim?

MS: Yeah, no. That is just it. There were no Hasidim really. They were not, maybe they didn't feel at home there. They were like, yeah, they were, for the most part, Agudas and Mizrahi. I mean on that order. But they were not Hasidim and they were not Eastern European. That is the funny part. Now, for instance, in Frankfurt, the dynasty I must also say was Breuer because some, I believe, came to Manhattan and to New York. Also Breuer, the Breuer orthodoxy. And the Hildesheim Orthodoxy in Berlin. And then there was in Hamburg a Karlbach Orthodoxy. They were by far the most Orthodox. Now there was also in Germany *ein Allgemeiner Rabbiner Verband*, meaning, an overall organization of all the rabbis, containing Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, minus these, these *Austritt*. They

would not belong to it. Now for many years Leo Baeck was the president of this common rabbinical organization, but there was also a organization of Liberal rabbis, you know, Conservative, separately. But they worked by and large harmoniously together. The sense of competition both between rabbis and between congregations that prevails in this country simply did not exist. There was nothing to compete about. But in this country again it cannot be otherwise because here the principle of separation of state and church prevails. Christians have the same system. It cannot be otherwise. The congregation here is really, so to say, a religious club. You may join, you may not join, you may this and that. Naturally the position of the rabbi was far more pleasant than it is in this country. Because he didn't depend on every Tom, Dick and Harry or Schmul or Heim and Rueben, neither financially nor in his position. He couldn't tell him what to preach, what to teach. Surely people are critical, but extremely respectful and it was indeed a very, very good setup, unique in the world. Unique in the entire world and will never come again. That was really the influence. It was caused not by Jewish benevolence or ingenuity, it was a German setup. It was German and the Jews just fell in line with the structure.

JL: So you became a Berliner rabbi in 1932?

MS: Now that is, let's see, absolutely correct. Now let me say this, yes, I became but I wasn't appointed for lifetime immediately. That came after maybe five, six years. But the Berlin leadership, I mean the community, they were all lay leaders. I mean the leaders were not rabbis. Sort of didn't want to let me get out of Berlin. To brag a little bit, I had offers from Frankfurt, from the Liberal group and from Munich I remember, from Nuremberg and from other places, larger cities, but of course I was a little spoiled and said why should I leave Berlin because most rabbis went to smaller communities first and I sort of liked it. In fact, very much liked it, surely...

JL: Could you describe a bit for me what *Fasanenstrasse* or *Prinzregentenstrasse* look like?

MS: Look like. Well, let me begin with the *Fasanenstrasse*. The *Fasanenstrasse* was built in the most fashionable part of Berlin near the fashionable Kurfürstendamm, which is the street in Berlin on

Berlin west side. Not too far from the fashionable Protestant Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtnis-Kirche, which is well known, quite a monument, which was bombed out during the second war and in part rebuilt. The Fasanenstrasse was founded in 1912 by the then rather prosperous Jewish community. Was a beautiful structure with three big domes. Had a seating capacity of about thirty-six, thirty-eight hundred, a beautiful balcony all around, beautiful bimah, beautiful everything. And I should mention that the inside, what do they call it, *Kachel*, what is *Kachel*? Tiles, tiles, were donated by Kaiser Wilhelm the II. And Kaiser Wilhelm the II, shortly after the opening of the synagogue, he came as a visitor to the synagogue. Now that I wasn't. . . was a child then, I was nowhere in Berlin even. That of course was quite something for the proud German Jews and they really felt at home and they meant it, the goyim. Yeah, it is incredible [sounds like: what followed]. So, the synagogue I think I mentioned had three big cupola. It was rather difficult, the acoustics was not too good to speak there. Very difficult. Very difficult it was. And poor Baeck spoke there and he didn't have a good speaking voice and he could hardly be heard and he never had loud speakers. I know, why not. That was foolish. But anyway, they didn't exist. So it was a beautiful, elaborate synagogue, there are many pictures of it left. When the synagogue was destroyed during the Kristallnacht I was present, I saw it burn out totally, the inside and on the very same place where the synagogue stood, the synagogue itself burned down and the ruins were erased and removed and after the war the remnants of the community built there a Jewish community house, which is in existence and the central place for the gathering of Jews. There's a library, there's social events and everything is going on there, minus no synagogue. The synagogue is now elsewhere but not there and whoever built it used the entrance to the synagogue, a beautiful portal, and incorporated that into this new community house and a few other little remnants. But it is located on the very same place at which the synagogue was. The synagogue Prinzregentenstrasse, which is also on the west side in a little more modern area, some sort of suburb was, as I said earlier, the very last synagogue ever built on German soil [knocks on table]. I was present when the synagogue was dedicated. Baeck gave the dedication sermon and naturally I thought

I mentioned in every synagogue we had a permanent, professional cantor. In every synagogue. They had a professional choir and everything; a choir director. Everything of the best and the finest.

MS: The synagogue *Prinzregentenstrasse* as I said was the newest one, it was a circular building. Circular. Also with a balcony but, as I said, it was the only one where men and women were sitting together. There was a certain group of Jews who liked that and they promoted that. But that was very unimportant. It was beautifully built, marble and all this. Was very large, too. I think it was 32 or 34 hundred seating capacity and when the synagogue was destroyed I was present for that too because the Jewish, there was always a Jewish sexton who lived right on the premises, called me during the night at two o'clock on the phone, rabbi, the synagogue is burning and this came out of the blue sky. I got up and ran to synagogue, I didn't live too far from there, and saw the synagogue burning and the Nazis pouring oil over the interior and the firemen standing by on the outside protecting the adjoining buildings and pouring water on those buildings that they wouldn't catch the heat and also burn down. The total inside of the synagogue burned down. Totally burned down with this one tremendous cupola and the walls, I have a picture in fact of it, were not attacked, but they were still standing the next day. Now that synagogue later on was all cleared up, I mean the ruins, after the war, and the city of Berlin, which incidentally paid the Jewish postwar community for every synagogue, considerable amounts they paid as . . . not reparation, just in payment for the lots and places and all this. And then they built where the *Prinzregentenstrasse* stood a *Blindenheim*, that is a home for blind people that is administered by the city of Berlin. And this what I am saying here applies also for the other synagogues in Berlin, they were all burned down, with the exception of two. Namely, the main synagogue which is a liberal one, what we would say except for the organ, Orthodox. They all had organs, the liberal ones, it was a former conservative synagogue, a smaller one, in Charlottenberg. The street is Pestalozzistrasse and it was a Conservative synagogue that was not burned down because it was just hemmed in between buildings, which was rare. Normally they would stand free, rather beautiful but it was between buildings. Had they burned that down they would have burned down all



the rest. And this is the reason why the synagogue really was not burned down. It is not, shall we say, architecturally beautiful, but it's has all the [sounds like: appurtenances] of a synagogue. But that is now the Liberal synagogue. And then there's also in East Berlin.

**END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 1**

TAPE 8, SIDE 2

JL: You were talking about the synagogue in East Berlin.

MS: In East Berlin was at one time the largest Liberal synagogue in Germany, called *Oranienburgerstrasse*, which had a seating capacity of 4,200. It was a magnificent, just magnificent older synagogue. Not as new as the ones I mentioned in the western part of Berlin. But one time it was in the northeastern part of Berlin. That synagogue I used to, before I was through with school they used older students to help out, to assist and to preach and all this and I spoke there often, that synagogue was totally burnt out. When I saw it the last time in 1970 it was still with tremendous cupola hanging down. You were afraid the whole thing would collapse. But it was all stone, ashes, debris, ruins and all this that synagogue, that is now in East Berlin. And right next to that synagogue was at one time the central headquarters of the Jewish community, right next to the synagogue. That's where the whole Jewish leadership was. The traffic was directed, a big library and everything was centralized there. And now it is there. Crawl up three flights, dark, dinky is what is left of the East Berlin Jewish community. There's maybe an old man sitting there and he, the whole community consists of maybe of 500 people, diminishing all the time. They are subservient to the Communists of Eastern Berlin. They cannot open their mouth. They have to express themselves against Zionism. They live in a . . . they publish, however, a newsletter which I get, and which I read. It's a document of the time, of later started not throwing away but save it. It is absolutely incredible. I could talk a great deal about it. But anyway, the synagogue of course there's no Jews, but the ruins. In East Berlin they never remove ruins. That is to this day. It is just depressing. However, there was in the northern part of East Berlin, one synagogue. In fact, the one where I used to preach. The Conservative synagogue which also was between homes, private homes, and it was not destroyed. And that, the Communist East Berlin government, rebuilt for the Jews at their expense. The Jews renamed it, called it *Friedenstempel*, Temple of Peace. At one time it was named after the street, Ryckestrass, R-y-c-k-e-s-t-r-a-s-s-e. It was not the largest synagogue, it had maybe 1800 to 2000 seats and it was in the northern part of

Berlin where, as I said, where the working men lived and the poorer classes of Jews. Now that is rebuilt and that is now also a liberal synagogue. It has an organ. It never had one before. Far too large for this diminutive, dwindling Jewish congregation. So that is the place where for the East Berlin, I don't say east European. I mean not, what do you call it—East German. East Germany is not East Berlin. East Berlin is by itself. East Germany is that part which includes provinces east and north of Berlin such as the old Pomerania where I was born, the old Mecklenburg, the old Saxonia and all this. That is East Germany. The DDR, the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*. But I was talking now only about East Berlin and so there is one synagogue left. I forgot to mention that in West Berlin, in addition to the synagogue I mentioned, there's *Pestalozzistrasse*, that's the Liberal one. There are also two Orthodox synagogues. Not synagogue buildings; they meet in halls and all this for those people who prefer that type of service. Then there are again a few old folks homes in Berlin and they have their own services right in the old age home. One in the northern part and then the city of Berlin in fact recently at their expense built for Jews and old folks home of the most magnificent order at the expense of the city. Gave it to the Jews for old people to live there in a very fine western suburb of Berlin.

JL: By the way, what is the name of that newsletter that you mentioned?

MS: The name—what is it now. Well, it's called *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt*, *Jewish News Letter*.

JL: We've talked about your rabbinical service and we talked in Germany and here but we've never discussed what made you decide to become a rabbi.

MS: Well, I don't think I can really answer the question. Not that I don't want to. Every once in awhile, not too often, I've asked myself. I have a peculiar notion about it. Number one, there is no rabbinical predecessor in my family and I don't think there will be anyone in the future. So I'm an odd figure. Why did I become a rabbi? There is nothing really in the cards. My parents were observant Jews and I was raised that way. Still remember the first time when I was seven or eight years old when on a

Shabbes I jumped on a wagon, you know, of horses and I thought—I mean I did it—and I thought, I mean just . . . I was afraid my parents would see me. I was a first offender.

JL: A liberal Jew in the making.

MS: I was already and since God didn't strike me dead, I thought well maybe he is not really concerned about that part of me. But anyway, why I became a rabbi. I think if I really dig, dig very, very deep down I must say that the very same reason that some psychiatrists become psychiatrists— they want to find out what's wrong with them. And I think, I was not conscious of it, never, I was always, as I to degree am even today, very, very Jew and non-Jew conscious. I was the only Jew around and I always . . . but I said, not in those days, consciously. It always fascinated me, interested me, troubled me, why I was different from others. And I think I wanted to find out what made me different. I acknowledged the fact, I never suffered from the fact that I was a Jew. I didn't have any Jewish self-hatred, but I was extremely curious what it meant to be a tiny member of a tiny minority surrounded by vast, powerful, different majority. I think that is the basic motivation. I am, I believe in addition, shall we say, a some sort in the liberal sense, a liberal believing Jew. I have a certain sense of spirituality that is in me. It might not manifest itself in observing the mitzvot in the tradition sense. But a sense of, I have no better word, inwardness, spirituality that is in me and without it I don't think one can be a rabbi, and as the years went by, but this was already when I was on the way. I was profoundly influenced by Baeck's philosophy and theology. But that was already when I was in the process of training for the rabbinate and ever since I was 14 I wanted to be a rabbi. That is the truth. And my *Abiturzeugnis* [high school diploma] of 1925, which I still have somewhere, meaning the, in English what is it? The graduation diploma stated, as it stated always for everyone, "*Swarsensky verlässt das Gymnasium, um jüdische Theologie zu studieren*" [Swarsensky leaves high school in order to study Jewish theology]. That was when I was 18. So no doubt we were asked then, I mean everyone who graduated, what do you want to do now. And most of those who attended this type of high school, *Gymnasium*, they went

to attend the university. That was the type of high school that existed. So I do not know whether I answered your question correctly, but this is just my suspicion.

JL: After all these years of being a rabbi you mentioned to me last week that you, in your own words, were thrown out of the Wisconsin Council of Rabbis.

MS: I will not go into this. It is too depressing, not for me but for the council of rabbis.

JL: Okay. Now let me ask you something about the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

MS: No I, I have to answer the question. I mean I'm just kidding. No, I do after many years of struggle, I did change my attitude toward mixed marriages. At one time I followed the natural procedure. But when I saw what is happening, and nowadays 50 percent of all Jews marry outside of the faith, what is happening meaning that we lose them all, for the most part, I mean those who. . . and only a limited number convert, the majority doesn't for all kinds of reasons. And then I saw what it did to the families, to the parents and grandparents, how they suffered. And I saw that we lose them unless we marry them, reluctantly. But when a person goes to a doctor, he doesn't go when he is in good shape, he is ill. So I thought rabbis, at least Reform rabbis, I do respect and all those who are not doing it, who wouldn't officiate in a mixed marriage, I do, I think my approach to it. I know it's against *Halakha* but I don't observe *Halakha*. I do it for the preservation of the Jewish people. And I mean it. And I can back this up in retrospect, chapter and verse, I've salvaged, rescued, saved more people. Of course some we lose, there's just no question, that's a guarantee. But I think it's the only approach we have to the growing problem and more and more Reform rabbis of course nowadays are following the same way. So, naturally, people from Milwaukee, I know a great many, and others they asked me to assist them and normally I don't like it. I think these problems should be resolved right in the whole community but the Milwaukee rabbis, including the Reform rabbis, although I have a sneaking suspicion they would do it and one watches the other. . . anyway, and also people often, not people, rabbis, send people to me. So I have become to serve as a garbage can. It's a garbage can. I don't enjoy that at all. Not being the garbage can, that I don't mind. There's is no garbage can. When

people have to be served I do this. But in order to unburden themselves and throw up their hands and nothing want to do with them, so we lose them and I see this all the time. Yesterday I talked to, parents talked to me, whose children because of it ten years ago they both converted to Christianity out of spite and [sounds like: leading] Jews and the chaos and the agony is just awful. But anyway, to make a long story short, they must have decided, I wasn't present but I heard about it, that I cannot be a member of that [inaudible] body. So I have saved for a number of years, the \$3.00 dues and in those days when I was a member, I will even mention it to you, this organization did exactly nothing except had boring meetings and always discussed the matter of kosher meat in Milwaukee. Now I am not opposed to kosher meat, not from Milwaukee, but I am rather jealously watching my time, spending a whole day in order to help them resolve a problem for which they do not need my help and if I am very, very frank, some of the rabbis, I like the Orthodox ones, they are sincere, they are lovable old, or not so old, folks and I could go along with them, but some do not measure up to my ideal of the rabbi so I don't suffer from the exclusion greatly, but. . . okay, so I'm not a member and so that is unimportant. Is totally unimportant. I have to do what I think is right to do and I will do it regardless. So enough about that.

JL: Okay, I was beginning to ask you about the *Hochschule*. Could you tell me a little bit about the types of students that were there and their political ideologies, Zionism, no Zionism, cultural activity, the curriculum, what a typical day was like?

MS: Well the Hochschule, as I indicated earlier, was founded by Abraham Geiger, the great liberal rabbi, Jew, scholar because he had the vision that the Jews in Germany needed a type of institution for the training of rabbis chiefly, but teachers could also attend but chiefly rabbis who were both ordered in society and civilization in general, that's the reason we made them go to universities and a choir. There was almost the *Amen in der Kirche*, unspoken Ph.D., whatever that was worth. I think it's not worth too much. But anyway they existed. And at the same time study *Hochschule*. Now, the *Hochschule* had a rector, what do you call it, a guy, a president, from year to year the way the

deanship changes and there were, oh I recall them of course all personally, maybe about ten major professors. One for linguistics, Semitic linguistics, one or two for Talmud, one who taught [inaudible], one who taught history, a great historian, was Ismar Elbogen, great historian. These men were all trained in Breslau and elsewhere. There was one for homiletics, pedagogic and *midrash*. That was Baeck. And the one who taught semitic languages also taught Bible. There was Harry Turcina, who later on emigrated to Israel, he was the only Zionist in the bunch and changed his name to Tuasinaï, Professor Tuasinaï. Who incidentally is the one who was the head of the [speaks in Hebrew] in Israel and who suggested the name "Israel," not Yisrael for the new state. I always was wondering what name they would give it. So he was the one. And he completed the [sounds like: *Ozar of Ben Yehuda*], this great, what is it 15, I believe, volume dictionary of the Jewish language, of Hebrew language. So I think those were all the professors we had. The number, at least in my day, now prior to that there were others and later on there were others, now the number of students who attended was naturally rather limited. Maybe in my class there were three, four or five. The school was small, high caliber, but of course a number of congregations was limited so maybe this I really forgot a total student body in any given year was maybe 35, 25, along those lines. And you had to work very hard. The school week, we didn't have classes naturally not on Saturday and for the most part not Sunday. Although in Germany in public schools they were held Saturdays as well, like any weekday. Had a tremendous amount of homework and very, very little time for social life or anything else. There was absolutely just impossible. Also, because of the double studies we had to pursue both at the theological seminary and at the university. And we used to have two ladies who were very, very queer, very unattractive who absolutely wanted to be rabbis, but absolutely. Fräulein Jonus and Fräulein Pomerantz. They were the perennial students. Now nobody would kick them out, but they couldn't be ordained. But they wouldn't cease to attend and study in Talmud and they wanted to outshine the boys and we had a little fun with them. But they were, God forgive me, so unattractive and so [sounds like: *mies* (bad)] that they really didn't fit into the whole picture. But they were outsiders and they were tolerated by the

professors. They didn't do anything. We had one of the professors who was strictly Orthodox. He didn't belong there. He was the Hungarian, his name was Banet, B-a-n-e-t. He was so unworldly and of course in my day, so old. Once someone said to him, "Professor Banet, I have seen one of your students carrying umbrella on Shabbes." Said Banet, "That's impossible." He has never seen that. No student of his would even conceive of [laughs] carrying an umbrella on Shabbes. The one who was totally secular was the only Zionist we had, that was naturally Tuasinai, Harry Turcina. He was born in Galicia, he was an outspoken, secular Jew. He did not believe in God and he was not a good teacher, but he had great linguistic knowledge, et cetera. The other teachers were, what they used to call in those days, or later on, *Zwischen-Schichtler* [in-betweens], they were in-between. That's a good expression. They were naturally great learned Jews, loyal Jews, but they were good Germans like every one of them. And Baeck for instance was not officially a Zionist, but he was the president of the [sounds like: *Karen ka Yamef*] *Yisrael*, just the same, because he favored what he always called the greater Judaism, the total Judaism. No partisan, little Judaisms, et cetera. And the others were exactly the same. But they were ideologically, I mean, not Jewish nationalists, secularists or culturalists even. They had this typical Jewish ethos or the mold, and we had in Berlin a goodly number of what was called *Ostjuden*, east European Jews, chiefly Poles who lived in the poorer section of Berlin, the synagogue where I spoke. They liked me. I was always very accepting and I'd be very friendly. But they for the most part they were either real Orthodox or they were totally, totally secular and the third group was totally Zionist. That was all. I mean they were different from the way we were. Well, that was the *Hochschule*.

END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 2



TAPE 9, SIDE 1

JL: Were there any Zionist activities taking place in the *Hochschule*?

MS: Well, in the *Hochschule*, I mean for many years not. But later on naturally, especially when Hitler came to power. Zionist organizations formed all over the country. Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. In fact, yet in Berlin, in the leadership of the community, one horrible Jew, a rather well-to-do Jew by the name of, I don't mind to mention his name, Kareski, K-a-r-e-s-k-i. He was, what do you call these, like [inaudible], he was a . . . well this was this group of. . .

JL: Stern?

MS: Not the Stern, but extremely radical, radical Zionist. He was more radical than the regular middle of the road Zionist.

JL: Beyutar?

MS: Yeah, that group, that group. I had many public debates with him and he once called me the most gifted of his adversaries whereas I explained my theology, which really made no difference—he murdered us all, but this guy sort of cooperated with the Gestapo. And he was in favor of *Juden raus* [literally, "Jews out" - a Nazi slogan] He was totally set that Nazis are right, we don't belong there. Yeah. And this guy became part of the board of the community and then this son of a gun came to Israel. He finally left and he was a well to do, he was in the liquor field or something, a brewery, and then he came to Israel. The story goes that the Jews murdered him because he was a traitor. Such a traitor, it was *gefährlich* [dangerous]. I had to fear for my life that he would announce me to the Gestapo. *A gefährlicher Bruder* [a dangerous brother]. This, what was his first name, Kareski. I mean all kinds of types, you know, come to the fore. Yeah, that existed. But there was also in the western part of Berlin not far from the synagogue where the headquarters of the Zionist organization, which did exist in Meineckestrasse 10, there were very, very excellent men. Very dedicated really, heart and soul, who cultivated the youth aliyah and all the other things. Also, the transfer of money. Jews could take earlier money out, bring it to Israel, take it along. They published a very fine weekly paper called,

yeah, *Jüdische Rundschau*. And the author of, in my day, not the author, the editor of the paper, was Robert Weltsch who was a well known name in England and in Israel and Zionist circles, great, excellent writer. He was the one who really helped stiffen the backbone of German Jews. He wrote in the early Hitler years from '33 to maybe '37 excellent articles. Naturally not against the government, but, always... his most famous article, "*Tragt ihn mit Stolz, den Judenstern*," ["Wear It Proudly, the Yellow Star"], a very, very famous article. Beautifully written, et cetera, by which he, as I said, strengthened the moral of German Jews. Naturally the division of Zionists and non-Zionists became immaterial, totally, totally, immaterial, absolutely. So therefore I speak of that period respectfully because after all ideologically we could differ. But for practical purposes we didn't differ. I mean I worked with them and all this sort of thing. But nobody of course, including the Zionists, I mean the ideological Zionist, anticipated that a catastrophe would be so horrible the way it worked out, nobody. Not the greatest pessimist, not the greatest pessimist. There was not one could say, yeah, it isn't good, we have to get out, but this, about this murder orgy that of course nobody anticipated, couldn't. Well, there we are.

JL: One more question about the about the *Hochschule*. Were there some cultural activities that took place? What types?

MS: So what is a cultural activities? You mean lectures or, I mean lectures yes, but all geared to the study. I mean not cultural, not. . . cultural activities did exist in Berlin. There was a *Jüdischer Kulturbund* [Jewish Cultural Association], but outside of this institution. This was strictly studying.

JL: Now you personally, what political and cultural clubs did you belong to in Germany?

MS: Not too many as far as I remember. What is a political club? Politically to none. I was neither a democrat nor republican nor *was weiss ich* [what do I know?]. Like Jews, I always elected [voted?] as little as, we had to do with elections, actually. It was just not comparable to here. This I really forgot. I don't think I elected ever . . . oh yes, later, yeah, yeah. Later on after the Second [sic: First] World War under the Weimar Republic, there were elections of parties and naturally the Jews, in the great

majority, elected the Liberal party. I mean as they do all over and I did the same. If you were a little more affluent would vote for the *Deutsche Volkspartei*, which was a little bit more economically to the right. Cultural organizations, well I remember I was a member of B'nai B'rith that I remember. And all kinds of Jewish organizations, I can't even remember the names anymore.

JL: *Zentralverein*?

MS: Oh! I'm glad you mentioned that. Yes indeed. I was not only a member but in later years I was a member of the *Hauptvorstand des Zentralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* [main board of the central association of German Jewish citizens] . . . Berlin West—what was the street. Olivaer Platz. So, yes, yes, yes, I was a convinced *Zentralvereiner*. Which is comparable to the American Jewish Committee in this country. It's about the same and to the ADL. And they did basically the same work. Yes, I was very much active in that and as I said to the end I was a member when things really got tough. Yes, yes, yes.

JL: How about B'nai B'rith?

MS: Well, I was not greatly active in B'nai B'rith. I mean there was no time for it, but I was a card carrying, a dues paying member. And well let me say only when it comes to B'nai B'rith, how different B'nai B'rith in Germany is from America. The first place, you . . . B'nai B'rith I think was a little bit exclusive. You just couldn't apply for membership and be accepted. You had to have a good record of moral and business behavior. Someone who did not was not accepted. The meetings were held in a rather formal way. My father was a member too. And you wouldn't believe it, when people went to special meetings they would have striped pants, dark coat and *ein Zylinder auf dem Kopp* {top hat}. There was a time when I wore *Zylinder* also. I will not go into that, it sounds so ridiculous in retrospect. On the holidays, high holy days, you wouldn't go without top hat, including this gentleman. The meetings were held rather, I mean, formally with all the trimmings, this and that and the other thing and lectures, an occasional social event. Occasional, not very much, maybe a dance or a what not. But for the most part they were really concerned with Jewish affairs, helping other Jews in other

countries, or with, to a degree I suppose. I didn't attend to many meetings, I didn't have time for that. We took up probably political matters too, but I came to this country and came to Chicago initially, a gentleman whom I met, an old doctor from Hamburg, I was unmarried, a little lonesome and unemployed, said, why don't you come along with me, I'm going to go to a B'nai B'rith meeting tonight. I said, yes, I would like to. I went to this B'nai B'rith meeting and I couldn't believe it. It was not a meeting of any kind, but the B'nai B'rith organization in Chicago sponsored a boxing match. *Two Leute haben sich in die Fresse geschlagen* [two people hit each other right on the kisser]. We paid 50 cents to raise it for some [laughs] good purpose, whatever it was, and the sight of it is nauseating, say this, and the guy had to [inaudible] and [inaudible] this, that. I said, such a thing I had never seen in my life. In other words, B'nai B'rith is, shall we said, more democratized and more popular in this country that it was there. Where it really was . . . In Berlin we had a building on their own, very elegant with kosher business in there and a restaurant in there and everything very, very fancy and very, very fine. And this was the same in all communities, yeah, the B'nai B'rith was a highly respected organization.

JL: By the way, in our preinterview, the original preliminary interview, you said to me Germans are not joiners. I assume that's . . .

MS: Well, this is what I meant. In this, Americans are joiners. That doesn't mean every American joins, but here because of separation of state and church, because of the democratic spirit, because of the desire to promote causes, be it political, cultural or whatever it is, people are trained that they belong to clubs, to organizations, you know. They go in order to promote whatever cause there is. The Germans never had this because of the German tradition. They were more or less told what to do. You belong to a congregation, oh wonderful. You belong to this, okay. But this individual, dues paying, you know, and to belong to a political party and all this, this changed. This is true after the Second World War to a limited degree. And now it has changed even more after the new German democratic constitution of 1949 things have changed. In other words, they are now taking more individual

initiative, which is the American way of doing. So, in that sense they are not, not great, or were not, joiners. I mean there were no causes. There were causes but it was all. . . there was no PTA let's say or anything of the sort because the government controlled the school and no father or mother would go up and say let's have this, this or that and in other respects. And nobody would dare to tell the city government to put in a new street or a new bike path, you know, or this just didn't exist. Everything was there. They're great in obeying, the Germans, for better and for worse. Yeah. And the Jews the same.

JL: We've heard a lot Jewishly about Berlin. Can you tell me a little bit something about what the city was like generally?

MS: Well, Berlin was the capital of the German Reich. It has a long and noble history going back two, three hundred years and even more, even more. The time of the *grossen Kurfürsten* [Great Elector] so to speak, of the 17th century, an old city. And there are older parts and there all kinds of neighborhoods in Germany, the center part is very beautiful, that's the west. At one time the central part extended also to the north and the Jews for the most part lived in the northern part, the eastern part and mainly in the western part of Berlin. And then Berlin, like other cities, has any number of suburbs. Affluent suburbs and then suburbs which were totally, shall we say, rural, agricultural where people have trailers and little *lauben*, *Gartenlauben*, you know, many which were more in the eastern, southeastern, other parts of Germany way back. Berlin has beautiful museums, the famous of which is the Pergamon Museum, which is now in East Berlin, with tremendous excavations of Greece, Rome, from all over. Berlin has beautiful music high schools. Not high schools, music academies, tremendous for those who study music. Many Americans, you know, went to Germany. This morning's paper indicated that a gentleman was a music professor in Berlin in his younger days, went to Berlin to study. And many came, many came. So did many Americans who studied medicine, philosophy, theology. Berlin was really the seat in Europe of culture, which makes it so depressing to realize what happened to all the culture and what influence it had on the moral and the ethical behavior of the

Germans. But all this existed. Somebody has written and said that the German professors lived life in an Indian reservation, totally by themselves. Which was true. We were excellent, outstanding, in the laboratories and the libraries. Outstanding, hardworking, scholars of the first order. And when it comes to the social and political life they didn't take any interest in that. Totally divorced. Now that's different here. Although it applies to many professors here too. They don't give a hoot. They stick to math and that's rest. And yet the climate is different. So Germany had all kinds of individual like the Technische Hochschule in Charlottenburg. Outstanding research institutes. It had the great, what do you call it, the *Planck*, was this great research institute for physics, for mathematics, just outstanding. Where Einstein studied and taught, [Max Planck Institute?] and many, many others. People really came from all over Europe. I must say chiefly really before my time because I was in Berlin already when things, you know, got Hitlerized, you know. But prior to that the Jews felt at home like nowhere else ever in the world, really. Not because they fooled themselves. They were accepted, that's true. And they accepted themselves and regarded themselves as part of it because the German culture is tremendously attractive to Jews. Tremendously.

JL: Do you think they felt more at home there than they do here?

MS: Yes. There's just no question about it. Oh yes. Here, it has to do . . . well, there's many factors. Now Baeck always used to say this, that's one factor, *ein Jude hat mehr Heimatliebe als Vaterlandsliebe* [*a Jew has more love for his home than love for his fatherland*]. That is—and that's true—maybe a Jew, because of our fate of our history we are pleased, delighted, satisfied, inspired by having a home that we don't have to wander the way it has always been our fate. So after the emancipation came and all the rest, then the Jews were finally accepted as equal citizens. What a relief for a Jew, at long last. I felt the same way, et cetera. All these medieval days, you know, all this is over. So a Jew, Baeck said, maybe he doesn't have, to the same degree, this fierce, national love of the fatherland with all these *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*. But he loves the home. By home I don't mean the home he lives in, the house, but the country, the climate, the environment and all of this. And Germany's a beautiful

country too. Certain parts are beautiful than others. But to someone who's at home makes no difference whether it has forest or trees or lakes or oceans or whatnot. So, that's one reason. Then I think that's a psychological reason. Then, in this country you find, naturally this country was made out of immigrants of some 40 Old World nations, so the people live a little more in an enclave here. The Jews amongst Jews, the Irish still stick together, the Catholics stick together, the Amish and Dutch; British and Wasp and this and that. Which is good. I think it's a safety valve for all of us, the plurality. Yet the Jew also feels he is not part of the majority. He always feels different in this country. Which all of this is very naturally. In Germany, you wouldn't believe it, he didn't feel different. That's a peculiar part, maybe you can say he talked himself into it. He didn't want to. It was wishful thinking, yes and no. Yes and no. For generations and generations he was accepted and he felt accepted. Naturally there's a smoldering anti-Semitism wherever Jews are. Under the best of circumstances and under the best of Christians. They can't help that, that's imbibed with the mother milk from the New Testament on. From the Gospel of John they got it, et cetera. The churches did their part in it. Now in Germany, to convert was a very effective means of being totally integrated. Some of the grandchildren of Moses Mendelssohn converted. Why did they? Because he had the burden of the Middle Ages to such a degree they were fed up. Henri Heiden, who converted also, he laughed about it. He said, conversion is the entrance ticket to the modern civilization in order to get a ticket. Meaning, if you want to become a professor, initially you could. As a Jew you couldn't. That came later on. You had to convert whether you believed in the stuff or not. Now, don't exaggerate the idea as it is often done of conversion. Relatively few converted, but there were some. Like Mendelssohn-Bartholdi, the poet, et cetera. I visited in fact in Berlin a descendant of Mendelssohn who was converted, a lady, very fine, very proud of Mendelssohn, but in the course of time they have become Christians. Not great believers but it was the thing to do. But only for a tiny uppercrust. The average Jew had no aspirations. But it's an old story. The more affluent a Jew becomes and often more, at least in Germany, the more intelligent he becomes, the more he got together with non-Jews, you know, and wanted to be one of

them. Now, whether we approve it or don't approve is a different story. In this country conversion has no effect whatsoever. Wherever Jews . . . because here in this country a Jew is regarded a Jew not by religion but as a member of an ethnic group, period. So he *er bleibt ein Jude* [he remains a Jew]. And it hasn't helped anyone in his promotion in obtaining better jobs, not in this country. The structure is different. So, which is better, which is worse—I don't know. This is the way it is and this is the way it was there.

JL: I'd like to just probe a little further. I don't know whether this really applies to the Jewish German community. You talked a little bit about the Liberal and the Orthodox communities from the viewpoint of the synagogues and the rabbis. What was the relationship among the general congregants, did they mix, the liberal and orthodox?

MS: Oh yeah. There was no . . .

JL: No separation?

MS: There was no problem. Some families, you know, went there, one's here, they got mixed up. That really didn't play a part. The only group that was extremely exclusive and isolationist were the Austritt Orthodox. They wouldn't marry anyone, they wouldn't . . . had their own cemeteries. We all had joint cemeteries. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy. *Die schwere Artillerie* [the heavy artillery]. And the less I had to do with them the better I liked it. Well that is not very kind, but the honest to goodness truth. Because they always looked down, you see. The Orthodox here they do that too. Even the *kleinen Schnuckels* [kids] in a congregation, you know, they look down, "[inaudible] Swarsensky, what kind of Jew is he?" You know, I mean that doesn't bother me but I mean the orthodoxy have an amount of arrogance of they have to be right, they are absolute. . . and the Christians the same thing amongst their own group, you know. That's the reason any kind of Orthodoxy is obnoxious to me, ideologically. Ideologically. Individually, *lass sie alle gesund werden* [inaudible] [let them all be well]. [laughs]

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 1



TAPE 9, SIDE 2

JL: In recent talks together we talked of the anti-Semitic legacy of Luther and the political climate that made such virulent anti-Semitism possible in Germany. And now I'd like to ask you how you and your fellow students at the seminary, and later on your congregants, reacted to the growing anti-Semitic attacks in Germany. As early as the teens and the twenties, even before you went to the seminary.

MS: You mean in high school? To the best of my recollection we were in those years, this would have been approximately around 1920, I don't think we noticed any overt manifestations of anti-Semitism, at least not where we were. True, there were, I mean, the Hitler spirit was not around, at least not in any organized fashion. Naturally wherever non-Jews are, especially in school, there were, I remember vaguely, the natural little fistfights or whatever. And yet I do not remember that I ever got into any particular trouble, that the teachers were anti-Semitic. Our teachers in high school were all anti-Catholic. That I remember most distinctly. They were strict Lutherans and they spoke of the *ultra montans*, which as a child we didn't understand. It's a term that goes back to Bismarck. I understand it means in Latin, *Jenseits*, across the mountain, the Alps. And in those days they would always talk about those dangerous people across the Alps, meaning the Popes, the Pope and all this. This I remember very distinctly. We had several teachers who just thrive on this sort of thing. And also there were no Catholic students around in high school. They were Lutherans as I said. But they did not, in anyway, of course I was a minority of a minority, in anyway to my knowledge attack us or insult us. If we did are work and for the most part, my brother and I and another guy, were pretty good students. Except that my brother I believe I mentioned this once before, excelled in athletics and would take on anyone in a fistfight or in any other fight, who would ever say a word against any Swarsensky or a Jew or against anybody. And that of course for some is a measure of, a source of respect [laughs]. Physical force engenders greater respect than all of the pamphlets of the ADL or of anyone else. So this is a vague recollection. But this goes back and as I say to the high school days, the student days. In college, that's a different story because then of course the initial Hitler spirit had already crept into

the situation and then students were divided for or against him. But even then, meaning before 1933, so between 19 . . . I graduated from high school in 1925, and Hitler came to power in 1933, those are eight years. At least in Berlin I didn't see a great deal of the battles, political battles going on.. They were chiefly fought in Bavaria. The Hitler *Putsch* was in Bavaria and the fights between Communists and Socialists and democrats and the Bavarian Catholic center party, they were all fought in Bavaria. They was away from where I was so I read about it in newspapers and yet our interest in politics in general, of Jews too, of all Germans, was minimal. I mean minimal as compared to this country where everybody is involved and exposed to interest in the political happenings. But there the general spirit was one of total, not apathy, but division between the things you did everyday and what was done by the few politicians who lived in a separate world, all of them on their own, of course the bane of the German system. But we Jews, at least the younger fellows, we sort of were infants by this spirit too. So my answer to your question is a rather vague, very vague, because I do not have any definite recollection of it.

JL: Well perhaps let me refer to the incident of the assassination of Walter Rathenau and attacks on Jews living in Grenadierstrasse and Drakonerstrasse and in '23. Oh I think in '31, that's quite a bit later Erev Rosh Hashannah Jews are returning from Kurfürstendamm, assaulted by Nazi gangs. Didn't those things stir up any . . .

MS: Yes, that's correct, you refresh my memory. The assassination of Walter Rathenau. I know exactly where I was. I was home in the place where I was born when we heard about it, read about it, et cetera. Naturally that upset my parents more than it did me. What year was it, '23?

JL: Twenty-two Rathenau and the . . .

MS: Twenty-two.

JL: . . . attacks on the Jews. Yeah.

MS: But I was 16 years old, but that I do remember. That depressed us greatly and made us more conscious of the situation in general and the Jewish situation in particular, that is true. But I was only 16 years old really then.

JL: And even those isolated attacks on Jews, did they have any effect in Berlin, in Grenadierstrasse and Drakonerstrasse ?

MS: Yeah, yeah. I know exactly where that is.

JL: It was in '23.

MS: That was in '23? Yeah. But again, I was only 17 years old, plus I was not in Berlin then. I was away from it and I, yes, I do remember this and I heard my parents speak about it, but certainly I didn't interpret this as prefacing an anti-Semitic wave of outburst against Jews.

JL: And then the appointment of Goebbels as *Gauleiter* in Berlin.

MS: When was that?

JL: Twenty-six.

MS: [inaudible].

JL: Do you recall the increases in anti-Jewish rabble-rousing? Did that affect you at all?

MS: Yes, then I was already in Berlin, I mean in my first year in college. Twenty-six, so I was 20 years old, yes. But I mean in terms of affecting me, it had no— it's foolish to say this—direct effect on me. Nobody harmed me, nobody expelled me, nobody did any violence towards me. Naturally as a Jew you identify with other Jews and it has a depressing effect, but I must admit that we always were nurtured by the hope and upheld by it that this whole thing would blow over, absolutely. I believed it straight through 1937, through the *Anschluss*. I was convinced, as were so many, in fact most German Jews felt that this is one other episode, slow, slow struggle for the republic.

JL: Now this may be an unfair question, but after those what we now call foreshadowings, how did you and the populace feel when Hitler was appointed chancellor? Did you still have that feeling of ease?

MS: Not ease, but surely the fear, the apprehension became aggravated. Yet, at the same time, wishful thinking of course, also the hope that the thing would blow over. Give him a chance people would say, he's going to break his neck. How long can that fellow stay in power, alright? He did stay in power for 14 years.

JL: And in further things like the murder of [inaudible] and suicide of Rudolf Masse, that also, you kept up the same kind of reaction?

MS: Yes, foolish hope.

JL: And further, the actual book burnings in May, 1933. How did you feel about that?

MS: It made me very wild. This was in the spring I remember, now then my recollection get a little better. Surely I gave a Shavuot sermon I remember. I talked about the book burnings, which in those days was still possible. Meaning we dared to do it, others no doubt too, and then I made the great profound statement that if Hitler wants to burn Jewish books he would have to burn the Old and New Testament also. That was even printed in the Berlin *Gemeindeblatt*, that was the paper for the congregation. That was in '36?

JL: Thirty-three.

MS: Thirty-three. Well, then I was through it already, graduated in '32, yeah. But still it was too early to open my eyes. Or not violent enough, too theoretical.

JL: What can you tell me about the telegram sent by the Präsidium [chair] of the *Gemeinde* in March '33, sent under orders from Göring to the American Jewish Committee to the affect that untrue reports about atrocities and boycotts against the Jewish community were being disseminated in the U.S.? Do you recall that?

MS: [Yes.] The German term for it is *Greuelnachrichten*, [horrible news] that's the official term. *Greuelnachrichten*.

JL: What happened then, what kinds of things did the community . . . were you at meetings?

MS: Well, in those days I was still young. When was that, in '34 maybe?

JL: March '33.

MS: March '33. In those days I was not, shall we say, involved, that was much later in all these matters personally. I knew about it, heard about it, but I was still a beginner and so I didn't have a hand in it I just heard about it, read about it, and we thought this part of the Jewish *golus*<sup>19</sup> situations, nothing we can do of it, do about it at that time. But still entertained hope that all this whole, ridiculous nonsense will not last.

JL: Alright, you were the rabbi there, but did the Jewish community members, just the plain people, know of the directive given by the government to the *Gemeinde* to say that this was false?

MS: You mean the directives given by what? By?

JL: By the fact that the *Gemeinde* listened to Göring and wrote to the American Jewish Community, sent a telegram to the effect that these were . . .

MS: *Greuelnachrichten*

JL: Yeah. What did the general population know about this?

MS: Well, what did they know about it? Some I'm sure in larger cities knew more about it than others. The problem from then on was always one of communication. How could you communicate with the people. The best communication, since you wanted to be sure, but still the best were initially in the early years in the synagogue. In the synagogue because then people ran and came, crowded the synagogue and they wanted to hear and whatever little could be intimated if not clearly and overtly stated was that from the pulpit. But there were still in those days good Jewish publication, of course by far the best was the Zionist one, *Jüdische Rundschau*, published by Robert Weltsch, who took the most I would say dignified Jewish stand, namely start trying to strengthen the backbone of the Jews, Jewish pride. Wear it with pride, the Jewish Star was the headline and all this. Little emotional. While the other publication, which was from the literary point of view more valuable, namely the *C.V. Zeitung*. The publication of the *Central Verein*, Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish

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<sup>19</sup> Ashkenazi pronunciation of the Hebrew word *galut*, meaning exile.

Faith. This was my line. They had a much harder stand. They were not Zionists because they tried to inform Jews and they did in the beginning and they tried also to shall we say console Jews that the hope that the righteous will thrive like a palm tree and justice will prevail. They did not in any way recommend emigration to Israel, at least in those days.

JL: So those days, excuse me, meaning the early thirties?

MS: [Yes.] So they were the quote, "*Zwischenschichtler*," [in-betweens], they were always in between. They were Germans, they were Jews, both very consciously, and of course they couldn't conceive that this was to happen. But they communicated. Those were the two major sources of communication among Jews and for Jews and naturally they had both had a tremendously difficult task of writing articles in the face of the enemy. But they did it in those days, until of course they were dissolved by government edict. I don't know the exact year, but I would think in the subsequent years they were forbidden to publish.

JL: You said that you were able to talk as much as possible from the pulpit and then there were these newspapers. But were you and the other rabbis able, on a personal level, to appease people or to tell them to run?

MS: Run?

JL: Either way, appease or tell them to run.

MS: Yeah, yes, I mean, one of my colleagues, contemporaries, though seven years older than I am was Joachim Prinz, who was a prominent rabbi in Berlin of the younger generation and Prinz was an outspoken Zionist. Outspoken Zionist. And he would recommend a very, I remember, one sermon he gave or heard on *Blut und Boden* [blood and soil], *Halakha* [Jewish law]. So he talked in Nazi terms. I mean not Nazi, in nationalistic, Jewish nationalistic terms and there were other Jews who resented that terribly. But others went for it and Prinz preached emigration to Israel. But immediately, but later on, except he himself emigrated to Israel. People resented that too and there was bitter infighting. I never participated. I respected him, I respected the point of view. I mean it's a point a view. Who

knows, who knows. So, he was the one. The other rabbis were all older, all older, they stayed out of this whole business and never talked political or practical terms. They interpreted the weekly [inaudible] [laughs]. So, he and I, we were those who were most exposed and best known. We were the youngest in those days and the responsibility was just great and terrible, terrible, terrible. But I, like Baeck and others, I held to the C.V. [*Central Verein*] line which naturally was foolish. Deceptive in retrospect, impractical and what not. But he could not simply conceive that what happened and was in the process of happening that that was possible. That is the only excuse I have. It was so out of the ordinary because the Middle Ages were gone so long already that we just couldn't conceive that the real Middle Ages would come back again. Absolutely not. And people sometimes say now, how can you be so short-sighted. I said now, what does it mean to be short or long sighted in America at the present. Now you tell me. You tell me what's going to happen in three years? We didn't know either. And of course if the status quo is pleasant as it was, as it is here, then you have even less reason for predicting doom. Alright.

JL: But things got worse of course and legislation against the Jews was constantly tighter and worse. Then how did people feel, you specifically and your congregants?

MS: Well, I would say after the *Anschluss* of Österreichs [invasion of Austria] which must have been in early '37.

JL: Thirty-eight.

MS: Thirty-eight? Well, could be. Well, then I had given up hope, too. Yeah. And most people also.

JL: And the Nuremburg Laws, did people, what did people do?

MS: That was a, that was a . . .

JL: What kinds of things were people saying finally when those were passed?

MS: Well, it was. . .

JL: Still quite early, yeah.

MS: Well, it passed. Well, everything was apt to make you more pessimistic and inject greater hopelessness into the total situation and make even people who never thought of emigration look for affidavits and visas and ways of getting out, digging up old relatives in the United States.

JL: And then I really, I know what your answer will be, but further it was always getting worse and when the name Sara and Israel had to be put on I.D. cards and on passports. Were people still complacent then?

MS: We were not, I mean complacent is not the right word. They were not complacent. They were horribly, simply horribly depressed because that's a symbol of inequality and not only inequality, but dehumanization and all the rest. In other words, all the efforts toward emancipation, they were cancelled. So nobody could be complacent except there's nothing we can do about it. This is if somebody tells you my friend you're having cancer. So what do you do? So what can we do? Go to another doctor, have a second opinion, run around, this, that. Yeah, those situations arise.

JL: What happened in March 1938 when the Jewish community was deprived of its status as a public corporate body and had no more right to collect the community dues? What happened then?

MS: That was a terrible, terrible blow because then the Jewish community was totally ghettoized in a sense that they had to establish their own administration, their own function. They had to raise their own taxes, which up until that time were raised, the Jewish community taxes through and by the government and all this was out. In other words, the Jewish community was no longer regarded quote *eine Körperschaft des öffentlichen*, as a body of public law. And there were 120 years of effort, they were just nullified. That was for me too, who believed so much in the emancipation, a terrible, a terrible blow. So then we had to go about to establish our own network of schools.

END OF TAPE 9, SIDE 2



TAPE 10, SIDE 1

MS: Yes. Then all of the children had to be taken out. In fact, they were expelled from public schools and the Jewish community, under the aegis of the *Reichsvereinigung*, That is not a local, but a national Jewish organization headed by Baeck, they had to establish their own schools. Public schools, high schools, et cetera. There were enough Jewish teachers around, those who taught in public schools. But they also established a teaching training center where younger teachers were trained. There were not enough teachers available. But for awhile those schools were in fact rather good, in their quality. Good teachers, good student bodies, and they acted and worked under the supervision of course of the government. So they couldn't do exactly what they wanted to do, but they didn't get any subsidies. The Jews had to raise their own funds, but they still did it on the same basis on which at one time the *Kultussteuer*, the tax for the community or the congregation were raised mainly on the basis of income tax except the Jews had to pay it directly to the Jewish community. So for awhile, that functioned and again, some people did believe that it was possible to remain and exist in Germany under the circumstances. Said, well if this is the way it has to be. The real blow of course for Jews came not from needling. They cannot sit on park benches and all this sort of thing. It was when they were gradually eliminated from the economic life. Goebbels had said, let us treat the Jews like a rose. We don't harm them, we don't touch them, but we don't water them. So to dry the Jews out meaning no jobs, out of jobs, so for awhile they again, like the school, were doing business amongst themselves. Manufacture this, that for their needs. But that was of course something you didn't hope for, but came. [loud noise]. Starvation. My parents in Berlin could not have existed had it not been for a Christian lady who shared some of her food stamps or whatever with them and bought them stuff. So in fact, this lady is still alive. I correspond with her, I met with her in Berlin and I send her things, and I've done this for quite some time. And a very plain woman. Very plain. Not highly literate person, but they were always here and there—good-hearted, plain goyim. That's...strange in life, isn't it? I mean you have this here, too. All over the world. So you don't have to be a Ph.D. necessarily to be a good

person. There are good individuals around. But whatever they did, they did at the peril of their lives.

Ja.

JL: What does *Jüdische Kultusvereinigung Berlin* mean?

MS: You mean then or now?

JL: Then. Was that. . . what did that name have to do with the closing of the Jewish community? That is the deprivation of the status as a public corporate body.

MS: I think that was a term, after the Jewish community ceased to be a *Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechtes*, meaning an organization of public law which had the right to tax and all kinds of semi-government function. Then it became, again what it was at one time, an association for the purpose of cultivating *Kultus*. The word *Kultus* means just religious ritual. That's what it is and nothing else. So they were permitted to have their synagogues and that's all. They could do whatever they wanted to do. Well, not totally. They were supervised, this, that, but, so their function shrunk, you know, it says if you want to pray you can pray, but stay out of everything else.

JL: What was it called before being a Jewish community? Before it was called the *Kultusvereinigung*?

MS: The term was always *Gemeinde*. The *Gemeinde* is a voluntary association. The *Gemeinde* is something more organic. Wait a minute...in German there are two terms. Wait a minute. Well, yeah, *Gemeinde* is, has legal status, it has the power to legislate with tax people, all this. *Jüdische Gemeinde*. *Jüdische Gemeinde* is more than Jewish congregation. *Jüdische Gemeinde* is the overall organization what some people have said [speaks in Hebrew]. And yet [sounds like: *negila*] is not wide enough either. So, but the Jewish, the Jews had not become a *Gemeinde* until—I don't know exactly. I think the times of approximately, Bismarck's. So what I regard as of such tremendous importance, that was relatively of recent vintage, you know. In the Middle Ages the Jews were absolutely nothing in the eyes of society. They were just pariahs. They couldn't organize, they could do whatever they wanted to do and nobody gave a hoot. So there they had little shuls, I mean that's all.

JL: Now you mentioned before the *Reichsvereinigung*. How is that related to the *Kultusvereinigung*?

MS: Well the *Reichsvereinigung*, the word *Reich* means realm, literally translated, is an organization of all Jewish, but not only congregations, all over the country, *Reichsvereinigung* took care of what at one time a local communities did, building synagogues, maintaining social welfare organizations, hospitals, et cetera, the cultural life and all this. The *Reichsvereinigung* naturally, not naturally, obviously, was called into being, not so much by Jews but rather by the government as a better means of supervising what the Jews did all over the country. So at the meetings of the *Reichsvereinigung* in Berlin, over which Baeck presided, at the meetings, Kantstrasse No. 2, they were always present Gestapo supervisor. Oh yes, at every meeting. So the Jews wouldn't conspire and God knows what else. But those men went through there. They were great men, Baeck's. They were not rabbis, they were. . . I know the most, most of them I know and their children. Great men. History will never really know what they did under fire, but what fire? Under uncertainty. What uncertainty? What the next day would bring. And many—not many, but some—did stay on. They never left and then they were murdered or...they really sacrificed. Those men. That is a remarkable group. Okay?

JL: Can you just back up to 1936 for a moment. What was your reaction and that of your congregants when during the 1936 Olympics suddenly the anti-Semitic notices were temporarily removed?

MS: No, they said, "Gottseidank." [thank God].

JL: You thought it would be forever?

MS: Well, surely, if you live by this unjustified silly superficial hope that things would blow over eventually, then you select every little index as, you know, a sign of hope. But if you have the . . . I mean the obviously correct view was held by the out and out Zionists because they always had a pessimistic philosophy from the beginning. Said we can never live together so this is just another indication and so this is normal. So they psychologically they were better off. But practically we were all in the same boat, practically.

JL: You mentioned the other day that the rise of political Zionism was sparked by the rise of Nazism. What was your connection with the February 1936 German Zionist convention in Berlin and there was the question of the Nazi program taken up?

MS: At that convention?

JL: At that convention in February '36?

MS: I do not remember that I attended the convention and it is most likely that it was taken up, however, not in an overt sort of way where it was discussed maybe in the secret, not secret, old private offices or what not. Because after all their entire program was based upon the premise of Hitlerism, so they surely. Well, in those days their main function, really of the Zionist group was to encourage people to leave and help them transfer their money to Israel. And in those days I recall there were all kinds of economic schemes under the [inaudible]. People could transfer [inaudible] [sounds like: Some went to Israel, to this city, what was it called...] otherwise we couldn't have done it. So these were the main functions really of the Zionist organization. Not politically. We politically couldn't fight the Germans nor the British nor anyone.

JL: You talked about the reaction to the *Anschluss*. What about the feelings when the Sudetanland was annexed? What did people do?

MS: Nothing.

JL: Nothing. What did people say?

MS: What do we do when the Russians move into Afghanistan? I haven't taken any action on it. I just suffer in frustration and hope the government will do anything about it. So in those days the Jews couldn't do anything. They said it was terrible. Too bad. Horrible.

JL: What knowledge...

MS: We had no political clout. Now this is here I see a difference, yet absolutely no, the Jews were not a factor, you know, for the government during [inaudible]. Here, at least, in a democracy, all right, the Jews, some Jews, take up the interest of Israel, the colored people stand up for the rights of

minorities, etc. So each group is wooed by the elected officials, that's democracy. There nobody was interested, or the Jews, or the Gypsies, or anybody else would say anything, the number also was very small, what was it, one half of one percent I believe. So they had nothing of a factor to be reckoned with, in any way. Yes, something for appointment, you enter the Supreme Court in Israel, made on the basis of population composition, but there it is all homogeneous more or less and the Jews didn't represent any power factor.

JL: What knowledge did you and your congregants have of concentration camps being established from the beginning?

MS: Well, ahmm, I don't think from the very beginning, meaning Hitler established concentration camps very, very small ones, the names of which we don't even know, ever since he came to power. We heard little about them, we didn't read the newspapers about them, however, my personal knowledge came, I would say, earlier than that of my congregants. Simply because, I believe I mentioned this once before, we were called upon to bury the ashes of congregants who had been murdered and their bodies been burnt in concentration camps. But this, again, has nothing to do with the gas ovens from Poland, this came up later. So I had, not the detailed, but knowledge of concentration camps, knowing what was going on there, hard labor, and burial. So I personally didn't see that it to be wise to tell people too much about them and scare people, what's the use of scaring people in a matter that there is nothing they could do about it and anyway. But the existence of concentration camps became a matter of public information slowly and I must say that the German gentiles are correct when they say that they too did not know of their existence, because these things were not broadcast at all, because I think Hitler still had a certain respect for the overt opinion in those early days of the [inaudible] So he wasn't eager to make these things known. Of course, the closer he moved to the Kristallnacht of November '38, of course, the more these things really became a edict for the unknown and then the whole situation changed.

JL: Okay, before we get to that, I'd like to ask you what you knew of and what was your reaction to the results of the Evian conference in July of '38?

MS: That, the Evian Conference naturally the *Zwischenschichtler* [in-betweens] that we had great hope on the Evigon Conference cause they always felt, and that was a more depressed opinion that not only there were no results but as a result, some countries had shut their doors formatically to more immigrants because the whole immigration problem was called to their attention of a world-wide forum. So, again, depression.

JL: What were your feelings, and again those of your congregants, when so-called stateless Jews were expelled from Germany across the border to Poland? And things got worse.

MS: Yes. I do remember this most distinctly. It was in the fall, it was shortly before *Simchat Torah*. Most distinctly, it a terribly depressing situation. When stateless Jews, meaning those that had no German, were not German citizens, Polish citizens, citizens of no country but they all came from Poland. They were picked up and taken to the border city of, at one time I knew it, it started with "S". I can't remember this anymore. And just dumped over, over the border, totally homeless, a terribly depressing situation. And everybody identified themselves with it, but again, there was nothing you could do about it, exactly nothing.

JL: What was the reaction to the news of Herschel Greenspan [Grynszpan] deed of vengeance?

MS: Well, it was the same reaction may viewers have, if one Jew does something which might be turned against Jews, again a depressing situation. This fellow's father, was one of those who had been expelled from Germany and this young fellow got in such a rage, over his parents, to what happened to his parents that he shot the secretary of the German legation in Paris. Mr. Von Rath R-A-T-H, and naturally and Hitler used this as his excuse for burning down the synagogues.

JL: Do you recall any, or did you have a chance to observe any, non-Jewish reactions to this?

MS: No, that I do not remember. Because in those days our contact with the non-Jewish population had already been reduced to nil.

JL: Could you describe the event of Kristallnacht?

MS: Oh! Yeah, I am so to, speak an expert on Kristallnacht, that I can describe it. Actually, what I experienced....

JL: Okay.

MS: And also what I read about it too, didn't I do this once before?

JL: Not for me.

MS: I didn't?

JL: No.

MS: No.

JL: Orally, yes you did it orally. That's true in my interview.

MS: Well, at about 2 o'clock in the morning of November 10-11, no 9-10, the telephone ring and the *Shamash*, Mr. Jacob Gera, a Polish Jew who was the resident sexton of the Synagogue Prinzregentstrasse, called me, and shouted over the phone, "Our synagogue is burning." Then, I got up, ran to the synagogue, pushed my hat way down in my face so as not to be recognized by anyone, and there I saw German SS troopers pour gasoline into the interior of the building and over the walls, and also German firemen stand on adjoining buildings so as to prevent that they be burnt down and so they poured water over those buildings so as to keep them cool so to speak. And there was a mob around, I don't know how many, and shouting "Death to the Jews" and all the other things, *schönen Geschichten* [nice stories]. Then toward morning I stood there for a while, petrified, not knowing what in the world to do. There was nothing to do because the policemen had orders not to protect the buildings. And then I ran, closer toward dawn, to the other synagogue which was not too far. The Fasanenstrasse Synagogue, which at one time the Kaiser had visited and to which he had contributed his *Kadiner Kacheln*, meaning the tithe from the royal factory from a certain city of Kadin or village. And there I saw the same picture, three huge domes -- Prinzregentstrasse had only one -- huge domes, and the fire rising from the pews up into the copulas, and a horrible sight. The inside of the

synagogue was all marble and therefore it didn't burn. [pauses, sighs] So, anyway, where was I? So, then I saw that spectacle at the Fasanenstrasse, too. Following that there was perhaps the greatest feeling of depression all over the city and the community and the poor Jews just didn't know what to do. Everything was disrupted, no communication, nothing. So what people did, this was on the 10th, I think, yeah, from the 9th to the 10<sup>th</sup>, correct. What people did was just roam around and through the city and fearing that they might be arrested, because outside of Berlin, in smaller communities in the country, Jews had already been arrested during Kristallnacht, which did not take place in Berlin. There, arrests came the next evening. I should also add, that the Kristallnacht owes its name not only to the windowpanes smashed and all this, also [pauses] let's see, the next day then, the people, as I said, were roaming around... [tape ends]

**END OF TAPE 10, SIDE 1**



TAPE 10, SIDE 2

JL: Okay, the other day we were, or rather you were discussing the events of Kristallnacht and you had come to the point of the pouring of the petroleum and the fact that the marble did not burn.

MS: So, now you expect me to continue the boring details of that night and the next day and all this? Strange, I have a feeling that I did this already, but maybe not.

JL: In the preliminary interview you did mention it in superficial detail.

MS: That's all right, that's all right. Well, I do not think that the experience of the Kristallnacht in Berlin were different from that of many many other hundreds of Jewish communities. Although I have read about real atrocities in smaller communities. There were to my knowledge no murder of Jews during that night. The hurt was chiefly psychological, the experience, the, symbolically, cask in which we instantaneously buried. Now, what happened was that in Berlin all synagogues were destroyed except one, a Conservative synagogue, a small one and it wasn't burnt down because it was the only synagogue that was between adjoining apartment buildings, so if they burnt the synagogue they would have inevitably destroyed that too. That, incidentally, is the very synagogue which today is the main synagogue left in Berlin and used for liberal services, and the organ nowadays, all the others were absolutely burned down but because of the majestic structure, I mentioned in the case of the Prinzregentstrasse, that was my synagogue and also the Fasanenstrasse, and they just couldn't burn it down, it had tremendous marble columns and copula but the inside was totally gutted and in the case of the largest synagogue in Berlin, which was in the northeast part of the city that was, so to speak, the center of the Synagogue Oranienburgerstrasse that stands to this very day, with a tremendous copula still hanging over it. Why it hasn't been removed, I do not know, it could well be because that is in East Germany in East Berlin nowadays and at one time the central administration was right adjoining to that very, very beautiful old synagogue, which was older because Jews settled there first in that section of the city. Anyway, during that night ah, not only synagogues, of course, were destroyed, but also all Jewish business establishments and therefore the Kristallnacht, because the

glass panes of all Jewish shops were absolutely knocked out, there was a clutter and a noise and a clatter of everything all around. And how did the people know that they were owned by Jews? Simply because, already April 1, 1933, I think, there was a first attempt at a boycott and the Hitler government had been the name "*Jude*" written on the windowpanes. They were later on removed, but for some reason, they knew exactly where those places were and they were destroyed. As a curiosity, I may mention that I knew personally a professor, a staunch Lutheran, by the name of Professor Paul Kahle who at one time lived in Bonn, which nowadays is the capital of West Germany, who was an orientalist and worked with graduate students, Jewish students, especially on his oriental studies. He wrote many books. He and his wife went out the next morning to sweep up deliberately the debris of some places. He went out with a dust pan and broom protesting the matter, and to save his life, they had to flee to London where he died now, maybe 15 or 20 years ago, Paul Kahle. So there were instances here and there, not in Berlin to my knowledge where some Christian custodians helped Jews, saved Torah scrolls. This did not happen in Berlin and it was quite impossible, as a matter of fact, that between two and five in the morning most people were sleeping and nobody was out on the street. I would never have known about it so early had not our Jewish sextant, each synagogue had a Jewish custodian, who was in charge, overall charge, of the synagogue and had many janitors under him, called me about 2 a.m. and yelled over the phone, "Rabbi our synagogue is burning." So then I got up and ran over and saw it, and pulled my hat in my face because I was afraid I could be recognized and thrown in the flames. Because in other communities, I remember, for instance in Essen, they mistreated Rabbi Hugo Hahn, whom you have heard of {inaudible} fame in New York and there were others instances of a similar nature. However, there was nothing I could do but stand and look at the horrifying situation that the people who were there did nothing, except jeering, and the SS colors egged the people on, plus the police was inactive and the only thing that was done was the firemen was standing on an adjoining building, but they were not too close, and poured water on those building to help to prevent their being burnt down also. More in, of further consequence is, of course,

was, occurs what happened the next day. The next day was the 10th, I think the 10th, yeah the 10th, of November 1938 and there was really a pall of despair covering over the Jewish people. It was a dark, dreary day and nobody really knew what to do. It was absolutely the whole thing had collapsed and fallen apart.

JL: Did community members come running to you?

MS: Ah, no.

JL: For information?

MS: Nobody really came and for this reason, everybody was looking for cover; where to go, what to do, because rumors had spread that Jews in the provinces had been arrested and taken to concentration camps right during the night, and in Berlin it didn't happen during the night but it happened, not even the next day, on the 10th, but the rumors were all around. So what people did, many, especially men, they arrested men first, they were looking for hiding places, a friendly non-Jew. In my case, I didn't know absolutely not what to do and another Rabbi, Carl Rosenthal, who was the last Rabbi of the real Reform synagogue in Germany, a tiny, classical American reformed-type synagogue. We had only one, Johannastrasse 16, and they had Sunday services and all the rest and we were liberal so he had nothing to do with, except he was a friend of mine. And Carl Rosenthal came to see me and said, "Well, you know what to do." I said, "I don't know," I had no idea, so Carl and I did what everybody else did and we couldn't think of a hiding place, we were running around, just leaving the house because we were afraid they would come to the house. So we then were running around all night and then it really got very dark and I had an old widowed aunt and, at that time my parents had moved to Berlin from the little town of [inaudible] where I was born. So we had to give up the farm and everything as, of course, they were forced to sell and of course they never got the money, but they were forced to turn it over to some "Aryan." And so I was living with them, and I was unmarried, or they lived with me, whatever, in a little apartment, so well I went to an elderly widowed aunt and stayed with her overnight. But then I got up in the morning, it was about 10 o'clock when I got home,

one or two students I had, girls who were living on that street where I was, in the west part section of Berlin, Wilmersdorf, called me and said they see on the street, ah Gestapo agents or SS men, then I don't know what kind of uniform, entering Jewish homes and arresting individuals, and one girl shouted, "They're going to come for you now, I can see it from my apartment." So, she was right, two guys came, knocked on the door, and said to me, "Get ready," and it was November. And of course, psychologically I was sort of prepared, my mother was not, she was crying, and so, "get ready," so they gave me two, three minutes to put on my winter coat and my hat, and boy we went. I went with them, they with me, and then they asked me how I want to get to a city jail, which was not too far, so I said in my defiant, ridiculous childish attitude, "I want to walk," because I wanted to see the *goyim* where I was living, what happened, the two guys, with guns of course, and I in between. Well, they rejected this request so they walked with me to the, to the tram, the electrical, what do you call it,

JL: Street car.

MS: Street car, to the street car, there we walked. And I noticed some of the neighbors, you know, behind the curtains, looking what happening. As a matter of fact, one of the gentlemen, a lawyer, who was Jewish, he said to my mother, "What did your son do? He must have done something." All right, this was, of course, the thinking, logical. So by street car we arrived at the city, at this jail, and that was a frightening experience because I had never been an inmate of a jail yet. I thought they would absolutely beat me up. They did not do that but they squeezed me into a dark cell, totally dark, and there were others apparently. And I got in...

JL: Was this already at Sachsenhausen?

MS: No, this was in Berlin yet.

JL: All right.

MS: And in Berlin in the jail it was hot, like the devil, I had my winter coat on, and it was just a room, I couldn't even take it off, and then I moved. I noticed there were other fellows in that cell too. I remember a dentist from Charlottenburg whom I still remember, nice elderly gentlemen. We

exchanged a few pleasantries or whatever they were, but the most interesting encounter in that jail was Professor Friedländer who introduced himself, like a real German gentleman, and sort of, he knew my name or what not and Friedländer said to me, and the reason I discovered Friedländer, I mean the cell was half maybe of this room in size, was a sentence came to me which I have learned in high school, Gymnasium, many years ago, from Horace, namely, *aequam memento rebus in arduis* [Remember when life's path is steep to keep your mind even, or, Remember to keep an even temper in difficult situations]. So I thank the Lord that the teachers forced us to memorize part of this great epic, which says, said it only in Latin, just out loud, I don't know why, "remember that in, under arduous circumstances, retain your equanimity." I said that to myself, I don't know, it just came out. Whereupon Professor Friedländer completed the whole thing. Why? He was professor of classics at the University of Berlin, so he knew it and I didn't. And then suddenly, we got quite friendly, it is a relief if you find a fellow sufferer. He said, "for me the tragedy is greater than even for you, I am not Jewish." I said, "I fully appreciate this fact," but I didn't want to hurt him or censor him or praise me, there was nothing to hurt, censor or praise, we were all in the same boat. We were back in the bosom of Abraham. And so there we were, nothing to eat, nothing to drink, of course you had no appetite, under those circumstances. I mean you don't even think in those terms. I always expected someone to come in and take us out individually for beating. This did not happen. But in the evening about 6 o'clock, a guy came and took me out. I don't know what happened to the others. "Come along." We went downstairs, went to a, not far from there, this was near Kurfürstendamm, this neighborhood, the synagogue was only a few blocks away, and they hailed a cab. And at my expense, these two fellows and I, but I don't know who they were, we --

JL: How were they dressed? As civilians?

MS: No, in uniforms. They told the guy to drive me down with them, because they had to surrender me to the headquarters of the Gestapo, which I had known, seen, in 1937, when I was called in, I believe I told you this once, when I was censored for my daring anti-Hitler remarks in sermons and in

speeches. So, I expected only the very, very worst. Now when we got, I knew of course every street, every place, that we passed by, I had what you call in French the “chutzpa”, which means arrogance, I don’t think I would have this attitude nowadays, but I did it, and said to the fellow, “I would like to call my mother.” And I knew exactly where there was a public telephone, I see it in front of me, where we passed by and, much to my amazement, he said, “Get going,” and, of course, he came along, and I telephoned my mother, at least. What could I say? But I told her I am on the way to this, goodbye, period. And then we arrived there, it was night, 7 o’clock maybe now, dark. There were in the courtyard, hundreds and hundreds of Jews, all standing at attention, some with little satchels, most of them with nothing.

JL: Now where was this place?

MS: Berlin.

JL: In, specifically, what was it?

MS: What? this was then the headquarters of the Gestapo, in Berlin.

JL: Yeah, but where in the courtyard they were gathered?

MS: Yeah, yeah. By all the officers, like a jail, you know, it was partly jail, partly administration, partly God knows what. There were places, or branches of the Gestapo, one I had never seen, that was the worst, they murdered people right away, that was in the western part of Berlin, that was infamous, infamous, if a Jew or anybody crossed this, this was just the end of him. But this was a little bit more humane, if you can call it that way. In other words, they wouldn’t murder you there, right away. So there we were standing, and the moment, and of course, search lights came over, it was lit, you could see, its was like daylight, it was dark outside, and some people knew me, and said, “Swarsensky.” That made them feel good [laughs]. Which I understand because misery looks for company and they said I [laughs] I had any clout, or any influence, I was in the same boat of misery they were, and uncertainty. So there we were standing, I would say close to midnight, in attention, in anticipation of things to come, and they did come. Maybe at 11 p.m. or so, huge police trucks arrived and they

pushed all of us, we had to jump on those trucks, and inside of the trucks, we even couldn't sit down or some, it was a miserable thing. And since I knew Berlin, I knew exactly where we were going, to the northern part of Berlin to a concentration camp. They could have taken us elsewhere, too, but this is where they took us, which was about 40-50 miles outside of Berlin. The name of which was, a double name, Oranienburg, that was the nearby little city, dash Sachsenhausen [Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen]. Nowadays it is in East Germany. So, then while we were driving out on this joyride two young fellows, twins, whom I -- the youngest on this trip, they were maybe 18 -- they knew me, I had bar mitzvah them, at the Fasanenstrasse, and they clung to me and said, "Oh, what is going to happen, Rabbi?" I said, "Well, I don't know either, let's calm down" etc. etc. I knew exactly what was going to happen because I had known, heard, I had never seen it, about concentration camps years ago, so nothing good. And nothing good came. We arrived there by midnight and concentration camp guards, these are real [sounds like: animals], they jumped upon us. I was in my early 30's and most of them, they was young. Most of the people [prisoners] were 50, 60, 70's, old people too. And they pushed them down from the truck and beat us with whips and so on, ah, many broke their legs, they couldn't jump, some were old, some had a heart attack, it was a murderous, hellish sight and experience, and the rest of us they drove through the gate of the concentration camp Oranienburg-Sachsenhausen. Now, when we arrived there, this contingent, and again, it was all lit up by searchlights, it was dark, it was windy, it was cold, November, but at the same time we could see to a degree. We could see, for instance, in the rear, it was a huge field. It was what we saw an oval shaped exercise field, where daily, ah daily, daily, um, counts, what do you call it, of the people were held. We saw in the rear, somewhere vaguely, barracks, only the little huts, wooden huts, we saw, what was very ghastly a sight, thousands of people who were all milling around, they came from other parts of the country, they were way out, like ghosts and skeletons, moving, moving around. You didn't know where they were going. You could see that they had striped prisoner clothes, pajamas on, not their own clothes, you know the striped concentration camp outfits. You couldn't see yet their number on it

and their emblem, everybody depending on the category to which you belonged, whether you was criminal, not Jewish, whether he was a priest, whether he, a Catholic priest, whether was a Gypsy, whether he was a political prisoner, or whether he was a Jew, pretending ....

JL: I am sorry but I have to stop here [to start a new tape]

**END OF TAPE 10, SIDE 2**



TAPE 11, SIDE 1

MS: We were standing there throughout the entire night, but not just standing. But the guards just moved around all of us at random, the way they always did it, beat people just you know, at their quote, "pleasure." They made for instance, I mean they tortured people terribly. They made, for instance, there were some sons, I don't know how they identified them, and their elderly fathers. They made in the sight of all of them, sons beat up their fathers. Would you believe it? Yeah? They made old people, some came with a *Koffer*, the luggage. Clothing, I don't know what they had in there. And naturally they were confiscated, but we were still fresh. We were not even registered. And then they made old people with the luggage in their hand run around the whole field. Collapsed. Heart attack. If I had had my heart [inaudible] that I contracted there in those days already I would have absolutely not have survived. Only the sturdiest and the luckiest. The luckiest were those who were not beaten up to death. But beaten was virtually everybody, but not so, fatally. You know, they'd hit you with a rifle butt over the head. There is just nothing you can do about it. If he hits you over the shoulder or the back or otherwise, you survive. So you did this. Now, I have to add here that the concentration camp was surrounded by huge walls. The inside of which is surrounded by electrified barbed wire. The top is also, has barbed wire on it and all kinds of glass, broken glass, so you can never get across, ever. Plus, there are towers, watchtowers which are manned 24 hours by guards again, with machine guns always directed at the inside. Each time I pass Waupun [Wisconsin prison] and look at the Waupun installation which is of course a summer resort as compared to a concentration camp, but the sight is a little similar, you know. High walls with guard towers and all the rest. Now part of the purpose of the electrified wire is of course to encourage people to touch them and commit suicide. But relatively few people, in fact, very few people amazingly would do that and committed suicide because, this I think is the positive aspect of this, everyone including this speaker, I had absolute hope that I would get out again. But absolute, innately, maybe that's the Jewish quality, but how I didn't know, I had no idea however to get out again, but I had a feeling this was not the end. *Yeah*

*tikvah*... [quotes a Hebrew prayer suggesting, "where there is life, there is hope"]. So, then the next morning we were "registered," given a number. Concentration camp people were not, at least in Sachsenhausen, unlike others, were not tattooed. In others they were, had a number burned in. We were not. Maybe there were too many. Maybe they didn't have time. They took away everything we had, gave us a thin pajama which was just marvelous in the cold winter nights and days. The only thing you kept were your socks and your shoes. Plus, they shaved your head. The purpose of it is to humiliate you and dehumanize you. So everybody looked like his own skeleton, et cetera. And then of course the routine of the day began. The routine consisted seven days a week of the same torture. Namely, you slept in barracks. Now the barracks, it sounds very elegant, there were just four walls and a roof. Wooden, it was probably built by previous prisoners. And the inside, there was no inside. In other words, you slept on the cold, soggy, wet ground and maybe there was room, but there were no mattresses, no pillows, no nothing. But you slept there with your clothes on, dirty to the nth degree, not shaving, not nothing. Packed like sardines. You simply couldn't sleep. I mean, it was too narrow, the guy next to you was snoring, was carrying on, some were crying, whimpering, this. It was like in the [inaudible]. And with this you were tired naturally the next morning. You were always tired. I mean you could never relax or rest. That was just all. Not only that, during the night fellows came and inspected us to see with searchlights, with flashlights whether we were still around. And if somebody would wake up or look at the guy, he would hit them over the head with a bit and all the rest who were lying there probably hoping that "this cup will pass," to quote Jesus in the New Testament, his agony. But every morning we woke up there were people in our barrack, I was in the barrack #42, and a couple of months ago I buried a fellow prisoner, older than I am, who happened to live in Madison, who was a cell mate of mine. He was ninety-two years-old, living in Madison in the old folks' home. Just by accident, because he has a married daughter here. And so the next morning, you saw especially older men, dead. Absolute dead. You know, from agony, physical, mental. They were dead. Those of us who were not dead yet got up, I would think at five o'clock and then we were given,

standing in line, in another part of the barrack, a bowl of lukewarm soup. They said the soup, I don't know, was made of some sort of cheap fish. Some experts analyzed this. I don't know what the devil it was in the first place, but you drank it, ate it, because you had nothing else to eat. No coffee, I mean, you know, nothing. Just soup. Then you were given a piece like this of soggy German potato bread. The lousiest, heaviest stuff. Now, some ate it up. They were so hungry. Others, and this was the main purpose of this, were permitted to put it in the pockets of your pajama to eat it for cold lunch which came later. But before lunch and before we have moved out of the camp for work, labor, again you had on the field, on the exercise field, counting the number. How many had left, not left -- had died. And in case, I should add this, someone was suspected of having tried to escape during the night, but there were many barracks so you didn't know what was going on in others, they started shooting, from, during the night when you were lying there, from the guard towers and of course you were scared to death that the bullet would hit you. And then they stopped again. So the nights were really experience of horrors also. But then, there were many people every morning lying around in the barrack dead and also on the exercise field from the night before. They had not been removed yet and we were not supposed to touch anyone. There was a certain detachment to clear the bodies away. And then after the count of the prisoners, if I recall correctly there were 14,000 in our place, was over, you were marched out, and this again was a horrible story, out of the camp. Originally of course you didn't know what was happening, later on it was a daily routine. You were marched out and the horror of the marching was that these guards again, they were all young, well-dressed, husky fellows. And incidentally let me say, they arranged it in such a way that the guards for instance at our camp were all Austrians. They would prevent that someone might, you know, meet someone they went to school with, a friend, this or that. So, totally different. Real Austrians, you could tell by their accent, the dialect. And so then they would beat you and have dogs. And the dogs, these vicious dogs would bite you. So nobody wanted to be on the outside, in marching. So when you got to the place of work outside of the concentration camp, you didn't know what you were doing initially, but there were

always guesses and rumors. So, we were actually building munitions plants in preparation for the war. Munitions plants that later on manufactured ammunition and what we did of course was not the engineering, which nobody knew, but just the menial, basic work. For instance, digging foundations all day long. The worst, lifting huge rocks, stones. Two people working had the job of lifting tremendous stones. They were put in the foundations. And there was always a detachment of either fifteen or twenty men working together and one guard, all around, and this fellow with a gun and had nothing to do, just poking fun at us, hitting us, insulting us and all this sort of thing. All kinds of cuss words and swear words and *Judensau* [Jewish pig] and all kinds of stuff of this kind. And the moment, and this was always the horrible thing, you dropped a stone—it was wet, you just couldn't handle it, I mean not the athletes could handle it -- you dropped it, then you were punished for it. They would hit you again with a rifle or whatever he thought of. This went on all day long. Not only this, you had also to excavate soil, put it on lorries [trucks] and shipped it elsewhere. I do not know. And if they were in a good mood they had a sadistic device, not just work. You had to take the corners of your pajamas and put sand in it, like this, and run. They make you run. And you had to deliver the sand somewhere else. It had no practical purpose, but just sadism. And naturally in a run you lose this damn stuff and you arrived with no sand. Bingo. You got beaten. So similar tortures went on all day long. You never knew when you were in this or in that position. I must say that the best workers we had in our camp were Jews from Ostfriesland. That's near the Dutch border. These fellows were more than these city slickers, they were farmers, they were cattle dealers, they knew how to work with their hands and their arms. They were strong. And these fellows could work and really made us city fellows appear, you know, as incompetent. But this was not their intention. They just could do it. As a matter of fact in this country too there are some Jews from East Friesland, that's the western part of Germany. There are some even settlements. There is one here in the state of Wisconsin near, not Dubuque. It's in Illinois at the border of Wisconsin and Illinois. It will come to me, I can't think of it now, but I know quite a few of them. They are for the most part farmers, here too, and cattle dealers. It is a type of

[sounds like: mister bars], it's that type. Not Ph.D.'s, hard workers, Jewishly very traditional, very traditional. It's a type, it's a certain type. They are near, I can't think, not too far from Madison before you enter Illinois, in Illinois.

JL: Beloit? It's in Illinois?

MS: It's in Illinois and it is . . .

JL: Rockford?

MS: Well, is not too far, but, yeah, in that general vicinity. Now isn't this something. Well, and they are elsewhere in the country. Of course in New Jersey. They are some, too, they would settle together and some in Israel. They are the best farmers there.

JL: Are they all prewar arrivals?

MS: No, but prewar, some, a few, yes. But the majority were all people who were discharged from concentration camps or survivors. Anyway, so I said they were very, very good workers and, but this situation went on, as I said, day in and day out. At noon there was a break, quote, "for lunch," quote, for about ten or fifteen minutes. During that period there was another count taken of the fellows outside of the places of work, and there we had to line up with tremendous *Blitzkrieg*, speed, so that we didn't take too much time for lunch. And lunch meant of course eating whatever bread you had left in your pocket. If you had none there was nothing. One thing which I do remember most distinctly is that there were also, they had a title, guards, they were Jews, because they couldn't control all of them. [Pause in tape] Oh yeah, this little incident, talk about the great lunch time, I will never forget as long as I live. Since everybody was, so to speak, defaced, in the most literal sense, you couldn't recognize anyone, in a different outfit plus the head shaven makes people look so different so that you don't recognize anyone. In short, what happened, one of the Jewish, I don't think *kapo* is the right word, I think that's something else again, but maybe it is, that is a Jew who is in charge of other Jews. They did this too as a matter of torture, you know, so that a fellow who was forced to do it. You couldn't say, no sir, I don't do it. Then they would shoot you right away dead. And also, so this was

another measure of their torture system. To make a long story short, we were lining up one day outside of the camp during these, quote, "lunch period," when, and this had to go one, two, three and the line had to be straight and not crooked, and all this sort of thing. There was one little fellow who, a Jew, a guard, reached out to slap me in the face because I wasn't straight or I wasn't fast enough, I don't know why, anyway, and all of a sudden, when he got close to my head, he said, "Herr doctor." He recognized me. That was a guy I had Bar Mitvahed and he was ready to give me a shiner, et cetera. I mean these internal torture, is sadistic deviscs, you know. It is incredible, incredible.

JL: Was he not in turn then harmed because he didn't. . .

MS: What?

JL: Was he not in turn then harmed by others because he didn't fulfill his duties?

MS: I hoped they didn't see it. See, I didn't see it. But he started out. But they didn't have enough people to supervise, you know, so they took Jews. They did this later in a more horrifying way. They had Jews select other Jews for deportation to Poland. That was the height of it. This was just the beginning. We were just, you know, trying to figure all this out, et cetera, on this relatively small scale.

MS: So after lunch was over, the situation continued until about seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Same thing, day in and day out, and then tired and hungry, you came back, were marched back to a camp, to the inside, and then another period of a different torture began. Namely, lining up again and counting, and counting. If the count came out correctly, then that was heaven. If it didn't, that was hell. And every once in awhile, in fact quite frequently, they couldn't account, the counting for the official number of people who were to be there. But it happened also and so on and so, if the count didn't come out correctly, then they had special methods. One method, and this we have to do every evening, after the count was over, we had to sing. Singing played an important role of torture in camps. We had to sing. There was someone who directed this, I think maybe a Jew, I don't know who. You couldn't see it, it was all dark and so far. You had to sing German marshall songs and also very, what do you call it, oh, there's no such word, pornographic songs, or I don't know, about all kinds of

sexual business. And songs I'd never heard, and all the others were not about all kinds of wild horror stories. Real weird songs you had to sing. Naturally you were not in the mood to sing. But, the worst was when there was one or two missing. Then we were held accountable for the missing men. It did happen that some of those who were 19, 20, 21, daring Jews, did not return from outside the camp. But by hook or crook they had hidden that day in the woods, they were all around, woods. They had tried to sneak into the system of the underground, what is it, sewer, the sewer system, and tried in the hope of being able to crawl through the sewers and come out somewhere in Berlin. Some did it. When these poor fellows were caught, and they were invariably caught, first of all you just can't get through there, I mean practically, I don't know what they had in their minds, but people do all kinds of things in desperation. Then they were brought back, they were put on a block in the middle of this exercise field, high up and then something happened which one could see in a TV presentation of *Holocaust*. They were beaten up publicly. Maybe ten of these horrible guys took turns and beat these poor people up with whips. The blood spurts. They didn't immediately die. After the beating was over and the singing, and the beating took place to the songs we had to sing, then they would put this poor fellow, naked -- the nude business played an important sadistic or sexual role too -- always nude, they would put him, December, January, whatever, in front of the barbed wire he had to stand in attention all night. They would pour water over him. The water would freeze on his body and naturally the fellow would die, you know, the terrible tortures. And other things, too horrible even to describe. So after this nightly exercise in sadism, you got back to the barracks, maybe at ten, at 11 o'clock. If you were lucky you got another bowl of soup. Probably left over from the morning, but the same type. If you were lucky you got another piece of little, not so much, bread and then good night. In other words, in and sleep. And this went on day in and day out. The same thing. We always had to look at something horrible. I remember I was there during a Halakha and I remember from memory what day it was and I tried to, sort of, when nobody saw or heard, hoping that nobody would come in, sort of, you know, give a little speech, remind them, courage, martyrdom and this and that, and some were grateful for that

because it took their mind off of the present misery. But other than that, there was nothing to comfort the people. The only comfort I had was that when we were returning from, I personally, from work, one fellow who knew me gave me once a little piece of German *wurst*. I thought this was manna from heaven.

**END OF TAPE 11, SIDE 1**



TAPE 11, SIDE 2

MS: Well anyway, I don't want to sit on the worst episode, but I absolutely thought this was nectar and ambrosia, which was the food of the Greek gods and I put it in my pocket as fast and ate it somewhere in the dark of the night. Another episode which I also shall not forget was when my shoes had faded away. I had no shoes. I had these little shoes, the type I have now, when I was incarcerated. And of course standing in the sleet and snow. Everything fades away. I mean it's just, *chazerai* [trash, junk, poor quality] of the first order and I had no shoes, absolutely no shoes. And we didn't know what the devil its' going to be. I couldn't walk barefoot, although they didn't mind that. So once in the dark of the night, I forget when, or early in the morning, I saw a dead Jew lying there, made sure he was dead, and stole his shoes from him. Put them on, they were better than mine, they were, we call them high shoes, not these half shoes. The only trouble was they were that much too long, so I had to put grass or any kind of junk in it, otherwise I couldn't walk in them. But that didn't help me greatly, it contributed to a trouble I had and that was the bleeding here, no washing up. I think maybe once a month or I don't know, you were given a bath or I don't know if I got that already. But the bleeding was simply horrible and I was afraid I would get blood poisoning, you know, since they rubbed, the shoes rubbed against the skin and all this sort of thing. So that I remember also. And then I remember toward the end of the session there,, that I was called in one day out of the blue sky to appear before the commander and I feared the worst of course. So he called me in and when he called you in he never talked to you face-to-face. You don't sit down. You have to face the wall and he talks, and always you face the wall and talks somewhere out of the corner. And nothing, nothing but humiliation. And he's shouting of course, nothing civil, do I want to be discharged. Why he called me in there, I think every once in awhile a few others too, I don't know to this very day. I have all kinds of speculations. I was known among non-Jews, but maybe that didn't help. My mother, a tiny woman, very daring, very courageous, in her simple way, so I understand, once went to the Gestapo in Berlin and said they should get me out. Now whether this had any influence, I doubt it, I doubt it. Anyway,

the guy said under certain conditions, the main one of which was to leave the country immediately, I could be discharged. Now comes something which is, borders on insanity. Nowadays I would have a different attitude, but anyway I said no. This, I say, is insanity. That is not heroism. I don't know. It was foolhardiness of the first order, but I did feel, and when I say this, this makes me appear better than I am or was, I just felt I couldn't accept a certain privilege or exception for myself which was not given to other Jews because I was a rabbi and regarded as such. We had to keep it from the Gestapo fellows. They were terrible. They always asked a person what he was. Called every Jew a millionaire. Immediately somebody had told me, don't say I'm a rabbi. Tell 'em you're a teacher. That was innocuous, you know. So anyway, so I said no. The guy gave me a kick in the pants and out I was. Now later on, I don't know how much later, a miracle. I was called again. I was bleeding like a pig. I had noticed I had trouble with my heart. This is where my heart trouble began which had lasted until three years ago when I finally needed the heart surgery. And ever since that time I had nitroglycerin pills. There was something. I had a feeling I would absolutely die if I had to stay in there longer. So when they placed the proposition before me again, I said yes. Of course, one of the reasons why I was so daring or whatever or foolish was, I wasn't married. I suppose a married person might react differently. But then I thought of my parents, I thought of, I said what good does it do if I die and nobody is helped either. Alright, so I gave up my heroism, which was not too deep in the first place, and I said yes. They made me sign maybe 12, 15 statements. Only the first several I could read. Just sign my name. They were all matters of fact apparently, forms. The first one I remember, that I went into the concentration camp on my own volition so as to protect myself from *der kochenden deutschen Volksseele*, from the boiling soul of the German people. I signed my name. Another, that I would leave the country immediately. Another, that I would never talk about a concentration camp anywhere in the world or Germany. The other, the following, I cannot remember. I never read them. I just signed them because they wanted to get me out. And when I was discharged and escorted to the very exit of this tremendous field and left there alone in the wilderness, a guy addressed me and said

that I should remember that the arm— these are almost quotes, these words are not forgotten—that the arm of the Gestapo is long enough to catch me wherever I am. And I will be caught if I ever say one word about concentration camps. And this fear in me accompanied me for a long time. When I came to this country and when I was asked and, I remember, in little towns where they had a minister to talk about this and that about Germany, I always asked the minister if you want to announce it, always give me a different name. He always called me Dr. Baum. That was my name, Dr. Baum, because I had my parents living in Germany. And it was known that Gestapo spies were probably not in every little Wisconsin town, but they were around. It was very dangerous in those early years, when I was here, because they would accuse Jews of spreading *Greuelnachrichten*, that means all kinds of cruel, untrue stories, just to stir up the sentiments of people against Germany. So, I had to report to the Gestapo everyday at one o'clock, appear, not at the main headquarters but at district offices in Berlin, and report I am here.

JL: What was the date of your final release?

MS: It was early in 1939 I think, half a year, so I guess. And then every two weeks I had to write a report, what I had done to promote my emigration because I told them when I got out that I had no way of obtaining a visa. I didn't know anyone in the world and I just didn't know. Of course that didn't impress them, really. How I got out, you have to get out, and out I could get, but not in. Alright. So, I lied every two weeks and said I'd done this, I'd done that, et cetera and now another and this will be almost the end of the gruesome story, another foolhardy thing I did after I got out, it was lying that I was making every effort to be able to emigrate, immigrate. The head of the Jewish community, this great man, Heinrich Stahl, S-t-a-h-l, a wonderful lay person who was the lay head of the Jewish community of the board of the overall community, and my revered teacher, Leo Baeck, and I got together. And I had promised myself and Baeck a long time ago that I wouldn't leave. And these two men said, now you promise that you would leave. Would you mind if, and they had daily contacts with the Gestapo, these fellows, on all kinds of horrible matters, would you mind if we approach a Gestapo

and wrote a letter, an application, that you stayed and said there's work to be done here, people are still here. And they were. And I tell you when I got out I started confirming boys again, marrying people and all this, and we had no synagogues, but we had all kinds of places, a little there, a little here, et cetera, yah. And when I was in Berlin last year, there was a couple whom I had totally forgotten. He said, you know, when you married us, you had just come out of the concentration camp, your hands were all bandaged and frozen and all of this. I said, sorry I don't remember. Yes, you married us at this and that place. So, anyway, the work went on. But always of course I had the pressure on me to emigrate. So they applied to the Gestapo that, because of the work had to be done and appeal to hope. They repealed the application, I got a telephone call at eight o'clock in the morning to appear immediately. I appeared as fast as I could. Did I get [inaudible], I welcome there, balled me out, threw some stuff at me, I don't know, books, and this. And of course you don't sit down, you always face the wall, and said to me, "You promised to emigrate. You know, look down, here the police trucks go through the camp, you know, you'll be on it. You get out!" Where upon Swarsensky said, "*Sholem Aleichem*" [Hebrew greeting meaning, literally, "Peace be upon you"] [laughs], got out and I tried to promote my emigration faster. Also, at that time I had an additional reason for leaving the country because at that time I was already, I mean toward the end not in the beginning, one of the *machers* there of the *Central Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*. They had sealed the offices, started investigating all the papers and all the files there at that time and one of the real fine gentleman in charge of this said, "Swarsensky, you must leave. If they find your name in here, this will aggravate the situation, nothing can be accomplished, you must leave, you must leave." Whereupon Swarsensky thought, now the end has come. While I was in a concentration camp a couple [inaudible], the name comes to me, Jews in Holland, in Amsterdam, who for reasons unknown to me had met me and come to like me when I was there, I think I mentioned this, in July 1937, for the World Conference of Progressive Judaism. They had contacted my parents, they had when they heard I was gone, secured for me a transit visa to Holland. That visa I had to use, there was

just no alternative. So one of the days, I think in March or God knows when, I finally went to the Tempelhof Airport, which was then the main airport, it is nowadays only a military one, and boarded a plane. I had no money except they permitted me to buy a ticket. And I bought a ticket from Berlin to New York. I thought as long as they leave me that money, everything else was taken away, I was not a millionaire, far from it, but I was very slowly working my way up, so that was all confiscated, everything I had. Well, okay.

JL: So where did you get the money for the ticket?

MS: My own money.

JL: It was still your own money.

MS: Yeah, yeah. They left me enough money, whatever it is, for the ticket. So I had a ticket to the United States on a boat, just blind, or what is this, booking. I had enough money to pay for the flight to Holland and also to England. I bought a plane ticket to Holland and England and then a boat to. . . so this was my own money because otherwise I would be a total *Schnorrer* [beggar, bum]. Anyway I then got another kick in the pants from the guys at the airport as a going away present which was all in the hands of the Gestapo, the whole thing, was not a civilian anymore. So, I got to the plane, to Schipol, which is the airport of Amsterdam, and Swarsensky was free at last. But in those days fortunately the Nazis had not invaded Holland, that came later. That came later. I just read in this morning's paper that Anne Frank's father just died, 91 years old, in Switzerland. So anyway, this was before that time. So I stayed in Holland for a little while and then I went to England because I couldn't, I mean I couldn't settle in Holland, thank God, you know. My visa is a transit visa. But while also in Holland another stroke of luck. The gentleman with whom I had been on the program, the British rabbi, Edgar, Leslie Edgar, who was on the same program I spoke in Holland, this had heard of me and the British government gave the chief rabbi, I think his name was Hertz, a number of visas, I don't know for whom, only for rabbis or for anyone, transit visas to England. And Edgar was kind enough, and I was really not close to him, he was a good man, and even thought of it how chance meetings often play a

role in life. Isn't it strange? So he secured one of those visas for me from the chief rabbi which permitted me to enter England because my stay in Holland was limited and I didn't want to be there. So then I went to London. And in London, I will not go into details of my life in London, that's another most frustrating story. But at least there is . . .

JL: How long were you there?

MS: I was in London maybe three months. I was not. . . but at least it was free, oooh.

JL: What was the dates now when you left, finally when you left Germany to Holland?

MS: I think I left in March, Germany, on a very rainy, dark, gray . . .

JL: March '39?

MS: Yeah. And I left Holland . . . I left, God I cannot remember this exactly, in the summer or late, in summer or early fall I came to this country. In England I, oh yes, I conducted services for German immigrants in [inaudible] Synagogue. They arranged special services to be held in German, they were kindly disposed, these Liberal, the Liberals are the Reformers there. They were the extreme Reformers who were very kindly and humanely disposed to German immigrants because they had that feeling that Germany was the birthplace of liberal Judaism. And they had this. . . and of course Baeck's figure and Lily Montagu and the great liberal Jew with the little *Ziegenbart* [goatee]. What was his name? A great fellow and scholar, I read his book. Can't think of his name. These were the giants of liberal Judaism in those days and they were kindly disposed. The chief rabbi, of course, they are so traditional, they had nothing to do with us. But at least they secured from the government, you know, the transit visa there for a little while and I shall not forget my little episode with a what do they call it, tuxedo. How does the tuxedo enter the picture? One evening Lily Montagu had invited me, but also others. Oh yeah, there was another Berlin Jew, [sounds like: Heinen Stern], and I don't remember any rabbi, but others and from other places in Germany I didn't know. They just invited us for a social evening. However when you went to Red Lodge Thirty, that was the building, Red Lodge, very castle-like, very British, you had to wear, by hook or crook, a tuxedo. Swarsensky had neither a tuxedo

[laughs], he had nothing. I had a *Regenschirm* [umbrella] which I brought along, a winter coat, a hat and a typical German *Mappe* [bag], you know, here like where you had your sandwiches and your bibliography [laughs] or what in. Anyway, another guy from Berlin whom I met and who had been in England for a long period of time, and I said, what I'm going to do with a tuxedo, I have no money to rent one, and I don't like these foolish things, but I did want to go to Lily Montagu, it was a sort of honor. So, anyway he said, you wear mine. Again a [inaudible] from heaven. So the guy was taller than I am, I put his tuxedo on [laughs] and then several guys present and I, we had to give brief talks, you know, experience this which was nicely arranged. And of course the food wasn't too bad either for an immigrant, *armer Immigrant* [poor immigrant] to be invited, et cetera. Now come the tuxedo situation. The *Hosen*, or pants in English, went up to here. Swarsensky had during his major address, I think it was in German, I couldn't talk English, but they to push down the *hosen* down, they'd come up to here [laughs]. Did I have a time. Depressed *schwitzing* [sweating] and whatnot. And of course this and that. So anyway this was that situation. And then finally, finally, finally, but there was much more in between. I boarded the *S.S. Washington* to the United States of America. Since I had purchased my tickets I was treated royally, *nicht wie ein Schnorrer* [not like a bum] which I was, but pretty good, they gave us good food, good quarters and everything was fine and dandy until I landed and then I was getting reduced to the state of nothingness. I came, which I haven't mentioned, on a special visa, a visa which then was given still in certain exceptional cases to farmers and clergymen of all faith to this country provided they had a position which could not be filled in America by a native. While I will not make this a matter of record what position I was to occupy in this country, which could not be filled by a native. It was not the Madison one. That truly wasn't filled by a native. So I was supposed to go elsewhere, all kind of manipulations which I cannot make a matter of a public record. So, what happened. Oh yes, the immigration officer, when we landed on Shabbes *zur Nacht*, Friday afternoon, did not believe me that I was a rabbi. Thereupon they put me for several days in the jail in Ellis Island. But the jail of course was a summer resort. In the first place there were hundreds if

not thousands of people. I had never seen a colored person in my life, was the first time I saw colored people. But I saw all kinds of nationality groups, men and women, I've never laid my eye on. I was never in Asia, et cetera. They were all detained and I was one of the many. I didn't see a people of my, person of my background, not one. I was the only one.

**END OF TAPE 11, SIDE 2**



TAPE 12, SIDE 1

JL: You were discussing Ellis Island and the different people.

MS: Oh, Ellis Island. Ellis Island. So these surroundings were not very conducive to lifting my spirit. But I always said I was free. The danger was they could send you back if you were not...legally the matter was not clear, they could send you back. This was a fear I had, but there was nothing I could do since it was weekend and I knew I had to appear the next day then before a judge. There was a judge, a court on the island. And naturally I had heard the term Ellis Island, but no conception of what it was like. I enjoyed myself as best as I could. I read all kinds of pamphlets and I was pushed into the kosher section. I've always had to eat kosher. A compulsion in my life. And this kosher section served, normally I forget the food, but that white bread of the American variety which I had never eaten nor have I learned to like to this day. It always tasted to me like cotton. And then they had what we call peanut butter which I never countenanced or liked to this day, but I ate white bread, butter, there were pieces of cheese and tremendous amount of slices of large onions. I had never eaten, seen anybody eat these big onions. But this was my introduction to the American cuisine. Came, the following week I was called—I should also mention that I was sleeping not in barracks, but in huge halls like in Waupun where everyone gets a little mattress. And it was hot. Beastly hot. Absolutely no air conditioning and there were all kinds of characters sleeping left and right of me. And I must admit that I brought to this country when I was in Holland in '37, this fine family said to me, any money you have left here don't take it back to Germany. Leave it here. And I did, so I had maybe, oh I don't know, thirty dollars in my pocket which appeared to me like a million. And I didn't undress or took my pants off, but slept with my right hand in my pocket because one of these characters, he looked a little strange to me. I thought well [inaudible] and then I'd be totally denuded, et cetera. And so then when I appeared before the judge he was stern, to the point, but friendly. There was a lady interpreter. She was, appeared to me like a Jewish lady. She spoke German, and she spoke English and then I, the judge said I want to speak English. I said yes, because I couldn't but I wanted to impress him, you

know, that I'm really qualified to give forth from an American pulpit. This was my fear that they would catch me. And there was reason, but these deeper things I will not reveal for me to be afraid. So, this fine lady said to me she would suggest that I, it would be easier for everyone. She was right. She really wanted to help me. I had sensed that. [speaks in Hebrew] She had that feeling. She suggested that to me sort of. Now she wants to translate. I said fine. Now the guy started asking me all sorts of questions about my rabbinical training. He didn't want to believe me. Neither did the immigration officer on the boat. This was off the boat already. I didn't look like a rabbi because there were others on the boat *mit langen Kapottes, mit einem Bart, und einem Hütchen, und Swarsenky wie ein* [with long earlocks, a beard, little cap, and Swarsensky was like a] non-Jew et cetera. That's the reason. He really didn't want to let me in. But this fellow didn't go by appearance but by credentials. So among the things I had indeed in my little briefcase were rabbinical whatever, testimony from the hochschule and also some sort of statement from the Jewish community in Berlin that I was a rabbi there. And then the guy asked me all kinds of silly questions. He said how my glasses, you know, they check you medically of course, too. Whether I wear glasses which I could see the people sitting in the back. All kinds of nonsensical stuff he went through. I said, oh yes I could see them all. Et cetera. I forgot what they asked me. So, I got out. And there was America. And I didn't know left. And I didn't know right. And I didn't know good from evil. I knew nothing. I was reborn. Period. Now you ask me your question.

JL: Okay.

MS: And now I'm in Madison. And that was equally tragic. [laughs] Because I did fill a position, it can be called this, which no other American was willing to take. So it turned out, but this Madison. In fact I had never heard of the existence of Madison or of Wisconsin in my entire pre-American life.

JL: Your brother was in Chicago, wasn't he?

MS: Yes.

JL: At that time. Did he arrange with this congregation?

MS: Mhmm.

JL: I see. Now just a couple of simple questions I hope about your incarceration at Sachsenhausen. Was there any way of news coming into you? Did you hear any news from the outside?

MS: Impossible. No, nothing. Except in the rumors. But, oh no, there was no newspaper, there was no radio, of course nothing.

JL: News by word of mouth, was there anything?

MS: Well, there were all kinds of speculations, you know, this one dreamed this up, they liked the wishful thinking. No, nothing about the war, about Hitler, about nothing. No, I don't think in any of those places people would get ever any news whatsoever. That's an American type question. Everything else could be . . . [laughs].

JL: No, whether, you know, whether anyone who came in after you did had things to bring. That kind of thing.

MS: You even, I see now your question, that's a good one. You didn't even have a chance to communicate with anyone. Really not. The only time was at working when you had your head down and the guy didn't see, you know. I remember that. I remember that one fellow next to me, I know exactly, a fine gentleman who was also with C.V., said, when we get out, when I get out he said, I'm going to write a book, *Vier Wochen unter Wilden, ihre Sitten und Gebräuche* ["Four Weeks among Wild Men, Their Mores and Customs"] [laughs]. That is tremendously sarcastic and cynical, you know, but shows, you know, the spirit.

JL: What had made him think it was only *vier Wochen* [four weeks]?

MS: No, he just gave a title, you know, *sechs Wochen* [six weeks] so that was, he wanted to. . . that was the title. So you got a good laugh, you know, out of it.

JL: There are reports of smuggling having taken place.

MS: Smuggle what?

JL: Smuggling of food and other valuable things. Into the camp, out of the camp, making money. Was there any such thing there?

MS: How that could be done is beyond me. But I will not say that's beyond the possibility of reality because people think, you know, of all kinds of things, really. I didn't tell you that there was always a detachment of Jews who had to move the garbage. That was one of the finest positions you could ever get. Namely the [inaudible], I don't know what it is in English, of the leftovers of the bread and the soup and the *chazerai* and all this that had to be put in some sort of cans. And these cans had to be moved, you know, from the barracks somewhere. Would you believe that I saw with my own eyes that these poor fellows who would carry this stuff would gulp it down, yes sir, yes sir, stealing. Once I happened to see the fellow again who was with me in jail, the dentist, white-haired little fellow. There were others who had frostbites and all of this, and this fellow, I don't know where he got it, stole gasoline. I don't know where, you know, and gave me some and I put it on the bites, these frost boils of some of the fellows. I mean all these daily horror stories, but I must always repeat, the worst I didn't experience. I was not in Poland. I was not in crematoria, I was not in gas chamber, I've never seen them in operation. That came much later, '41, '42, '43 when I was out. So, whatever I experienced was absolutely nothing, just nothing, compared to what those poor people went through. Okay.

JL: Okay, then there were women in Sachsenhausen also?

MS: No.

JL: There were none. Okay, then a final question about, generally about the concentration camp life. What is your feeling about the sheep to slaughter theory?

MS: When I hear this theory I get hot under the collar. This is the theory of this horrible Chicago doctor, and I can't think of his name now . . .

JL: Bettelheim.

MS: Bettelheim, Bruno Bettelheim. That man makes me mad. And a few others who have as far as this theory, this lady also. Now, from what I experienced, saw, it is absolutely impossible to defend yourself. If a gangster enters the bank or your apartment or anywhere, a hijacker, what do you do? The rules are, kindly give him the money. Even if 20 bank employees are there and he's only one, you give him the money because he is going to shoot. You have no chance of winning. Secondly, when these two fellows came to arrest me with their guns pointed at me, what was I supposed to do? What were my mother or my father going to do? Plus, we had no guns. Jews by and large, in this country too, do not have guns because our psychology is totally different from that of the great many people who now espouse the gun lobby and their interests. We do not think of human beings in terms of animals. We have a faith in, based in intrinsic humanness of human beings and so we are not trained in our religious or whatever background under the habit to be prepared for those things. And moreover, the majority of Jews, later on too, although the German Jewish situation was not equal to that of Jews in Poland, et cetera, they had no, and by and large, just no way of defending themselves against a tremendous majority. It is true however that especially Jews in Poland have made attempts here and there to shoot, if they could, or to lay hands on someone, they've also ghetto uprising and many other instances. I know, maybe I shouldn't put it on record what I know, of someone in Madison, Wisconsin, who told me, who had suffered through all these horror situations in Poland, from the hands of Poles, Poles, because the Poles not only the Germans persecuted the Jews horribly, helped German Nazis because they have a long history of Jew hatred and just loved it that they could help the Nazis and cut off for a little bit, for a little while, a little reprieve for themselves, and this man told me when the war was over and they were liberated, liberated, they found one Nazi, one Polish Nazi, who had murdered Jews by the hundreds and I don't know what he had done. A couple of husky Jews, Poles, and this man is rather husky, still alive, said, they would capture this guy, hang him up, string him up, and sit down and eat lunch. I said, boy, I don't think I could do it. I couldn't string anybody up and eat lunch at the same time. But this I don't say is heroism, it's not in line with

our tradition and yet very, very human and therefore I take my hat off when a person can do this. There is, we cannot simply react the way some people think Christians are reacting, love our enemy. That is humanly impossible. Or forgive. We can forgive what somebody else did to me, but not this murder machine. That just was out of the realm of all moral categories. So, I say, yes, there must have been other Jews who resisted. But unfortunately the majority just couldn't help. They were lined up in Auschwitz coming from the cattle cars and were assigned to the crematoria, the gas chambers, right away, right and left and left and right. Yes, they were lead to the slaughter like sheep. They were. But there was just nothing they could do. They couldn't even take their own lives. They couldn't even do that. And again most Jews in concentration camps, they had a chance, they wouldn't do it because they had faith in mankind and in the future. So when somebody tells me this stuff I would say, boy, how would you have reacted. What would you have done? It's easy to sit at a desk and write stories and tell people how should they behave. Nothing in life becomes real until it becomes personal. If you go through this personally what would you do, whom would you murder? Well then Mr. Bettelheim says, this poor little Frank family in Amsterdam they wanted to continue the lifestyle to which they have been accustomed, mainly to live together and stay together as a family. He accuses them of that and said they should have separated, one here, one there and plus they should have, if somebody came and took a stick and hit them over the head [laughs]. This is childish. I think I admire people who wanted to maintain a semblance of the life they had lived. There is strength in numbers and in the family and not splitting up. Of course they couldn't anticipate the sadistic tortures of the Nazis. Who could anticipate this? So I think it is just utter nonsense. It is really burns me up when I hear people talk that way. Yes, yes, as if the people who went through this they were cowards. They were heroes, they were heroes in their way, heroes of suffering. So, Mr. Bettelheim, alright.

JL: Back to before Kristallnacht. When did you discover that the Gestapo had been listening to your sermons?

MS: I discovered it only in, I think it was July or when '37, when they called me and presented to me. I wasn't aware of it. We were told that they are in plain clothes hidden fellows, but you don't take it seriously. Plus, you could never see them. There were so many people there, et cetera. But then the whole thing came out, came out. And when they presented me with the facts and I couldn't deny the fact, they were correct, they cited whatever I had said absolutely correctly. There was nothing not true.

JL: How long had they been listening to it?

MS: Not to me only. Allegedly since '33, '34. I could only judge, you see I forget all my major addresses, a big deal. There's one talk I remembered. I once said in '34, '35, spoken to a group of Jewish ladies, *auf Kurfurstendamm* about this nonsensical Jewish talk, Jewish demography, our numbers go down, the way people here talk too, you know, this happened, that happened, we have fewer children. And of course the danger, with the *chutzpah*, I mean I had, it wasn't visible to me that all this was coming down so I said, be sure we have only so many children in each Jewish family. And one lady [laughs], a good-looking, blonde one interrupted me and said to me, *aber Sie müssen die Kinder kriegen!* [but you have to have the babies]. In other words [laughs], see, I got it then already from the women's liberators. Well anyway I don't know that, foolishly I remembered that. Well, I don't really object to that. This was not directed against Hitler.

JL: You've mentioned that Baeck and Kahler had asked you to stay.

MS: Not Kahler, Stahl.

JL: Stahl, sorry. Had asked you to stay back in the community. What about other people, after you got back from Sachsenhausen, was there a noticeable difference in the community from the time before Kristallnacht? Were people taking it seriously now and leaving?

MS: Of course. Everybody was running for shelter, sending cables to relatives and non-relatives in America, running to the Jewish, not the Jewish community but rather the *Reichsverband*, the overall organization, that organized offices to facilitate emigration because the average individual is not familiar with legal requirements and all this. And especially the *Palästinaamt*, the office, the

Palestine office, at the Meineckestrasse 12, Berlin-West, was swamped with people trying to find out how to get to Palestine and all this. Oh yes, yes, yes. I mean there was not a soul that felt now we're going to stay. This was the very end. This Kristallnacht was, convinced even Swarsensky, that it was out.

JL: What happened to the rest of your family? Your mother was, you told me she did come to the States.

MS: Yes. My father, my parents were pushed out of that little apartment where we were because the Jews were forced to live in Jewish apartment buildings and meaning, Jewish. There were owned by Jews and the Jews had to squeeze in. Now my parents had to look for a place too, and they were pushed around from pillar to post and during the process my father had a heart attack and died, but he was 81 years old at the time. My mother who was younger had to get out, had to get out otherwise there was danger that they would ship her, and my brother and I, we made frantic efforts to bring her to the places to which Jews went. One of these horror places was Shanghai, maybe you've heard about it, the settlement of Jews in Shanghai. I forgot the details. I only know that we paid in money for visa, for the ticket, but it never realized. Then comes number two, Cuba.

JL: You mean you paid for money to go to Shanghai already?

MS: Yeah, yeah, which I borrowed, here, this, that. My brother had a better credibility than I. Then came Cuba because Cuba issued visas, and these visas as you probably know, they were for the most part forged, you know, went with the *St. Louis* [ship] and all this. So we lost money there too, it was terrible, just terrible. In the meantime my brother tried to find someone to issue a visa, an affidavit here. I have no, here in Madison, and God knows they didn't trust me and I didn't know anyone and they were not eager to. . . well, anyway, but in Chicago there were more Jews also of German background from the last century, et cetera, especially gentleman, Strauss by name, in Frankfurt. I think he was the one who gave my brother affidavit for my mother with the assurance she wouldn't become a burden on him. So anyway, to make a very long story short, we were fortunate in getting our mother out at the very last boat that ever left Spain. She had to go from Berlin to Spain. When she



was in Spain she had to wait for this practically sea-unworthy small boat with other immigrants. She had to sleep in the hold of the boat. She got sick. The Spanish captain took, I believe, seven to nine weeks to get that boat to the United States. They landed in North Africa somewhere, we got a cable, the guy started, what's the word, extorting money from the people on the boat and all kinds of horrible, horrible things. He wouldn't move, you know, unless they chipped in more money. And it is beyond description how these fine gentle people exploited the misery of Jews. That's a chapter by itself. Someday, well, I haven't got the time. I have the interest, but I dare not take the time just to accuse the world, unjustly accuse the world of their love your neighbor. So, my mother finally came to New York. I went to New York and waited around there until she came down. I didn't recognize her. She was only skin and bones. I just didn't recognize her. She was completely brown. I don't know, sallow, the skin, I don't know and this and that. So, well but she finally arrived here and died a normal death in Madison.

**END OF TAPE 12, SIDE 1**

TAPE 12, SIDE 2

MS: I had, huh, I had cousins, you know, both from my father's and mother's side and especially on my mother's side they had quite a few children.

JL: Where were they?

MS: Well, they were in the same boat we were. Some were murdered, two cousins went to Israel and they were convinced Zionists and really they were young yet and became real farmers. One has been on a *moshav*, [Israeli cooperative settlement] and I write to him, I haven't written him lately. [inaudible], I remember vaguely somewhere on a moshav and of course he's about my age now, a little younger. The children and grandchildren are grown up, one was killed in a war and all these normal things that befall Jews. A few went to South America, a couple of cousins, one went to India, one went to England.

JL: Now these were all prewar, who made it out before the war?

MS: Before the war, yes. Yeah, these were really, yeah. They left earlier than I did, right. Yeah, they were not Holocaust survivors in that sense.

JL: And so the only actual person you had in the U.S. before you left was your brother?

MS: Correct.

JL: Could you tell me just a very short little bit about your trip from England to the U.S., the boat. You did start mentioning the Washington before.

MS: Well, it was a very nice boat and my golly and not everybody was an immigrant. In fact, the great majority were not immigrants, they were vacationers and they enjoyed themselves tremendously. I remember that the boat stopped somewhere to pick up, and this I couldn't understand, students, medical students, Americans, who were not admitted to American medical schools, from Scotland I believe. And I think there were Jews among them too, but I didn't meet anyone of consequence. I just mingled with the people, tried to read a little bit in American newspaper and learn the American *Sitten und Unsitten* [customs]. However, I must say I opted for the kosher department. They had a

- kosher department on the boat and I felt I really wanted to be in it not only because of the food, I thought the environment was a little more homey and you know I would feel [speaks in Hebrew].
- JL: When you were finally here and even yet in Holland and England, what did you hear of war news?
- MS: War news. Well, I heard what everybody else heard also, nothing in particular. Everybody was scared to death what would happen, but Hitler invaded Poland September 2, '39 and all this and everybody was really what immigrants are worried about is what is the fate of their own families, you see. But that is naturally related to the war news.
- JL: You had already left when the euthanasia program began. When did you learn about it?
- MS: You mean euthanasia, you mean in concentration . . . ?
- JL: No, euthanasia of the unfit citizens, the mentally retarded.
- MS: Oh, yeah. I had never heard a great deal about it. I did know about . . . I think I had left.
- JL: Yeah.
- MS: Yeah.
- JL: What news did you hear of it on this side of the Atlantic?
- MS: You mean here in this country?
- JL: Yeah.
- MS: Well, I heard the truth. I mean what American newspapers and correspondents reported like everybody else. I had no special . . . nobody would write to me about it.
- JL: What was the reaction, your reaction, other peoples' reaction?
- MS: Here in this country?
- JL: Yeah.
- MS: Well, for some of course the matter is so far away geographically and in terms of experience that they don't hold too much stock in it or give too much attention. And to me of course it was part of the Hitler program, you know. Part of the general line of this policy. He did not only murder Jews, but non-Jews too. For instance there was near the city of Bielefeld in Westphalia, a place called Bethel,

like the city of Bethel, a Lutheran foundation where little crippled children were accommodated and held. I mean not held, but they lived. I remember this when I went to grade school already we would be encouraged to give pennies always collect for Pastor von Bodelschwingh. So we had heard about this as children already and naturally when you heard later on they would just get rid of them. It was tragic.

JL: Let me take a quick leap in time now and ask you just a few more questions about your children. When your children were young what were your greatest concerns for them?

MS: For them? That they would learn English which their father would struggle with. I really don't know. I never thought about, the greatest concern? Well I suppose the greatest concern of any parent is that children are physically well, things can go wrong, too. I mean I had no reason for being especially afraid, no indication, but frankly I don't think I ever thought about this too deeply. And I don't think the fact that I have this particular background has played any particular role because I do not live even by the subconscious fear that similar things would happen in the United States. I cannot conceive it and I've given talks on it why not. Of course it's not only wishful thinking. One has to base one's assumption on certain facts, but the facts can be overthrown.

JL: What activities or forms of behavior did you forbid your children to engage in or encouraged them to engage in?

MS: Well, in the first place, my wife is more the encourager and discourager than I am. After all, somebody has to work and concentrate on matters, but I really must say I never had any problems of behavior, serious behavior. They don't smoke, they don't drink, they don't misbehave, I mean in any of the flagrant ways. They are [inaudible], I mean I don't know what to say, with courage. And they, oh yes, my daughter has the habit of being late and that boils me up no end. But, I mean late for an appointment for instance. She doesn't have that time sense for time or whatever it is, or responsibility which I would expect of a human being. But other than that I cannot think really of anything in particular.

JL: Have you ever objected to any of their friends?

MS: No. No. Their friends were mostly from the high school and grade school and from Temple and I cannot remember that there was anyone . . . I remember one in grade school very violent, sort of uncouth fellow, he had problems mentally and he has dropped apparently away anyway. So.

JL: And given the choice, if you had an opportunity to leave Wisconsin, where would you go?

MS: In the first place I wouldn't go. Wisconsin is very germane to me, I don't know why. It could be because of, I hate, not, I don't hate to say it, I could be mistaken, I like the open walls here. I like the, maybe the German, Lutheran, this sounds very peculiar, background of so many people here. It's something which in spite of all my separations from that part of my background is somehow germane to me. I frankly would not live in New York nor would I relish to live only amongst Jews. Now this coming from a rabbi is most peculiar, but it's the honest to goodness truth. I do not, while I love my fellow Jews, while I love to work with them and share their ideals, but I have never had the desire or the need to live only in a Jewish environment. It's the truth. I meet so often Jews coming, especially from New York, trying to settle here in Madison and they ask me where is there a Jewish neighborhood. They went through the city, they looked at the mail boxes, couldn't see Jewish names. I asked them, what do you need them for? What do you need 'em for? Go to the synagogue, to work, but the neighbors don't have to be absolutely a Jew. I just, well this is of course the original immigrant psychology. I'm a more recent immigrant than they are, but I haven't got it because I have never, from childhood up, lived among Jews only. Had I had that experience it might, I might feel differently about it because Baeck, he used to make a distinction and said, Judaism can be a matter of—I forgot what he actually said—of the environment and there is value in it. He talked about immigrants coming from Poland, Russia to this country, the environment keeps them close to Judaism. But then in America they have no environment. They go wherever they live, Peoria and Beloit, et cetera, and then Judaism goes right out of the window. The environment isn't there. Judaism has to be a matter of the individual, has to be internalized. That is the only type of Judaism that can be exported. And that is correct. Can be

exported regardless where you live, in Brazil or in Rockford or wherever, that you can export. But you never can transfer the environment. The environment has to be within you and he mentioned these things long before immigration and all this. And I believe it. It's either in you or it isn't. Now I will admit that the environment will help, there's no question about it because nowadays we are in this position that we try to create for our children artificial environments in summer camps. We are already in a different situation again, but even then it has to be internalized. And that is difficult. That is difficult of course. The environment of it helps. But if it doesn't become a matter of your conviction or principals, ultimately environment has no survival value. Baeck said this many years ago. Whatever Baeck said I remember. Not isn't that peculiar. And all the other teachers I had . . . did you hear this thing zing?

JL: The alert?

MS: Alright.

JL: I am finished with my questions to you.

MS: Oh, and I am, too. At least this time I didn't fall asleep.

JL: I really thank you very, very much for all of your time and all of your self that you've given, but just one [inaudible]. Is there anything you'd like to add yourself?

MS: No. I say *Gottseidank* [Thanks God].

JL: Thank you.

MS: I am in America. I didn't say... [laughs].

**END OF TAPE 12, SIDE 2**

END OF TRANSCRIPT