

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Zionism in Youngstown

Personal Experiences

O. H. 542

JOSEPH HILL

Interviewed

by

Thomas Hess

on

October 20, 1975

JOSEPH HILL

Joseph Hill was born in Lithuania, January 14, 1903, the eldest of five children of Orthodox Jewish parents. In 1921 he came to the United States. He worked in a steel mill in Elwood City, Pennsylvania for about six months, then came to Youngstown where he attended night school while working as a clerk. He became a United States citizen in 1927.

In 1929, Mr. Hill married a schoolteacher and they had one son, David. In August of 1965, and again in September of 1974, Mr. Hill visited Israel, where his brother and two sisters live.

Mr. Hill has been active in the Jewish community since he came to Youngstown in 1922. He was one of the organizers of the Youngstown Hebrew Club and served as its president off and on. He was Chairman of the Council of the Jewish National Fund and helped to organize many of its fund raising activities. Some of his other titles include: President of the tri-state regional Zionist Organization; member of the tri-state regional Zionist Executive Committee; elected to the National Executive Council of the Zionist Organization of America. Mr. Hill served as president of Youngstown's Zionist organization and is presently Chairman of the Board of that organization.

Mr. Hill is a life insurance agent. He has been employed by the New York Life Insurance Company since 1935. He has received the Brandeis Award. He is a member of the congregation of the Temple Rodef Sholom and belongs to B'nai B'rith and Youngstown's Jewish Community Center.

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH HILL

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Hess

SUBJECT: Local History, Orthodox Jews' Views, Youth
in Lithuania

DATE: October 20, 1975

HE: This is an interview with Mr. Joseph Hill at his home on 131 Roslyn Drive in Youngstown, Ohio, on October 20, 1975.

Mr. Hill, I would like for you to tell me first about your life in Europe before you came to America.

HI: I was born in a small town in Lithuania in 1903. We were a family of five children. I was the oldest. My parents were strictly Orthodox Jews. They observed their religion one hundred percent. We went to a religious school approximately eight to ten hours a day, six or seven days a week.

In 1914, when World War I broke out, there was chaos. In no time the Germans invaded. We were not too far away from the German border. Thereafter, the Russians never returned. I do remember that in my father's home there was a picture of the old Czarist family that no one could criticize. No one could deny having it in their homes. If you did not have it, you were considered a traitor to the government.

My father served three years and nine months in the infantry of the Russian Army. However, being Jewish, we were discriminated against. You couldn't own any land. We were in a ghetto. Children couldn't go to college. There were no colleges or universities to speak of, and people were mostly poor and couldn't afford it anyway.

Consequently, most of the Jewish people living under these circumstances desired to leave as soon as they could, where-

ever they could go to.

In 1915, before the Germans invaded our area, the entire Jewish community of Lithuania was forced to leave. We were given two weeks to pack and go deeper into Russia, away from the German border. The Russians understood that the Jewish people were most likely not in their favor, being under constant, severe anti-Semitic discrimination. The Germans promised them the world, so they thought there might have been spies among the Jewish people in favor of Germany. Maybe there were, I don't know. So entire communities were uprooted. We traveled by horse and wagon with whatever belongings the family could take, about 150 to 200 miles away from Lithuania, deeper into what was then called White Russia.

Nobody had any money. I remember going to soup kitchens to survive. As we were traveling slowly, as best we could, we were almost near Vilna, which was a big city. The Russians retreated faster than we traveled. The Germans, of course, came in, and we returned home.

My father, who was by trade a carpenter, specialized primarily in making windows. He traveled to farms to work. If they didn't have any money to pay him he would bring back food.

One Sunday morning he left and never returned. Several days later we found him stabbed to death. His body was thrown into a lake. I was then about fifteen years old.

My mother had the responsibility of supporting a family of five, although she had five brothers in the United States who would have helped her. The United States was at war with Germany. No money could get in from the United States to Lithuania. She went to work and did the best she could and she made a living.

When the war ended, I being the oldest of the family, it was understood that there was no future for us in Lithuania. Lithuania was in the process of establishing a government and an army of its own. There were no records of any kind because during the turmoil, as the Russians retreated and the Germans came in, all the records and most of the court-houses were destroyed. They had no dates of birth of anybody.

So they had representatives of the community take a census. They would go from house to house and mark down the names of people and the dates of birth. When they came to our house, I was about seventeen years old; my mother did not register me. She knew if I was registered they wouldn't let me out of there because I would have to get into the Lithuanian Army. That was the last thing that I wanted to

do. I had no interest in remaining in Lithuania. However, when the time came for me to leave and my name did not appear on their books, I did not exist. My uncle, who at that time lived here in Lowellville, Ohio, sent some money to my mother. She went to the various authorities and hired an attorney. Somehow a miracle developed and my name appeared. I got a visa and I was permitted to leave.

I was maybe seventeen or eighteen years old. I had to travel to the nearest office of the American Council. It was located in Latvia in Riga. We traveled about two days with horse and wagon. I got permission from both the Lithuanian government and the American Council; I was okay.

I arrived in the United States in 1921, in New York. I had an uncle in New York who had to guarantee that I would not be a public charge. I was in New York about six or eight months. Another uncle, my mother's brother in Elwood City, Pennsylvania, worked in a steel mill. He was some sort of a foreman in his own department. He decided that I would be better off staying with him. He would give me a job in the steel mill in Elwood City. He would be my boss. I wouldn't have to pay any room and board. It was walking distance to the plant. The only thing I had to do, whatever money I didn't need for myself I should send home to support the family. That was fine.

I came to Elwood City late in 1922. I worked in the steel mill about six to eight months making thirty-eight cents an hour. I was happy because I didn't need anything. That was enough for me.

In those days there were no unions. The plant next door decided thirty-eight cents an hour wasn't enough and they paid forty-five cents. Our plant would not give an increase, so they went out on strike. My uncle, being a foreman, didn't want a strike, so he kept going into the plant doing whatever he was supposed to do. They threatened to tear his house down and cause him plenty of damage. But he kept going. He didn't want a strike.

I left. I was not interested anymore in thirty-eight cents an hour, or forty-five cents. There was no future in it for me. I came to Youngstown. I got a job in a store, clerking. I made fourteen dollars a week. I worked about twelve hours a day, six days a week. I was permitted by my boss to take off two evenings a week to go to night school. I started going to the night school which was then located at the YMCA building. I kept going to night

school. And I kept dropping out of night school. It wasn't too easy. But I kept going back. It took me about twenty years to graduate from high school.

In 1929 I got married. I married into a prominent family in Youngstown. My wife was a schoolteacher, teaching kindergarten. She was also a teacher of Hebrew. She was certified so she knew how to handle kids even in religious school, Hebrew school. In 1930 we had a son. Those were Depression years and we had nothing. There were no jobs. There was no money. We had to give up housekeeping. We moved in with my father-in-law. His house was crowded, but we had to move in.

About 1933 or 1934 when things began to get a little better I got into the life insurance business and I've been in life insurance ever since.

Our son grew up and went to Youngstown College for two years and then Ohio State University, and graduated from law school. Then he got married and had children of his own.

Now, so far it's personal. I don't know whether that makes any sense or not.

HE: Sure. That's the background that we need. Now I would like to fill in a little bit. Your name in Lithuania was not Joseph Hill, was it?

HI: No.

HE: What was your Lithuanian family name?

HI: The Hebrew name . . . I had two names, Yoseph. The last name was Chaim. Chaim means life. Yoseph mean Joseph. The translation is multiply. The second name is Polish, Podgursky. The s-k-y is a suffix. Where my family got that name I don't know, and actually I was not interested. Pod-gura means "under hill". I speak some Polish. When I came here I had no interest in that name and I didn't think anybody could ever spell it. I just called myself Hill. I became an American citizen in 1927 and I've been known as Joseph Hill ever since.

HE: You mentioned that there were five children in your family. Could you tell us something about your brothers and sisters?

HI: I came here in 1921. In 1923 my brother next to me, Harry, came to this country with our help, my help and my uncle's help. He has been in New York ever since. The rest of the family stayed in Lithuania. We sent them money to live on. They went to school. There was comparative peace there. They lived much better under the Lithuanian government than

they did under the Russian government because Lithuania was a democracy. There was anti-Semitism, but not the same as before. The Lithuanian people primarily were a peaceful people.

When the Hitler trouble started, remembering that that town was still not too far away from Germany, it had an influence on those that were really anti-Semitic. Many of the people in Lithuania became more violent. My youngest brother, who was then about seventeen years old, decided it was time for him to leave, because he didn't want to serve in the Lithuanian Army. He went to Palestine.

HE: What year was this?

HI: I would say this was probably 1927, 1928, 1929; about that time he went to Palestine. He had nothing, but the Zionist organization was beginning to be more active. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, 1918, those who wanted to settle in Palestine had nothing to go to except an ideology and determination. He decided he wanted to go there. He did not want to go anywhere else. We tried to bring him here, to the U.S.A. He just didn't want to. He has been there ever since.

I was in Israel twice. I was there in September of 1974 and the first time in August of 1965. My brother tells me of the experiences that he had there. As an example, he left Lithuania and he had one pair of new shoes. He had no other shoes and he had no money. When he got to Palestine a group of men went together, with the help of the Zionist organization. Being tired, the long journey, they went to sleep in the open air. It's warm. When he got up in the morning he didn't find his shoes. The shoes were gone. He had no money to buy new shoes so he went and got himself a job. He walked back and forth and he got along without shoes until he got enough money to buy a new pair.

My mother and the two younger girls remained in Lithuania. It got to be a question whether they should come here or go to Palestine. Under the American law at the time, I could bring my mother over without any difficulty because I was an American citizen. But the sisters, the two girls, had to wait for the next quota. There was no quota, as I remember it, for bringing parents over. My mother didn't want to leave without the girls. The youngest was still in high school. So they decided not to come here. They decided to go to Palestine. My mother and the older sister went to Palestine, about 1933 or 1934. The youngest girl remained in Lithuania. She was going to college to take up teaching. She stayed there for several years. She had left for Palestine about two weeks before Hitler invaded.

HE: That would be about 1939 or 1940?

HI: I don't remember the exact year. Just about that time. She was one of the last to leave. Those who remained were never heard of again. My father's brother died of natural causes some years ago, but his five or six children . . . two of them are still in Mexico. The rest of the family remained in Europe and they were all wiped out by the Nazis.

I've always said to my friends that if it were possible for a human being to forget that Lithuania ever existed, I would just blot it out of my memory. It isn't possible, but I have no interest. I wouldn't go back there. I don't know what happened there, I am just not interested. My father is buried there in a cemetery. There isn't anything I could do for him if I went there anyhow.

HE: You mentioned earlier there was anti-Semitism first while Lithuania was part of Russia. What form did this anti-Semitism take? We find it expressed in many ways around the world. Could you tell us how you felt that as a young person?

HI: To the best of my recollection, I would say this. The anti-Semitism that existed, active or inactive--by active I mean making pogroms or destroying property, beating up Jews, inactive, just cultural anti-Semitism.

In the town where we lived I think there were 200 or 250 Jewish families, and the rest of the families were Polish. We were not too far away from the Polish border, just maybe fifteen or twenty miles. The farmers, the peasants, were all Lithuanians. I believe it was primarily religious anti-Semitism. They were all Roman Catholics, fanatics, illiterates. There were no schools to speak of. They didn't read any newspapers. There was no radio, no telephones, no communication of any kind. What they knew was what they were told by somebody, maybe what they heard in church, what some speaker or maybe a rabble-rouser would tell them. The Jew was known as a non-believer. The Jew was a Christ-killer. This, I believe even up to this point, generally speaking, is the basis for Christian anti-Semitism. This is where it began from. We were called, in the Polish language, Ne-Douyarar. I'm not sure whether that's the correct pronunciation above. Non-believer.

My parents believed in God one hundred percent. Nothing happened without the Lord. Yet they were known as non-believers because we were brought up in a different way. That, basically, was the kind of life we had to live.

I would say the Lithuanian people were in the same position,

to some extent, as the Jewish people, because they too were dominated by the Russian Czar. They were not Russians. But to some extent they were worse off, or just as bad off as the Jews were. They were worse off to the extent that they didn't have a leadership that put any emphasis on education. There was no public school system. Therefore you didn't get an education.

The Jewish people put an emphasis on the education of their own religion. We had to go to religious school. Consequently we learned to read and write. My old teacher was also my father's teacher. He was probably an unqualified teacher, but he was a teacher. They accepted him as such. We even learned mathematics. The Lithuanian people would come to church on Sunday morning. I remember a big church in the middle of our town that was built by some feudal lord. That church was bigger than the cathedral in Youngstown, Ohio. You could see it from miles away. They would come to church on Sunday morning. They would walk, or ride. The roads were not paved. There was a lot of dirt and dust. They would come into our homes to wash off and clean up. Many of them would bring letters written in English, or in the Lithuanian language, from relatives who were already in the United States. They couldn't read it. They would bring it to us and we would try to read it to them the best way we knew how. They were illiterate.

Why the Jewish community of Lithuania and Poland hadn't left when they could have left is a question. It's not easy for masses of people just to pick themselves up and leave. That's probably the answer. You try to go so you can better yourself, but to go to Palestine in those days was going to nothing. There was nothing to go to. There was nothing but wilderness and waste.

HE: You haven't named the village you lived in.

HI: It wasn't necessarily a village. We had 250 Jewish families and there were some Lithuanian families. There were mostly Polish people. We probably had 500, 600, or 700 families. I don't know whether that would be called a village or a town. Whatever you would call it, it was called Vishay. It appears on the Lithuanian map as Wejseja.

HE: We know that further south in Russia there were active pogroms where many Jewish people were summarily executed. Did you see any of this physical attacking during your youth there?

HI: No, that I did not. During the war we lived under German occupation for three or four years. There was a rumor that

there was going to be a pogrom in our town. The young people organized themselves, and they said, "This time we are not going to take it without defending ourselves." The pogrom never took place.

When we returned to our homes, after we were forced out during the Russian occupation years, about two years later or a year and a half later, all the homes were empty. No one was able to take any of his possessions with him, except his clothing and family. The homes were empty. The people of the town just emptied everything. We came back to nothing. They didn't take the homes but there was nothing left in them.

HE: You mentioned your father was a carpenter. What were some of the other occupations of Jewish families that lived there?

HI: Shoemakers, tailors, small stores. My uncle traded horses, my father's brother. He would buy and sell horses. There were no automobiles. Maybe he would be an automobile dealer now. He was fairly well-to-do, comparatively speaking. Blacksmith.

HE: Small business and artisans?

HI: Yes. We had a big synagogue in the town. People would go to pray and study, the rabbi. Poverty, everybody was poor. I remember a brewery that was owned by a Jewish fellow.

HE: Was he prosperous in comparison to the other people?

HI: Yes, he was prosperous. He was so prosperous that he was able to send his children to college, the univeristy. When the government of Lithuania was established one of his sons was a member of the Lithuanian parliament.

HE: Do you remember his name?

HI: Yes. The name was Diskin. I don't remember any first names.

HE: You've mentioned the Jewish school several times. Could you take us to school for one day?

HI: We would start about age five, maybe earlier. We had to be in class early in the morning. We would come back home after dark. They were primarily interested in learning the prayer book and the Hebrew language. That was the important thing. You would know all of the prayers and how to participate in the prayers in the synagogue, and then the Bible. That was primarily what we had to study. And to read and write for the same purpose--to communicate.

HE: What languages?

HI: All in Hebrew. All the prayers in the Orthodox tradition are in Hebrew. Hebrew was known as the holy language and you had to learn it. If you didn't know the Hebrew you couldn't read the prayer book.

HE: Was this for your sisters as well as for your brothers?

HI: No. They primarily stressed males. There was no objection to girls learning, but it was not as important. The boys had to. They had to go to school. In the Orthodox tradition, in order to have community prayers you had to have ten males. It was quite a disgrace if anyone couldn't pray. There were some who never did go, farmers who were too far away from town, very few. It was quite a shame for any Jewish man to be an illiterate. They stressed education, and this was the only kind of education they were acquainted with. They didn't know any other education. We had learned to the extent that most of the prayers we knew by heart. We didn't have to go to a prayer book. I still remember them.

HE: Is the practice here in America different with regard to the prayers? You're not using the same prayers here that you did there?

HI: We had only one kind of community, and that was a strictly Orthodox community. I never heard of the word "reform Jews", not at that time, nor conservative or anything else. There was only one kind of Catholic community, and that was the Roman Catholic. One church . . . one Roman Catholic church and one Jewish synagogue. I was strictly Orthodox. On the Sabbath everything stood still. People would dress up in the best clothing they had. They would go to the bath house on Friday and clean themselves up. There were no modern conveniences in the homes. It was a public bath house. They would come home and they felt refreshed. Go to the synagogues and pray, and come home and have a half-way decent meal . . . and rest.

HE: What kind of activities would you have on Saturday?

HI: On Saturday morning--synagogue. About eight o'clock. We would come home about eleven and have a noon meal, an elaborate type of meal. Then the older folks would take a nap, or take a walk. They would go out of town and get some fresh air. The town wasn't that big. The young folks would also go walking, to the woods, just relax. Back to the synagogue towards evening for twilight prayers, some home late at night, and the day was over. The next day--back to work.

HE: Did you have any desire to go to Palestine when you were

thinking about leaving Lithuania?

HI: That didn't even enter my mind. It was understood that if I went to Palestine I would have to be helped. There was no way of earning anything down there to be able to help the family. No way. When I came here, whatever I did, I could save some money and send it to the family.

Later on, when the rest of the family went to Palestine--the girls and my youngest brother--they lived in a kibbutz. They were self-supporting. I could have gone if I wanted to. I didn't want to. I have no desire to ever give up my American citizenship. They live there. I've been a Zionist since my childhood days. My Zionism begins with my religion. My Zionism isn't based on politics. Politics are a necessary evil.

HE: Can you give us an example of maybe something that happened in the government where they laid the blame on the Jews?

HI: I haven't given it any thought . . . offhand, I would rather not say.

HE: One thing that is very interesting to me that I would like you to emphasize is this knowledge that the Jewish people had of this very active anti-Semitism, very obvious to them, long before we get Hitler in power. If we say Hitler actually came in power in 1932 or 1933, you've indicated about ten years earlier he was laying out his program. Did the Jewish people talk about this feeling or what Hitler would do?

HI: In this country?

HE: Yes. You were here then, right?

HI: Yes, certainly. The government of England was the mandatory power over Palestine and under the Balfour Declaration, which was ratified, I believe in 1921; even by the American congress there was to be a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. It later developed that maybe Balfour himself was very sincere in what he was doing. Lloyd George I think was Prime Minister at the time. But they didn't think that would remain a statement. In order to build a country . . . this was a very unique situation. The Jewish people were not there. There were some, but not enough to build a country. Not the Jews nor the Arabs. People lived there--the Turks and whoever else was around there. There was no government of their own, or country of their own. I think England thought that would never happen anyhow. The Jews were a people, what the Germans would call luftmenschen, traders. They were not builders. They sold flowers. They

don't build any buildings, no farmers, dig ditches, drain swamps. The Jews never do that. Never get them to do that.

But it developed that there were some. There was an organization in Russia of Jewish college students, intellectuals who said, "We've had enough of this." They were treated worse than the colored people were treated in this country, where you have to be isolated and you were not accepted. Even if you went to the university, you were still a Jew and a non-believer and a nobody. They said, "Well, we've had enough of this." They organized themselves into an organization which became known as Bilu, which is an abbreviation of a Hebrew phrase, translated, meant "House of Jacobs, Let's Go." They went to Palestine and they organized themselves into kibbutzin.

Just by way of example, my brother from New York and I were on a tour of Israel for a month. We were housed in a hotel in a city called Netanya on the Mediterranean. Beautiful city. My brother lives in a small town in Israel called Afula. I didn't realize he moved so far away from the family, even from Tel Aviv where my sister lives. My brother has an old car that he borrowed money to buy. This car is about twenty years old. But it runs, and he came to see us. I said to him, "This city of Netanya is beautiful." He said, "You should have seen what it looked like thirty or forty years ago." I said, "What did it look like?" He said, "Over there." He pointed it out. There's a great big apartment building standing there now. He worked there, draining swamps. He said, "That's where I got malaria. You're telling me about Netanya." It develops that the Jewish people who got there, those who could have gone elsewhere, said, "We've had enough. We want to establish a life of our own where we will be the masters of our own fate." They drained swamps, they planted trees, and they built roads. They made a living.

The English thought that this would never happen. They didn't want to get out of there. They knew that they could probably buy the feudal lords of the Arab countries. But they could not buy the Jewish people because the Jews didn't want that kind of domination. They wanted to be masters of their own fate. I believe the downfall of the English empire down there started with the Jews giving them trouble. Here's a mandatory power in violation of the orders that they had from the League of Nations at that time. They couldn't control a handful of Jews! There were only about 500,000. The Arabs woke up. If the Jews could get rid of the English, they could get rid of them too.

HE: What year was this realization coming to be in Palestine, when the British realized that they couldn't control the Jews and the Arabs saw this situation?

HI: I think it finally developed because of the Hitler holocaust. Those Jews who had left before Hitler came in were fortunate enough to just get out ahead of time. They had no place to go.

We were just getting out of a severe Depression here in the United States. After all that Roosevelt tried to do, we were still in a depression until the war started in Europe. Labor was not in favor of allowing new immigrants to come in. I'm not saying they were anti-Semitic; they were just human beings trying to protect their own interests. If you were going to open up the gates of the United States and allow millions to get in here, not only Jews would come here, but others would come. They were not all Nazis, and they all wanted to get out of there. So even labor was not in favor of free immigration. There was restricted immigration.

So the Jewish people were trapped. Many of them went to Palestine. They were helped by all kinds of organizations, Jewish organizations primarily. They sent them to Palestine. Consequently, around 1945, 1946, 1947, in order for them to be there, in order to establish kibbutzim, in order to establish homes, in order to establish anything, they had to settle on land. The land had to be bought--paid for. They didn't come with guns. They didn't come with anything. There was a world organization called the Jewish National Fund. Its purpose, primarily, was to buy land, redeem it, cultivate it, and give it to the people who were willing to settle on it. They gave it to them free. All they had to do, in due time, was to assume the taxes on it. They didn't own it. They couldn't hire people to work for them; they had to work it themselves, or off they went. I was involved in that. Before the establishment of the state of Israel the land was owned by absentee Arab landowners. They were willing to sell it to anybody who was willing to pay the price for it. We would go out and raise money from charity. Donations, contributions, all kinds of schemes. Then send it down to headquarters and they would buy the land and turn it over to these people who were coming in, and establish communities, settlements. But before you could put people there you had to find water; that was the greatest importance, and then get them the tools to work with.

HE: When did this Jewish Fund start?

HI: The Jewish National Fund actually started about 75 years ago in Europe at one of the Zionist conventions that Herzl had called. He could have gotten all of Palestine from the Turkish sultan for a song. But he had to get whatever money was necessary, as cheap as it was, from somebody. The masses of the Jewish people didn't have any money. The Rothchild's and some of the others said, "You want millions of dollars to give to the sultan." They knew what the sultan was. And all of them were a bunch of grafters. The Jews won't get the land. I've heard it explained. The rich Jews said, "Give us the land; we'll give you the money." The sultan said, "Give us the money, we'll give you the land." Nothing ever happened. Large sums of money they couldn't get. So they established the Jewish National Fund. They said, "We will collect money from every Jewish home. The Jewish women, the religious women who light candles on Friday night, put a penny into a box for the purpose of redeeming the land." Basically, to the religious Jew, the Zionist movement is a religious movement. Every Saturday and Monday and Thursday, when you read portions of the Bible, the Torah, to the public, before the Ark was opened they offer a prayer that "out of Zion shall come the law and the word of God from Jerusalem." That's Zionism.

I was on the program not long ago; I was asked to speak about a certain phase of religious Zionism. I looked through the local phone book at the listing of churches in Youngstown. I found a number of churches that had the word "Zion" in the title--Zion Christian Church. Well, what did they want also? A religious connotation of some sort. The religious Jew--I mentioned at the beginning that we had to learn the Hebrew prayers by heart--one of the prayers is "Return us to Zion, the city, and there we will serve thee," whatever that means. It wasn't too difficult to get a million of Jewish people in Europe to accept the concept of the Jewish National Fund. This is not political. This is not speculation. The land will be bought and owned by the Jewish National Fund. It can never be sold. It's for people who are willing to settle on it and cultivate it.

My brother and sister in Israel, in a town called Afula, had their homes given to them by the Jewish National Fund. Their homes were built on J.N.F. land. All they have to do is pay the taxes. The land is not their's. The house is their's. The land belongs to the Jewish National Fund.

HE: You indicated a few minutes ago that when Israel became

a nation this changed somehow?

HI: When Israel became a nation, the question came up, "Who owns the land?" There's a lot of land there that nobody owned. No title. Who owns it? If the Jewish National Fund is going to buy land, who are they going to buy it from? The government of Israel? Well, the government owns it. Israel is a democracy. You just don't take any land away from anybody, just like in the United States. Unless it's under the process of eminent domain, which is understood.

Even today there's a lot of wasteland. Nothing has grown there for thousands of years. It takes millions of dollars to clean it up. The government of Israel just doesn't have that kind of money. They just don't have it. As the immigrants come in--not as many now as in the past--they would prefer not to have them settle in the cities. They used to complain that Tel Aviv has grown too big. Maybe we have the same problem in this country. New York is too big, and so is Los Angeles. If more people would leave there and go on the farms, maybe there wouldn't be this trouble, the trouble that they're in. But human nature being what it is, if my family brings me over, if I were in Russia or some Arab country, and I had to leave to a country called Israel, to my brother's or my sister's or my other relatives, without anything in my pocket, and they may have a little business of their own, chances are I would settle near them.

HE: I would like to go back to a statement that you made a little bit earlier concerning the knowledge of the Jewish people with regard to Hitler's anti-Semitism. How conscious were the Jews of Hitler's great anti-Semitic feelings and when does this consciousness first start to express itself?

HI: To the best of my recollection Hitler became active about 1923. He was just another politician and no one ever thought that he would ever be in power. The Jews had heard these types of anti-Semitic statements over centuries, and they said, "Well, he's just another one." The German Jews who were, by and large, assimilated, didn't take him seriously. I understand that some of the rich German Jews even supported Hitler, not necessarily his anti-Semitism, but his politics. Until Hitler actually became powerful--by the way, it's generally known that Hitler did not take power as they do today in so many countries where the army takes over. Hitler was legally elected by the German people. This I do remember, he ran for office against Hindenburg. I don't know who else, which means that Germany was a democracy

and most of the German people knew his program. His book, Mein Kampf, was already published. Many of them had read it. They voted him into office, which means many of them agreed with what he stood for.

I remember, about 1935, I attended a lecture in Youngstown. The speaker was Dr. Printz. He was a German rabbi, a refugee. He left Germany and came to the United States. Dr. Printz at the time spoke at the Youngstown College. He could hardly speak English. He said that he personally knew Hitler. He was of the opinion that Hitler was honest in his anti-Semitism. That he would fulfill through his program, that he was not using his anti-Semitism for political gain. That came to pass, as we saw later.

Those German Jews who were beginning to lose their jobs, their positions, and a chance to make a living, before Hitler had the chance to implement his program, or entrench himself solidly in his position in government, many of the Jewish people had left. They went wherever they could. A lot of them went to Palestine. Some came to this country. I know many who have left before that time. They were fortunate. Many of them had even saved some of their money.

I just learned recently that the banks of Switzerland have numbers. Their accounts are numbered. Names are not known. They started that in order to protect the refugees who were leaving Germany, so that no one would know what they had with them.

That was the end of Jewish life in Germany. There were 500,000 Jews in Germany about 1930. By 1945 there were hardly any. Because of World War II the Jewish population of Europe was liquidated, with the exception of Russia. Poland had three million Jews. Today there are about 30,000. At the beginning of World War II there were eighteen million Jews in the world. By the end of World War II there were twelve million.

HE: You used the word "assimilated" a couple of times with regard to German Jews. What does this signify, that a person was assimilated as opposed to someone that was not assimilated?

HI: They were a part of the German culture, of the German society. They went to the universities. They were Germans. They considered themselves German citizens of the Jewish persuasion. They didn't consider themselves anything else. Just like the other religious groups in Germany. There were Lutherans, there were Catholics, and there were Jews. They were all German citizens.

HE: Were in Europe would you find a contrast to this, some group of Jewish people who didn't consider themselves assimilated? What nation?

HI: I would say that the Jews of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, definitely were not assimilated. The reason is not that they didn't want to be assimilated. They were not allowed to be assimilated. The Jews, even where I come from, were not allowed to own land. They could own a house, but they could not own land. The ownership of land means permanent ownership, and that means permanent residence. That, they didn't want, the people of Russia, Poland, Lithuania. Not necessarily Lithuania. Poland itself didn't have independence, but the Polish people, by and large, were of the same opinion as all the rest of the population. The Jew was a foreign element.

HE: So there was a very definite distinction between a German Jew . . .

HI: That's true. They didn't want the Jew in their midst. They just didn't want them. The church . . . the entire environment, so far as the Jew was concerned, was anti-Semitic. The Jew couldn't go to the university unless he converted himself. Some maybe had a little money, they paid a little graft. Some maybe got in. They were very few in number. I heard one Jewish historian make a statement that Europe, over a period of nearly two thousand years, was nothing but a graveyard for the Jew.

HE: You referred to your visits in Israel and this land that the Zionist organization has purchased and given to the people to use. Now that Israel is independent and is developing are there any complications in the activities of the Zionist people here in America buying this land and putting refugees on it? How is this working out now?

HI: It's a rather interesting situation from the Jewish point of view. I've been active in that phase of the program for a long time and I'm somewhat familiar with the buying of land, and the raising of money to buy that land. The Jews own no land as such, as individuals, or as a nation. The Jews were expelled from there by the Romans, and they were gone. There was a small Jewish population at the time, primarily religious Jews who lived there in the Holy Land. But the rest of the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. In order to return, they always yearned to return. In the daily prayer book there isn't a page that doesn't mention "Praise to the Lord that He returned to Zion and to Jerusalem, and there we will serve thee."

When the time came, during the 19th century, they realized that prayers alone won't get you anywhere, you have to do something. Dr. Theodoere Herzl organized the Jewish masses the world over. At that time nobody owned the land. The Turks were there and the sultan was in charge. There was no government of any kind. He negotiated with the Turkish sultan. The sultan said, "I'll sell you this land." It was actually worthless after two thousand years of neglect. All they had there was rocks and mountain and swamps. He said, "I'll sell it to you, for a certain amount of money." I believe it was around ten million dollars. Dr. Herzl didn't have ten million dollars. He was organizing the Zionist organization at the time. He went to some of the rich Jews in England. Rothchild, I think, was one of them. He told them about it. They said, "That's fine. We can probably raise the ten million dollars. But how sure are we that once you turn the money over to the sultan that we are going to get the land?" Those people were, by and large, a bunch of grafters and wouldn't trust him. They said, "Give us the land and we'll give you the money." Then he went back to the sultan. The sultan said, "Give me the money and I'll give you the land." And that's the way it went on. Herzl didn't get anywhere that way.

In 1895 or 1900, at one of the Zionist conventions that he had called together in Russia and Vienna, they organized what was called the Jewish National Fund. The Jewish National Fund went to the poor people. They said, "We can't get any money from the rich. We have to get money from you." One of the first things they did was have a little charity box, a metal box that the women have at home. Every time they offered a prayer, before lighting the candles on Friday evening, they would put a coin in for the redemption of the land in the Holy Land. That became a traditional collection twice a year. Committees would organize in the various communities and empty the boxes.

Then they enlarged on it. They started selling trees. They started the planting of trees for certain occasions, inscribing people in the Golden book. As soon as they had a certain amount of money they would negotiate with the absentee Arab landowners and they would buy the land from them. Then they would set up kibbutzim settlements. There was nothing there. They just settled there. These people had to be supported. There was no industry for anyone to come to and get a job, so they had to do this if they wanted to stay there. The quickest way to get people to have something to eat is to put them on the farm.

I remember--this is from personal experience--my father-in-law was the leading Zionist in this area. He bought land without ever seeing it. His name was Louis Ozersky. He had a deed to the land. My brother was young when he came there. He was about sixteen or seventeen years old around 1925. My father-in-law said, "The land isn't doing anything up there. I'm paying taxes. If your brother wants to use it, I'll give it to him and let him use it." My brother went down to look at it and he couldn't accept it because he himself just couldn't do anything with it. It took a big organization to clear it and cultivate it, to make it usable. That was the situation.

As far as the Jewish National Fund was concerned the land was not for speculation. It was just the property of the Jewish people. It is not for sale. It cannot be sold. When they gave a piece of land to people who wanted to settle on it, they had to enter into an agreement with the organization that they, themselves, would work the land. They couldn't hire anybody. No matter how good of farmers they could be they could find somebody to do a better job than they did for a lot less money in that part of the country. The Arabs are practically still working for nothing today. In those days you could get them to work your land for nothing. But you couldn't do that on Jewish National Fund land. That was out.

My sister and my brother have their own homes. The Jewish National Fund gave them the land to build their homes on. They didn't have the down payment. If anyone were to buy my sister's or my brother's home out there, they would buy the home; they wouldn't buy the land. The land is not for sale.

HE: How does the government of Israel enter into ownership of this land? Do they own the land?

HI: The land is owned by the Jewish National Fund.

HE: the taxes go to Israel?

HI: It is not taxed. They pay a certain amount of money to the Jewish National Fund. It became sort of a complicated situation when the government of Israel was established. Now who owns the land? The Jewish National Fund was a fund raising organization for the purpose of redeeming the land, for bringing in free dollars. The government had no objection to it. The only thing the government is interested in . . . This I have seen, and I know that from personal experience what my brother told me because my brother has been in road maintenance for the government.

He worked on road maintenance while the English were there. The roads there were narrow. The Jewish National Fund wanted eucalyptus trees on both sides of the road.

With all the modern military vehicles there, which are much wider than they used to be, and the armies and war and commerce and everything else, people traveling back and forth in big trucks and so on, the roads have to be wider. In order to widen the road you have to remove trees. The trees belong to the Jewish National Fund. That's private property. In the countries where you don't have democracy the government comes around and does what they want. But this is private property. The government does not get involved. So they have to deal with the Jewish National Fund. They enter into an agreement, "We'll buy the trees from you." At this time the trees had grown and they could use the lumber and sell the trees, sell them to factories to make furniture out of them.

After you have completed your agreement with the Jewish National Fund, before you can cut the trees down, you have to go to the military. They have to agree to it too because this is a sort of a security. Without trees everything is open. That's the way they work. It takes time, but that's the way they operate.

HE: You used the word democracy and democratic procedures. Could you describe the government of Israel so that we could see any ways that it might be a little different than what ours is here in America, or see how it is so very much like ours?

HI: It is not like ours. The government of Israel, as it is today situated, is exactly the same as the French system, or the Italian or Germany. Not England, which still has a king and queen. They have the party system. There are seventeen parties in Israel today. Even the present government has a very slim majority in the knesset.

HE: What's the knesset?

HI: That's the congress. They elect representatives. It is patterned after the French and Italian system of government. There is a president, a prime minister. The president is elected by the congress. I'm not sure whether he serves four years or six years. He has to be reelected by the congress. It's a free society.

I don't know whether the United States system is really a truly democratic system because in our system, in the

United States, the minority does not rule. They are not represented. The loser is not represented. In France and Italy and Israel the loser is represented.

HE: He has his seat in the kneset?

HI: He has his seat in the kneset. Depending on the number of votes that he has received. That's probably more democratic. That's the way they operate. I agree that many, who are in a position to know that Israel is going to be in trouble in that area for a long time to come, from its neighbors, until such time as the neighbors become democratic, as long as they are surrounded by the feudal system, they're going to be troubled; because the feudalists cannot allow democracy to flourish in their midst, any more than Russia the communist system can tolerate a successful, prosperous democracy. This is the situation of the world and we have to face it.

HE: You mentioned Russia. You made several interesting comments concerning the Russian/Israeli relationship and the Jewish people in Russia now. One thing that really interested me was the possibility of Russia and Israel becoming more friendly in their international relationship.

HI: I'll comment on this by giving a specific example. When we visited Israel in 1965 we met a family living in Israel not too many years. Their name was Friedman. They were my sister's neighbors. He told us a very interesting story about how he came to Israel. He was born and raised in Bucharest, Romania. He lived there. His family has lived there for a long time. By trade, he was a tailor. When Romania was taken over by the communists -- I don't remember what year it was -- the peasant, the farmers, by and large, were illiterate. They didn't know what it was all about. Those who lived in the cities had some education and they could read and write. In order to save a job, which did not necessarily apply to the farmers because they had their own work, those in the cities, you had to declare yourself a communist. If you were not a communist you were not the first one to get a job. So those that were even anti-communist said, "Well, okay, we're communists."

This man, Mr. Friedman, was one of hundreds who were called in by the government and asked that they go around to the countryside, to the farmers and the small towns, and talk and preach about the glory of communism. When Israel was established in 1948, the Romanian communist government, at that time, selected 400 Jewish communists, those who had declared themselves as communists. And

they let them out. So all these people said, "Oh yes, we want to go to Israel, to Palestine." What they had in mind was, "Here is a small community of five or six hundred thousand Jews who came from everywhere. We're going to send in 400 Jewish communists. They could take over and establish a communist government." Friedman was one of them. He and his family came to Israel.

Out of the 400 communists, 397 disappeared. Three remained communist. This proves only one thing. All that the communists are interested in is spreading their ideology to take over. It is possible that the government of Israel has made a mistake by aligning itself from a political point of view with the west. They could be anti-communist just like Egypt is anti-communist. Actually, the communist party in Egypt it outlawed even today. It is not outlawed in Israel because it is a democracy. I understand there are about two or three communists in the kneset. They are Arabs. I'm sure they were not elected by the Jews.

If Israel remained neutral--there are still about two and a half million Jews in Russia, there were about five million Jews in the United States at the time--if Israel had remained neutral instead of aligning itself with the west, perhaps Russia would have taken a different position, but Israel did not remain neutral. By aligning itself with the west they became anti-communist. This has made trouble.

HE: This has caused a difficulty for the two and a half million Jews in Russia?

HI: That's correct. It's an interesting observation. There are two and a half million Jews and there are over 200 million people living in Russia. They say there are only six, seven, or eight million members in the communist party altogether. The rest of them, some of them may be atheists today or agnostics, but surely they hadn't wiped out Christianity in the last fifty years. Not a single Christian voice is heard from Russia, wanting to get out of there.

There are Jews who, at the risk of their lives--they certainly lose their jobs immediately--when they say, "We want to leave and go to Israel. We want to leave." They don't want to be communists. They want to get out of there. We realize that it's not possible for two million people to say that, but there are individuals who do. Public opinion helps a great deal. President Nixon, and even president Ford, Kissinger, want to do it diplomatically--quietly. You can't do it by having

protest meetings and all that. But some Jews do leave Russia.

This, I think, may be of some interest. The Arabs are all small countries. One of the arguments they used thirty or forty years ago, against allowing the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, was that Palestine, as is, could not accomodate all the Jews. Supposing all of the eighteen million Jews said, "We're going." There was no room for them, no room for expansion. "They're going to throw us out of our countries and our homes."

Under the Balfour Declaration, at that time Jordan was part of Palestine. Perhaps some of the people could be scared, assuming that this was going to happen. But Hitler solved that problem. Now there are no longer eighteen million Jews. It's generally known, historically speaking, that masses of people do not move for ideological reasons. The American Jew isn't going anyplace. There are exceptions. We'll stay. There are millions of Greek people who don't go back to Greece. There are millions of Italians who don't go back to Italy, or Englishmen who don't go back to England. This is a good country. We want to stay here.

Europe is empty of Jews with the exception of Russia. And they can't get out of there. It's possible, if the doors were open, not only the Jews would get out of there. I am assuming that fifty million people would want to get out of there tomorrow and go someplace else. But they can't get out.

There are still some people coming into the country of Israel. And some leave. I spent a little time recently with an Israeli professor of the Hebrew university. He says, "It's a democracy. If anybody wants to leave, he leaves; we can't stop him. We want him to stay, but we can't stop him."

Where are they going to come from? The 800,000 Jews who have left the Arab countries have left. They didn't come to the United States. They went to Israel. The majority of the people of Israel today, the Jews, come from the oriental countries. Fifty-five percent of them are oriental Jews. The government is still in the hands of the western Jew. He is the, so-called, cultured, educated Jew. The oriental Jew was an illiterate Jew. They're having problems educating and civilizing the oriental Jews to take over. It will probably take a generation or two.

HE: What is the population of Israel right now?

HI: About three million.

HE: How many would you say would be the maximum that that land area would be able to support, even with their very best technology?

HI: Talking about the subject with the Israelis, and based on some of the material available in various publications, because of the lack of water in that area, and the land situation, as such, with the mountains and all that, Israel is becoming something like Switzerland. They'll have to develop industry. They can't depend on farms. It's interesting. Israel is a new country of 25 years or so. They have enough food for themselves. They even export oranges. The United States has to supply food to their neighbors. Egypt doesn't have any food. Israel has food.

They were idealists. They wanted to stay there. They said, "If we're going to stay here we have to have water. We have to look for it. We have to cultivate the land. Get rid of the rocks and the swamps." My brother had malaria. Working, draining the swamps around there, it takes a tremendous amount of willpower and ideology. We have to assume that that's the way the United States was built too, by the early settlers.

HE: The thing that troubles many Americans, both Jewish and non-Jewish folks, is whether we did all we could to try to save the Jews at the time of Hitler. You've indicated some feelings on this. Would you tell us about that?

HI: The American people, as such, did not do enough to save the Jews. That troubles many of them today. Their conscience still bothers them. You can include a lot of Jews among the so-called American people. Even today, among the Jewish people, when they have the major drives to raise funds, the great majority do not give their share. I understand they don't even reach twenty percent. Eighty percent stand on the sidelines.

America was dragged into World War II. We had to look at it from that point of view--from the world situation, not just the Jewish situation. I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of American boys have lost their lives because of Hitler. America considered it a moral war. America paid the price, just as England, France, and all the others did.

I'm looking at it from a broader point of view. Twenty million people were killed in Russia. I'm assuming that fourteen million were not Jews.

HE: Twenty million people were killed in Russia . . .

HI: During World War II,, twenty million people. Six million were Jews.

HE: Russia had a great percentage of these losses too?

HI: Yes.

HE: You told us about going to services in the Orthodox synagogue in Lithuania. What did the services there consist of, that we might compare them to an Orthodox service in America today?

HI: I want to get my little prayer book . . . The Orthodox service, there or here--we have Orthodox Jews in Youngstown who still stick to tradition. Can you read this?

HE: No, sir.

HI: We'll have to send you to Hebrew school.

You go to services. If you can't go to the synagogue you have to pray at home. As soon as you get up you have to wash your hands. You can't just get out of bed and take a prayer book and pray. You have to clean yourself. Clean hands and so on. You will agree that that's the way it should be done, even if you don't pray. It's a long prayer service. You go through a lot of prayers. Then you go home and wash your hands again, have breakfast, make a prayer over the bread. After you are through eating you pray again. Bless the Lord for the food. There's a special section for that. Then you go to work.

The Orthodox Jew doesn't take off his hat. You are not allowed. If he doesn't want to wear a hat he puts on a skullcap. The Orthodox Jew wears a Tzizit--the little shawl with the fringes. Has to wear it twenty-four hours a day.

Towards evening, twilight service. Then later another service. When you eat, you go through the same ceremony all over again. Before you go to bed you say certain prayers.

HE: The Orthodox Jew in Lithuania or in America would be having the same service?

HI: Yes. If he deviates from it--he is not allowed to deviate! That is a violation. The first prayer that the Jew utters in the morning--this is in the Hebrew--he thanks the Lord for returning his soul to him. Because when he goes to bed he turns his soul over for safekeeping to the Lord. In the morning, when he gets up, he knows that he is up, the Lord must have returned his soul to him.

The second prayer: "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of

the Lord." Everything is with the Lord. "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord." That's the tradition we were brought up on. Now compare that to today. I guess this is called Catholic Judaism. Then we have to go away from that and say Protestant Christianity in all its phases. It's no longer Catholic Christianity. You make changes. You eliminate certain parts and so on. If you've eliminated a lot . . . As I understand it the difference between the Orthodox and the reform--Conservatives are somewhat confusing--the reform take the position that the Bible was written by man to explain about God. You can stop right there. "There is a God." It's a certain concept. There is room for God and argument--deviation--as long as you say there is a God.

The Orthodox say, "The Lord gave the Torah to Moses." The Lord himself did it. Moses handed it over to Joshua, and so on down the line. So there's no question. We weren't allowed to question anything at home, the children. My father wasn't allowed to question his father. I think the reason he didn't want to give us the answer is that he didn't know the answer. He said, "You don't question." We lived that way.

Consequently, it's interesting to note, based on the religious training that the Jew had in the ghetto--this was ghetto life, there's no question about it--very seldom did you hear of Jewish murder. The Jew lived with the Lord.

He was so regimented.

HE: You said you had to leave from Lithuania by going out through Latvia. How did you get out of Latvia and how did you make your way to America?

HI: This is a different phase. I may have explained it, but we can go over it again.

When the government of Lithuania was established, about 1917, we had been under Russian domination over a period of about 300 years. We were actually Russian citizens. When the government of Lithuania was established, there was no record of the population. Nobody knew who was alive and who wasn't or how anybody was or anything. So in various towns the Lithuanian government would appoint a committee. They had appointed a committee of Jewish citizens to go out and take a census of the population, names, ages, dates of birth, occupation and so on, for the sake of record, so they would have it in various courthouses. We also knew that the Lithuanian government was in the process of establishing a Lithuanian Army. Unless you had a birth certificate, which hardly anybody

had, especially a young man of fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen . . . If you didn't have a birth certificate and if you were tall, you were eighteen. They would take you in and say, "You are eighteen." If you said you were fifteen or sixteen, "Give us a birth certificate," and you entered the army.

When they came to our house, ours was no exception. My mother was a widow and she had five children. I was the oldest. We were talking about when the war is over and it is possible that I would be the first one to leave and go to the United States. My mother had five brothers in this country. I was to come here and get a job and help the family out.

If I got into the army I wasn't going to go to the United States. She didn't register me at all. Instead of having five children, she had four. My name didn't exist on any record. But when I had to leave, one of my uncles, my mother's brother, sent her a hundred dollars. He had remembered Europe as it was from way back and he said, "A hundred dollars will buy a lot of people. You go to some lawyer and you get him a passport." So that's how I came back to life; they put me back on the books. Somebody got paid off.

I left Europe illegally. I don't want you to tell the Lithuanian government about it. (Laughter) Technically, I left Europe illegally. All I had to do thereafter was go to the American Consul and get papers. But we had to travel. I think the American Consul representing our section was in Latvia instead of Lithuania. In 1921 I came to the United States?

HE: You came by boat?

HI: Yes.

HE: How did you earn your passage? Did one of your uncles pay for that?

HI: They sent money to my mother. I don't remember whether they sent tickets or not. They must have sent tickets, steamship tickets. Came through Belgium.

HE: So you traveled across Germany?

HI: Yes. I remember stopping in Berlin or someplace there and looking in windows. For some reason, I don't know what happened, our boat left ahead of us. We had to stay in Antwerp for two weeks and wait for another boat to pick us up. That required additional money which I didn't have. It was sent to me.

That's how I came to the United States, and I've always been happy in the United States. I was particularly fascinated when I started going to night school, practically as an adult, and I was studying civics. That wasn't an academic subject. To me it was.

HE: What was the fascination?

HI: The operation and the establishment of our government, background, the Constitution of the United States, senators, the house of representatives, the separation of church and state. How that came into being. I'm still for it. I'm for the separation of church and state. Because you know what happened when the church dominated when the church controlled the state. That's the reason, I think, the Constitution of the United States is set up the way it is, freedom of religion.

HE: You came to the Youngstown community in 1921?

HI: I came to Youngstown in 1922.

HE: You've been part of the Jewish community here in Youngstown for about 53 years then. Would you give us a brief outline of the growth of the Jewish community here in Youngstown during that period of time? This is particularly interesting to us that are not Jewish, because some of us feel that anti-Semitism exists because we don't know our Jewish neighbors. Maybe if you could enlighten us on what the Jewish community is like in Youngstown it would help us to overcome this ignorance.

HI: I'm not sure about your assumption that anti-Semitism exists. I don't know whether it does exist. We argue that point quite often.

HE: Who do you argue it with?

HI: Anybody. Jews and non-Jews, Catholics, anybody. I have been in the insurance business, and I have, maybe at this point after forty years, fifteen or eighteen hundred people, all in this area. They're all my friends. Most of them are non-Jews. If it's organized anti-Semitism, that's a different story. When an individual says to me that he dislikes Jews, he doesn't know what he's talking about. He has an axe to grind maybe, for some reason. I don't know. Religious anti-Semitism, Biblical anti-Semitism, that's a different story. That's not a Jewish problem. Anti-Semitism is a form of hate. I can't see how a Christian could hate. If he hates, he's no longer a Christian, not a good Christian. That's my approach.

On a national level we have the Ku Klux Klan, maybe the

the John Birch Society. They're not as bad as the Ku Klux Klan, but bad enough.

I don't know of any anti-Semitism. I've always worked from way back with the non-Jew. There is a Jewish philosopher--I think Saul Friedman corresponds with this man's daughter, who publishes a national magazine and she accepts his articles. Her name is Maria Sirkin. Her father was an early Zionist. He was talking about anti-Semitism in those days. He was a Russian Jew who settled in the United States, I think. He said this: "There is no anti-Semitism, as such, in Christian communities where there are no Jews. There is no anti-Semitism there. Anti-Semitism comes about when the Jew settles there. Therefore, if the Jew wants to live in safety and security he had better not settle there. Let him go where there is no anti-Semitism. You establish your own Jewish state, where you have your own country." But, in Youngstown, I don't know of any anti-Semitism.

HE: That's a good report. Would that be true over the whole fifty years that you've lived here and been active in the community?

HI: I'm generalizing. Maybe it's not as simple as all that. We know that many utility companies would not hire Jews. I don't know whether I should mention their names or not.

HE: Sure.

HI: The Ohio Edison Company was one of them.

HE: What year was this?

HI: Up until recently. I understand that the J.C. Penney Company was another one, and many others. A Jew couldn't run for office and be elected, being a minority, but we weren't asking to run for the presidency and be elected. If that's anti-Semitism--maybe it is, I don't know. I think John F. Kennedy could be elected as president of the United States because he was a Catholic. That's not anti-Semitism. That's anti-Catholicism, or something. I have a feeling that John F. Kennedy was elected by Catholics, not by Protestants. Catholics were Republicans who voted for John F. Kennedy because he was Catholic. I don't know whether these people hated the Protestants or not.

Why would Ohio Edison Company not hire Jews? I don't know. I have never met the man who is in charge of hiring. But, there is no question about it, traditionally Christianity--I hate to say that to you--the Christian church has now, finally, come to realize that the Deicide concept is responsible for all that. It's changing. Today we are

speaking in terms of the Judeo-Christian tradition. That's only recently.

One way of creating an anti-Semitic atmosphere is what happened at the United Nations just recently, labeling the Zionist movement as racist. Who is going to label it? The United Nations. Judaism, to me, is a civilization, not necessarily a religion. Inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and all the inhabitants thereof." That's democracy. And that's Biblical. It has nothing to do with religion. It's a way of life. That's Zionism.

Zionism, basically, is Judaism. Judaism is Zionism. It's inseparable. If you're going to separate it you're taking the soul out of Jewish religion. I've heard all kinds of interpretations of the meaning of Zionism. Keep it simple. We have established the state of Israel. That is a place of refuge. That's of secondary importance. The Zionist movement never had that in mind. The person who is looking for a place of refuge and this door is open, that's fine. He is not particular. He will go wherever anyone will accept him. But Zionism is to keep the Jewish heritage alive. Going back about 3500, 4000 years, the only way to keep it alive is by keeping the Jew alive. The Jew cannot stay alive outside of his environment. He must be the master of his own environment to maintain his own heritage. And that means that he has to go somewhere where he will be the master of his own fate. That's the establishment of the state of Israel, and that's part of the prayer book that we mentioned before. The Jew says, "Return us to Zion, thy city, and there we will serve thee." In a broader sense you are taking in four thousand years of Jewish history.

There are Jews in Israel, not merely Jews, not merely Israelis. The country is only twenty-five years old. They come from everywhere! They came with their own background and their own ideas and their own philosophy and so on. Some are atheists, some are German Jews, some are not. You can't judge a Jew of Israel today by what he ought to be. He is not an Israeli, basically, the children, yes. A new generation is being developed. It is interesting that in twenty-five years of their own government, they've created more cultural institutions-- school systems, universities, music, opera, everything-- than in all of the other countries put together in their area, and they had five wars to fight. Maybe there's something to what they say. The Jewish people are people of the book.

HE: Did you have some official title as a leader in the community?

HI: Yes. I've had some titles. After coming to Youngstown in 1922, and after I got somewhat acclimated here, I was one of the organizers of the Youngstown Hebrew Club, which existed for about thirty-five years. I was president of that off and on. Our job was simply to meet once a week or twice a month. We would have lectures, discussions, speakers, teachers. We would study Hebrew. It was a Hebrew culture club.

Later, I was chairman of the council on the Jewish National Fund. The Jewish National Fund was composed of a council, which takes in all the area Zionist groups that send representatives. The Jewish National Fund is non-profitable. It's an agency. I was chairman of that for three or four years. During my term in office we organized annual fund raising dinners. The so-called charity boxes were outmoded. When the government was established and needed billions of dollars, you can't depend on pennies. I was one of the organizers of the annual dinners that we had here. It's still going on, the fund raising for the Jewish National Fund.

Later, I was president of the Zionist organization in Youngstown for two years. At that time we had about 600 members in the Zionist organization. In Youngstown, the various groups have about two thousand members.

Then I was asked to serve as president of the tri-state regional Zionist organization. That was about ten years ago. I served for two years. The tri-state region takes in your area, Wheeling and Charleston, West Virginia, Youngstown, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Buffalo, Akron-Canton. That's a non-paying job. You get a fancy title, but that's all you get. I was very happy to take it because it is how to be of some service, and we did. We created some activity. We went to Johnstown, Pennsylvania for a conference and we had very interesting meetings. While doing this I had the opportunity to meet a lot of important people, Jewish and non-Jewish, preachers, ministers, priests, who were interested. Many of them are friends. I'm very happy. Once in a while we go down to various functions to meet these people. It gives you a lift.

At the present time I am a member of the tri-state region Zionist executive committee. On the national level, I have just been elected to the national executive council of the Zionist Organization of America. That's the governing body of The Zionist Organization of the United States.

Locally, I am the chairman of the board of the Zionist organization. Dr. Saul Friedman is president of the Zionist organization.

HE: In this Youngstown community, where you've been so active, about how many Jewish people would you say are living in Greater Youngstown now?

HI: I can almost give you an exact answer on that because being involved in the organization, we send out a mass mailing to the community, and that's the entire community, about once or twice a year. The Jewish Community Center has a record of every man who comes into the community, or if he leaves the community--they take the name off. They had a good system, which is, basically up-to-date. I think there are something like 1630 or 1640 addresses recorded at the Jewish Center. That takes in widows and single people, widowers and so on. We estimate there must be about five thousand Jews in this area.

HE: Do you have any idea how large the Jewish population was when you first came to the community? Just give us an idea how much it's grown.

HI: I don't know exactly. It has definitely grown.

HE: Do the Jewish people live in a community more or less together? Not necessarily in a ghetto, but can you say that the Jewish people, more or less, all live on the north side, between certain streets?

HI: Not anymore, no. The city of Youngstown, as well as so many of the other cities, has grown. My father-in-law came to Youngstown in 1895. He used to tell us that the end of Youngstown, on the south side, was Myrtle Avenue, which was something like five or six blocks past the Market Street Bridge. The end of Youngstown on the north was somewhere around Madison Avenue or two blocks above that. The community itself was small. The Orthodox Jews had established two congregations. One was on Summit Avenue. That was established by Jews who came here primarily from Hungary. The Russian Jews came a little later. They built their synagogue at 117 East Rayen Avenue, just about two blocks away.

HE: That's not there now, is it?

HI: The building is still there. The foundation there was laid by my father-in-law. But the building was sold to a black congregation when all the people moved further north.

There was no place else to live in those days. No matter where you lived you were not too far away from the synagogue and the Orthodox Jew had to live close to the synagogue because he would walk. On the Sabbath you are not allowed to work. Based on old tradition, even your animals are

not allowed to work. So, if you wanted to go to synagogue on the Sabbath, you walked. You can't live too far away from the synagogue if you have to walk.

HE: You said these two Orthodox synagogues were just two or three blocks apart. Was there some feeling between the Hungarian Jews and the Russian Jews that would cause them to build two synagogues?

HI: Yes, there was. The strictly Orthodox Jew believes that someday the Messiah is going to come; he will rebuild the Holy Land. Until such time as that happens, we have no right to assume anything else. Then he prayed--same prayer, same book--and said, "Return us to Zion, thy city, and there will we serve thee." He meant, "Send the Messiah down." You see?

The Russian Jews began to think in terms of practical Zionism. This is religious, cultural Zionism. They said, "We have to do something about it." There was friction between the two factions and they said, "You keep your synagogue, we'll build our own. We'll have our own rabbi." We don't have any bishops or anything. Each congregation has its own rabbi. I remember a discussion some years ago going on about that. One of the national speakers brought out something beautiful. I thought it was. He used to come to the Jews, and he said, "We will wait for the Messiah. He will redeem us." We agreed that that would be a very good idea. Let's wait. We have waited this long, we will keep on waiting.

According to your concept, how is the Messiah going to come? Is he going to fly down, is he going to walk down? How is he going to appear in the various communities? What is he going to look like? Well, he's going to look like we do, like one of us, and he's going to come down on a white horse. I believe that. He'll be riding on a white horse and greet everybody. That's fine, okay, let him come on a white horse. He'll take everybody to the Holy Land, Jerusalem. That's fine.

Do you know that if you go down to Jerusalem today you'll find that the roads are not paved. There's a lot of mud down there when it rains. It isn't clean; it's sloppy. Why do you want the Messiah to come on a white horse in the mud? Give us some money, we'll build some roads. Let him come in comfort! (Laughter) Those are the ironies.

HE: These two synagogues existed when you came in 1922. Were there any other synagogues?

HI: There was a reform synagogue, where it is now, when I came here. The Temple Rodef Sholom. Dr. Berkiewicz is the rabbi there, on Elm Street. That's still there.

HE: Were there any Jewish people on the south side of the river?

HI: Yes.

HE: Did they have a synagogue over there?

HI: There was nothing on the south side. There was a small synagogue on the east side on the corner of Prospect and Himrod Avenues, on the right side. The building is still there. A lot of Jewish people lived on the east side. Later, as the community grew, the people from the south side--a small community--decided they wanted to build a synagogue closer to their own homes. They built one on Myrtle Avenue. That building is still there. That was a synagogue, over on Myrtle Avenue.

But there's hardly any Jews left on the east side. As people started moving away from the those locations, that building was sold. And on the south side, the children began growing up and they moved further away, towards Boardman. The two congregations, the east side congregation and the Myrtle Avenue congregation merged.

HE: When was this?

HI: Not too long ago. About fifteen or twenty years ago. They built a congregation on Glenwood Avenue. It's a Conservative congregation.

HE: These Orthodox congregations would require sources of food that would meet your kosher requirements?

HI: Both the Orthodox and Conservative.

HE: Were these markets close to the synagogues?

HI: We had quite a number of kosher butcher shops, where you could get kosher meats. We've gone away from that. There's only one kosher butcher shop in Youngstown now.

HE: Where is that?

HI: On Elm Street.

But we find today a different situation. There are those who want to keep kosher. In those days, let's say 75 years ago, if anybody wanted to buy meat--whether he looked

Jewish or not--if you bought meat you put it in an icebox in order to keep it fresh. If you didn't have any ice it would spoil.

We buy kosher. If you're interested I'll give you my reasons for it. We buy kosher and we freeze it. We go into Pittsburgh or Cleveland and we buy enough meat to last us four or five months. We bring it back and it goes in the freezer. First of all, it's convenient and second of all, it's cheaper. We go down there and sell it cheaper, just as cheap as non-kosher.

HE: Was there a Hebrew school associated with each of these synagogues?

HI: The synagogue on Summit Avenue, which was known as Children of Israel . . . There's still a small group of them. They still maintain a synagogue on Fifth Avenue. They bought the building, the Children of Israel. They were basically of Hungarian Jewish background. Now there's a very small group left. They were not big enough to have a Hebrew school.

My father-in-law was considered a producer. He was a worker in Jewish life. If a synagogue was necessary he saw to it that the synagogue was to be built. He did what was necessary, he was involved. They had at the time, what I call the Youngstown Hebrew Institute. It was an independent organization, not affiliated with any synagogue. Anyone who wanted to send their kids after school, to learn Hebrew and the Bible and all that, would make arrangements with the committee. They met at Wood Street School. I think it's still there. In the afternoon when the school was out, they made arrangements with the board of education I guess; that's where they met for a long time.

HE: Where does the Hebrew school meet now?

HI: Each congregation has its own school. It is not a city wide united school. There's a congregation on Fifth Avenue. Temple Emmanuel, they moved from Rayen Avenue. I used to be on the board up there. By the way, I was on the building committee when the building was sold. They built up here on Fifth Avenue and Fairgreen. There was another conservative congregation that was called Anshe Emeth facing Stambaugh Auditorium. That building is empty now. Most of the congregations merged within the last twelve years. They now call it El Emeth. El Emeth means "God of Truth." El is God. Emeth is truth.

HE: These congregations that merged--at one time there were things that kept them apart in their faith--what brought

them together to merge? I know they're not the same congregations, but what caused these other congregations to merge?

HI: Because that which kept them apart disappeared. What is the difference today--now, you're a minister and you're in religion--what is the difference today between a reform Jew and a conservative Jew? The con reformed Jew, the conservative Jew, wears a yamalka, a skullcap, at prayers, the reformed Jew does not. So what is the difference? If you want to become a reformed Jew you remove the skullcap. If you ask any one of them what they are, they say, "I don't know. I go over there, but next week, Conservative." I got over here--we belong to the reform temple. I don't feel reform. I don't feel conservative. I don't feel anything. I'm Jewish. That's all. I've had enough background I could walk into the Children of Israel Temple today, the rabbi is a personal friend of mine, with this little prayer book and I could join them.

By conviction, I think I would lean toward reform. The reason is this, Judaism is not based on belief. It is based on Mizvot, on good deed. We follow laws. "Laws and commandments hast thou taught us." When we don't follow the laws of the commandments we forget about the Lord. Just follow the laws and the commandments.

Coming back to what I wanted to say before, why do I personally believe in buying kosher meat and keeping kosher. There's something that we learned a long time ago from the Bible, from the Old Testament, that we are prohibited to eat blood. I think the way it's stated in the Bible is, "Don't eat the blood because blood is the soul." Right?

HE: Right.

HI: I think if we want to be better human beings, if you follow that kind of a concept, you would stretch it up a little bit and interpret it this way: It's bad enough that you have to kill a living being because you say you can't live unless you eat the meat of that thing. Don't eat that which gave it life. An animal kills and drinks the blood. The human being is not a vicious animal.

My mother didn't understand it that way. She was more kosher than I was. But all she knew was that the Bible said "Don't eat the blood." So she would buy kosher meat from the butcher. She would bring it home and soak it, for certain regulations, half an hour or something, then put salt on it and let the salt absorb the

blood, then wash it off. Then you had no more blood. I still believe in that!

I knew kosher butchers here in Youngstown who used to tell me that Gentiles would come in and buy kosher meat. Now, you can buy kosher meat and not do all that, soaking it and all that. You can boil it too to get the blood out. I couldn't eat the blood.

HE: Did World War II have any big effect on the Jewish community here in Youngstown?

HI: Oh yes. From what respect? From the point of view of giving money or fund raising?

HE: From as many different points as we can examine. World War II made the whole country almost a transient country. People move around a whole lot more. Negro people have found a lot more freedom since World War II, and I just wondered how it might have affected the Jewish community uniquely or in common with the effects that it has had on the rest of the country.

HI: I don't think Youngstown is any different than any other community. Since World War II, I think we had at least ten million young men in the service. Some of the Youngstown Jewish young fellows, as well as non-Jewish, had an opportunity to see the country at government expense. They have learned that this is a great big country and many of them have decided that when they had the chance to go on their own that they couldn't settle in Youngstown, because they've been elsewhere and they like it. Youngstown itself hasn't created it. All small communities are that way. I've talked to people from East Liverpool in the last few days and they have the same problem. Young people don't want to settle there. They want to live in bigger areas, bigger communities. I know many Youngstowners who have gone to Los Angeles, California, a lot of them. I don't think it had any effect on the Jewish community, as such, anymore than anybody else.

HE: The effects were common throughout the whole country.

HI: I think it's common.

HE: You described the assimilated German Jew before. Would you say the American Jewish people were assimilated in the same context as you used the word for the German Jews?

HI: No. The American Jew is a free individual. This is a much bigger country than Germany was. What is happening today to so many American Jews is they just live their own lives and they don't affiliate with any congregation.

They don't necessarily convert or become something else. They just disappear. They intermarry. Not out of conversion. Conversion, to me, is a form of changing over from one ideology that you have into something else. But you have to have something to change. They have nothing.

I know Saul Friedman's wife, who is not Jewish. She was born in a non-religious environment. What is she changing? Is she were to decide to become affiliated with . . . If you want to call it conversion, if she were to decided to become Jewish, she just becomes Jewish, but she doesn't convert.

So many of our people just disappear. I understand this is particularly true on the university level. They just disappear. They don't disappear as human beings. They have not disappeared as Americans, they're still here. But that's not necessarily true in Youngstown because in Youngstown, as I see it here, practically every Jewish family is a member of a congregation. If we walk into cities like Pittsburgh or Cleveland--I am more acquainted in Pittsburgh. They had a congregation on Shady Avenue, and within the last four or five years they've raised around three million dollars to remodel the place. So somebody's interested.

Last Friday evening, the little congregation that they have in East Liverpool--I've never seen it. It must be a small one because they have fifty Jewish families there. The president of B'nai B'rith happens to be Richie Feldman or Marvin? Marvin. He tried to have it designated as B'nai B'rith Sabbath. I saw him Friday morning and he said he expected four people to be at the service that evening. I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I have a football game going on down there." Everybody's a member of B'nai B'rith. Christians come on Christmas and Easter. They have other things to do.

HE: We've been going on for quite a while. I sure appreciate all that you've told me. It will be very enlightening to a lot of people. I really and truly thank you for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW