

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Judaism in Youngstown

Jewish Perspective

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MORRIS DEVORKIN

Interviewed

by

Thomas Hess

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MORRIS DEVORKIN

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Hess

SUBJECT: patriotism, anti-Semitism, schools, leaders

DATE: November 17, 1975

H: This is an interview with Attorney Morris Devorkin for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Thomas Hess, in his office in the Mahoning Bank Building. The interview was taken on November 17, 1975, starting at approximately 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Devorkin, we're interested in knowing about the Jewish community in Youngstown and we're interested in your definition of Jewish. In our conversation we had just a couple of minutes ago, why, you made some interesting observations. We need to know what a person is that's Jewish.

D: That appears to be a very simple question to answer, but even the prophets and many of our contemporary Jewish leaders find it very difficult to answer. In the final analysis, the simplest answer is: Anyone born of a Jewish mother. Beyond that, I mean, that's it. A Jew is not necessarily a Jew because of his religion only. It's a tradition. It's a culture. It's very difficult to describe who is a Jew. There have been many, many books written on the subject. We recognize those of us who are Jewish. A Jew is one born of a Jewish mother. Let it go at that.

H: Okay. If we were to look for certain characteristics or traits or habits in a person that was Jewish, an American-Jewish person living in Youngstown today, what traits would we be most apt to notice that would, perhaps, distinguish him as Jewish?

D: I personally don't feel there are any traits other than the traits of the community in which he lives. He takes on those traits, even physiologically. We have blonde Jews; we have dark Jews; we have blue-eyed Jews; we have brown-eyed

Jews. They appear to take on the characteristics of the community in which they live, and none other.

- H: Now were these physiological characteristics recently introduced into the Jewish, to use the word loosely, race or have they been existing in the Jewish population for a long period of time?
- D: I would say for a long period of time, for many, many hundreds of years. They take on the characteristics of their particular environment. There have been a great number of intermarriages too over the hundreds of years so that, genetically, often, they take on the physical characteristics of the people among whom they live.
- H: Let's move from the more obvious to a little bit more difficult to immediately recognize. How would a Jewish person, perhaps, think differently than someone else in the same society might think of? What cultural or what historic events, what religious training, all the different things that go together to form a man's mental pattern. . .
- D: I don't think he actually thinks any different. But possibly, because of the suffering that he's gone through, through many, many generations, he may have a little more compassion than the average person. He may live more often in accordance with the Judeo-Christian precepts, but he doesn't think any differently than any other human being within his particular sphere, in my opinion.
- H: You used the word suffering there over a long period of time. Perhaps people outside of students of history and maybe many students of history wouldn't quite understand what you were talking about there with regard to the unique suffering of the Jewish people; would you sort of tell us what this was composed of?
- D: Well, the Jew didn't always have the opportunities he has in America, and it's true that he didn't always have the opportunities that he had in Germany prior to Hitler, yet it happened there. In Russia, in Poland, and in Romania, all of the countries of Europe for many, many generations, they couldn't belong to a guild; they couldn't get a job; they couldn't be in business; they were treated as second-class citizens, and often there were pogroms in which villages were wiped out. The Jewish population had to hide from their oppressors. In those days, however, it was based on increments. As a result, the Jew was compelled to develop intellectually; he went to the book. And for that reason, the Jew, when he did have the opportunities as he has in America, that's the reason you find a greater proportion

of professional people, or writers, that follow the intellectual pursuits.

Also, genetically this may be true too because the weak Jew was unable to survive, so it was the strong, the one able to survive, that finally did survive. However, in the final analysis, a Jew is one born of a Jewish mother.

H: A word you used that seemed to be very important in the way you put it was compassion. Does this word have a special meaning for you personally or for Jewish people as a group?

D: I think it does for Jewish people as a group. It does for me as an individual because I was raised an Orthodox Jew. I was taught that compassion for people is very important. One of the most important things is the dignity of man. As I was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home, it would appear that if anyone was in trouble, mother and dad were the first together with other of our Jewish friends, to come to their help. Possibly because of the type of home that I was raised in, it has developed in me the compassion for others and the importance of the dignity of man. I think, probably, that's what it's all about.

H: Now, is this compassion as the Jew sees it, a compassion for Jewish people or a compassion for all men?

D: A compassion for all people. But you will find that often it is the Jew who has been the leader in many of the movements that have helped to understand man's dignity and live in accordance with man's dignity. It's the Jew, often, who possibly has suffered as a human being because he has been the leader and the one who has helped to take care of the sufferings of people, Jew or non-Jew. I find, even in the black movement, there are many Jews as individuals who have helped the blacks and other ethnic groups that have suffered a great deal.

H: Now, before we started to tape, you were making some very interesting observations with regard to the difference between the Jewish minority in a group and we used an Irishman as an example. Would you want to tell us how you think that the Jewish community in Youngstown would be different than any other ethnic or racial group might be?

D: I think probably the only difference would be that the Jew believes the American society to be a pluralistic one in which he believes he has the right, if need be, to stick out like a sore thumb. If he wants to have his store--if he's in business--closed on Saturday and open on Sunday, it should be his right. If he wants to go to the synagogue

on Saturday, rather than as the Christian goes to church on Sunday, it should be his right. It should be his right to be different as a Jew and still be accepted as a dignified human being. It doesn't necessarily mean that if he believes in the pluralistic society as opposed to that which we may have been taught in school many years ago that it's a melting pot; it doesn't necessarily mean that it dilutes his patriotism toward America. He's not a lesser American as a result of it either. Even though he wishes to be different because of his religion, he still has contributed a great deal in whatever country he lived, as a patriot of that particular country as he has done in America.

We have our politicians, we have our great writers, we have our great scientists, all of whom are American. I think this may be a bit of difference where possibly the Irishman or most others who form the various ethnic groups ultimately believe that our society is a melting pot in which ultimately the traditions and the cultures are enmeshed in with the American and the great American culture survives. But we have two, great cultures: We have the great American culture and we have the great Jewish tradition and culture. By having both, neither dilutes the other, but each adds to the other.

- H: These outstanding contributors that you've talked about, does the Youngstown Jewish community have these outstanding contributors?
- D: Oh yes. We have men like, one of whom was C. J. Strouss, who not only was a great Jew, but a very great American, a very great citizen. He was in the background of practically all of the great civic work that was done in our community up until the time of his death. We have men like Sidney Moyer who has been head of the Community Chest and practically every organization in town that has helped our community. We have many, many men like that.

We got back to Rabbi Fylo who was the rabbi at the Reform Temple many years ago, who not only did a great deal for the Jewish community, but did as much, if not more, for the non-Jewish community; as Dr. Berkowitz has done. He probably spends more of his time with the non-Jewish community than with the Jewish community. At the present time he is the chairman of the 648th Board, which is the Mental Health and Retardation Board, doing an excellent job. He was the chairman of the Red Cross from our community. He's been very active in the Community Chest. He has been head of the Kiwanis; you name the organization, he has been the head of it at some time or another. His being Jewish, I

think, implemented the great work that he has done in our community for all the people. He has helped the ethnic groups, the blacks, and other ethnic groups that needed help. Yet, this didn't minimize his effect as a Jew. I think it made him a better Jew. It made him a better American. By being a better Jew he became a better American. He was a tremendous help to our community. There are just dozens and dozens of them.

- H: Sometimes when we think of patriotism, we sort of automatically equate it with defense of our country. There are many fellows from the Youngstown area that have been involved in that. Can you tell us about some of the men from the Jewish community of Youngstown that were in any way outstanding in the defense of our country?
- D: Yes. I know that the Jewish War Veterans of Youngstown have men from World War I, World War II, and other problems that we were in. Many of whom have become field grade officers, company grade officers. We probably have more officers than our proportionate share of our population of the community. I think possibly the record would disclose that we've had more serve as officers and as enlisted men in the various armed forces than the percentage of our population would designate.
- H: Did any of the Jewish young men, for example, at a time of draft, claim conscientious objection?
- D: I honestly don't remember any of them in Youngstown claiming conscientious objections. I don't know of any Jew that has, at least during World War II.
- H: You mentioned something I've never heard of before. You called it the Jewish War Veterans Association?
- D: Yes, the Jewish War Vets. There is a National Jewish War Vets with offices in Washington, D. C. and this is a branch of the National Jewish War Vets. I am not a member of it, but a great number of the Jewish War Vets are.
- H: Would this be similar to the American Legion or V. F. W., something like that?
- D: Yes, similar, very similar.
- H: Where is it located in Youngstown?
- D: I don't think they have a building, but they do have an organization. For a while it was very, very active. As a matter of fact, we have one man in Youngstown by the name

of Sidney Fiore, who is dead now. He was the national commander of the Jewish War Vets.

- H: Every group within a community has somebody they think of as the leader of their community. Who would you designate as the leader of the Jewish community here in Youngstown?
- D: There wouldn't be any one such because if you would think about it, if you have two Jewish people together, you have three different opinions.
- H: Do you think this trait is a help to the Jewish people in their living in a community or does it sometimes give them a problem?
- D: It sometimes would probably give them a problem. If the opinion happened to be liberal within a conservative group, there would be a problem. It would be the same problem any other person would have who would go against a particular Italian's opinion.
- H: I heard just recently there was a decision passed by the United Nations that certainly must have affected every Jewish person. Could you give us your observations, your feelings about this decision or this branding of Zionism as a racist thing?
- D: In the first place, it is so ridiculous, the conclusion that they apparently came to that it's hardly worth even discussing. It just has no merit whatsoever. If one were to analyze it to its fullest, one could only conclude that it's a form of anti-Semitism, and it doesn't necessarily mean that all nations who went along with the resolution went along with it because they believed this to be true. It was based upon politics and based upon pressure by the oil producing nations and that sort of thing. Anyone, whether he be Jew or whether he be Christian, couldn't by any stretch of the imagination come to this conclusion that it's a racist organization.

As a matter of fact, in reading the Old Testament and the New Testament, the word Zion is used many, many, many times. As a Jew, you would probably understand what Zionism means to a Jew. It's so much a part of his religion.

A person, before he died, hoped someday even his body would be buried in Israel. His dream, ultimately, was to go back home. It doesn't necessarily mean in the physical sense. Every American Jew isn't going to go back to Israel, but he has got to have the feeling that he has got the roots there; it is very important to him. Zionism, rather than being a

racial situation, is a dream, a dream of a homeland, the Jewish homeland. I mean it's so ridiculous what was done that one shouldn't waste too much time even trying to answer, to give it that much credence.

H: Let's move away from what the U. N. did then and try to grab hold of a better idea for the Gentile of what Zionism really is. If you were asked to give a definition of Zionism, what historic background and what facts of a person's activities would you say constitute Zionism?

D: I would say for over 2,000 years the Jews dreamed of their homeland, dreamed that somewhere along the line they would have their homeland back. As a result of much of the pogroms around the turn of the century, as a result possibly of the Dreyfuss case in France, there developed a political sort of Zionism, which culminated after the Holocaust and became a reality; but it was a reality of a dream that every Jew had regardless of where he was, whether he was an Oriental Jew, whether he was a Western Jew. As a matter of fact, those that returned were mainly Oriental Jews, who, incidentally, took on the attributes of their particular countries. Most of them, of course, were not westernized and most of them did not have any understanding of some of the better things of life. Zionism, to me, is a dream, a dream of the Jewish homeland. It's as simple as that.

H: You've indicated that a great percentage of the people that did return were Oriental Jews. Have many American Jews gone to settle?

D: Not very many as I understand it.

H: Is there some reason why the American Jew would not want to make that dream reality whereas. . .

D: Well, the dream is there. It's still a reality, that is, a Jewish home. It doesn't necessarily mean that he wants to go back there, he wants to live there, but that is the Jewish home. By feeling this way, I don't believe that it dilutes, as I mentioned before, his citizenship and his patriotism and his loyalty to America. Each individual has his own reason why he will or will not go back home or back to Israel or to Youngstown or to any particular community. A person has his own reasons, whatever they may be.

H: Have you visited Israel yourself?

D: I've never been there, no. We intend to go, probably next year.

H: In our community of Youngstown there is a Zionist organiza-



tion, have you been active in this?

D: Yes, I have been active in the Zionist organization.

H: What is this organization?

D: The Zionist organization originally was to help in reestablishing the Jewish homeland. Now, I guess its mission is to help in its preservation and also help the Jew in Israel and those in the other countries, especially in America--Zionist Organization of America--to perpetuate the kinship, as one would have the kinship of the Irish with the Irish in Ireland. It's a little stronger with the Jew because that has been a part of his religion. It's not a come-lately idea.

Actually, the only nation was the Jewish nation in that part of the world. The Palestinians never had a nation there, actually. It wasn't till the U. N. agreed with the reestablishing of the sovereign state of Israel that it also agreed, I think, that the Palestinians were entitled to the West Bank of Jordan. But yet, Jordan took that part over and nothing happened. In other words, Trans-Jordan was to be a part of Palestinian country. Was that not so as I remember it? But the Palestinians were never a nation there.

H: You say this Zionist feeling is 2,000 years old. How long has there been a Zionist group in Youngstown?

D: Now, when I talk about the Zionist feeling, as a religious feeling, as the desire to go back to the homeland, that is some thousands years old. But the Zionist organization is only since about the turn of the century, since Theodore Hertzl. That's an organization which is apart from the dream. In other words, the Jew who did not belong to the Zionist organization still had that dream of Zion. The organization is a place where you pay dues and belong. Not every Jew belongs to the organization. I'll bet there aren't probably more than two percent or three percent that belong to the organization itself. It's just a club, an organization dedicated to this purpose.

H: Okay, the organization is. . .

D: Probably seventy-five years old I would say; approximately, during the time of Theodore Hertzl.

H: It has raised a lot of funds then, for the reestablishment of the. . .

D: No, I don't think it raised too many funds. The funds are raised by the various Jewish communities through the U. J. A., United Jewish Appeal. That is apart from the Zionist organization. The Zionist organization is a very small part of the total Jewish community. This must be understood. It's just a club, an organization, like, for instance, the Catholics have the Knights of Columbus; this is similar to that. They perpetuate the Catholic. . . The Zionists perpetuate the desire for Zion, the perpetuation of this state. Not all Jews belong to the organization, yet they're Zionists at heart, their dream. So the money comes from the total Jewish community not just from the organization.

H: What do you see then for the nation of Israel in the near future?

D: I look for them to have a great deal of trouble. I don't think the Arab nations are going to accept them so readily. I think they're going to suffer. I think they are going to have a lot of sweat, blood, and tears. It's not going to be easy. How can it be easy with a few million people on a postage stamp surrounded by 100 million that are an avowed enemy? It can't be easy, and it hasn't been easy. It's the only real democracy in that entire area. That's a thing that is hard for me to understand, how certain countries such as. . . For instance, Japan went along with the resolution. Is that correct?

H: Yes.

D: How Japan could go along with that resolution other than the fact that they put a tremendous amount of pressure on her because she imports probably ninety-five percent of her oil and she can't, as a nation, believe this to be true, especially if she knows and the world knows what little Israel has done. The deserts bloom. They grow oranges bigger there than they do anywhere in the world I'm told today. At one time you couldn't grow an orange there. It's a true democracy. It's as democratic as any nation can be under present conditions.

H: What's going to be required, as you see it, of other democracies then, in the aid of Israel, to sustain her as a nation?

D: In my opinion, whatever might be necessary so to do for her own survival, for the survival of the other democracies. Take, for instance, America. America disregarding anything other than her own survival, disregarding anything other than her own health, in my opinion, must help for selfish

reasons, must help little Israel. Why, the Russians have been trying to get a foothold in that area ever since the tzars. Once they get a foothold in that area they look down the throat of Africa. They control the manpower of the world then. And it was said in geopolitics: anybody who controls Eurasia controls the world. And it would appear to me that little Israel stands in that way at this point. And the world doesn't seem to care. I just don't understand it.

H: That was the very next question I wanted to ask you about. Your memory goes back far enough to remember when things were happening to the Jews in Germany and the world, more or less, stood by and let them happen. I wondered if you thought that that might be repeated in history?

D: It could be and it's frightening. And the reason I say it could be and it's frightening, you have a situation in Lebanon now; you have a situation of Christians who are being slaughtered by the Moslems. The Moslems control about sixty percent at this point. At one time they controlled about fifty percent. And nobody, nobody has come out, even with a statement that I know of to help the Christian world. They will be slaughtered. They'll be killed out like the Jews were killed in Germany and yet nobody of the Christian world has said anything that I know of or has tried to help that I know of. I think the prime minister of Israel came out with a statement, but that could be a very selfish statement, so it didn't mean anything. But, the same thing is happening today. What's being done? What happened to some of the emerging countries? Who gave a damn? Nobody cared.

One sure thing: It will never happen again in the same way. And the reason it could never happen again in the same way is because there would be one hell of a sounding board which we didn't have then.

We have a little Israel. There was a time that we thought that in a place like Germany we were safe, completely safe. They were assimilated even more so than in America. And yet, when Hitler looked for a scapegoat, he found a scapegoat because he was weak. He couldn't fight back. And that happened in a homogeneous country. We felt that because we're heterogeneous that it could never happen here and probably it can never happen here. But one never knows anymore when one sees what's happening in Lebanon. I felt it could never happen here until I see what's happening in Lebanon now. My mind is changing a bit on that. It's happening to Christians there. Nobody seems to give a damn and a person has to give a damn about his

neighbors, about others.

I think the Jew has always given a damn. I think that has been the big problem, probably, because he did care not only about himself, but about others. That was the Judeo-Christian philosophy of life. I think that basically you had a great deal of this.

H: Then you see something like lethargy being a real danger?

D: Oh yes. I'm afraid of it now because of Lebanon. At one time I said, "We're a heterogeneous country, it can't happen here." Germany was a homogeneous country. It happened. And I always say, "This is why it will never happen here." Then I see what's happening in Lebanon, but nobody speaks out, nobody in American, none of the Christians speak out, nobody speaks out to what's happening there, and then I get concerned because of the lethargy. People apparently just don't give a darn. I can readily say now that it could happen anywhere. I'm afraid it can. I'm afraid if we had a bad Depression almost anything can happen.

H: Were there any signs in the Depression of the 1930's that you could equate?

D: Yes, yes, at least that's the excuse that was given by the Hitlerites. As I remember, there were certain reparations that were ordered, as I remember my history, and Germany was so poor. They had tremendous inflation where it took a bushel basket of money to buy a loaf of bread and that sort of thing; they were willing to accept almost any excuse. The excuse being these Jews were the scapegoat. It gave him something to solidify it against because the Jew was very weak. He had no sounding board; he had nothing even though he was assimilated for many, many generations, even though most of your great scientists, a great number of them were Jews, your great doctors.

H: You lived here in Youngstown during our Depression?

D: Yes, I lived through it.

H: Now, at the time of that financial crisis here, were there any pressures that were placed upon the Jewish people, any different than what there was upon other folks?

D: It was pretty hard to know, and probably not. The reason that it was pretty hard to know and probably not is because we were so preoccupied with what was going on in Germany then. Hitler was coming to rise. He was making pronouncements, anti-Jewish pronouncements and that sort of thing.

So, we were pretty much occupied, mentally at least, with what was going on in Germany.

H: When you say, "We," you're talking about the Jewish community?

D: Yes, the Jewish community. We were becoming aware of what was happening and most of the interest was to help the remaining Jews there.

H: What were some of the ways that this information was shared among the Jewish people here in America? Were there special lectures or things like that?

D: No, just you would read something in the newspaper. We would be concerned and we would show our concern by holding a meeting or two, or we would discuss it and whatever nickels and dimes and quarters we could get together, we would get together hoping that it would do some good.

During that time, of course, we had a certain amount of anti-Semitism here too. We had the Silver Shirts; we had the America Firsters; we had other groups that were very, very strong. As a matter of fact, preceding that era we had your Ku Klux Klan and they were anti-Semitic; they made no bones about it. I remember as a child they marched in Niles, the Ku Klux did, and some of the vets from World War I went over and broke it up. One particular person was the father of one of our pretty well-known lawyers in town, Fox.

H: He was one of the vets?

D: He was one of the vets who broke it up, broke heads then if need be. He got into a fight over something that made him feel that . . . They felt "fight fire with fire".

Many, many years ago in the 1920's the Silver Shirts were pretty much during the time Hitler was coming into power and all through the Hitler regime.

I made a statement to you when you asked me, I believe: What is a Jew? I mentioned to you that it was very difficult to answer that question. I simplified it by saying that a Jew is one born of a Jewish mother and the part that I think I was wrong in was when I stated even an atheist can be a Jew. I don't think this is true. It would appear to me that one born of a Jewish mother who believes in the oneness of God . . . The reason I say that, ". . . who believes in the oneness of God," is because one of the most important prayers is the prayer that: "Listen, oh wizard, the God our Lord, the God is one." I remember as a kid, I was

told that this is a prayer that is on the lips of the Jew almost to the time he dies, when he talks about the oneness of God. So, it would appear to me that the answer would be, one born of a Jewish mother who believes in the oneness of God. I think that's it rather than one who's an atheist.

Now, going back to anti-Semitism, during the Ku Klux regime which was in the 1920's, it was not necessarily anti-Semitic alone. It was anti-black and anti-Catholic. I remember as a child that there was a Ku Klux parade that was organized in Niles, not too far from Youngstown. Some of the World War I Jewish leaders and Catholic leaders actually got into a fight to break it up. I also remember that later during the 1930's when Hitler was coming into power, that there was a Silver Shirt who was anti-Semitic alone, not necessarily anti-Catholic or anti-black although they were that too, but they were mainly anti-Semitic. It was sort of a Nazi situation. When a speaker was scheduled to speak in Youngstown for the Silver Shirts and the America Firsters, which was another group like that, their group unbeknown to the rest of the Jewish community tried to break it up by fighting and so on, which was not the way which the Jewish community wanted it done. They felt, even then, that free speech was most important, that they should be given the opportunity to speak at that time and probably counter it to explain the truth of the situation. So, that briefly is that.

I think another thing that you wanted, I believe, when you first came in was something about the background of some of the Jewish families who probably helped to make Youngstown what it is. During every era that I know of, and prior to my time, Jewish people were involved in the community, not only as Jews, but as citizens of that given community. As a matter of fact, there was something in the paper not too long ago where it explained that a William Wilcoff, who came to Youngstown prior to the turn of the century, was one of the incorporators in the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, which was our main industry. He was one of the two or three bigger stockholders of the company. His brother before him, Sam Wilcoff, in the 1880's, I think, organized the Wilcoff Company, which is sort of a steel fabricating plant still in existence.

I remember my days as a child, many, many names of Jewish people that were very active in the non-Jewish community such as Clarence J. Strauss, who I mentioned to you, of the Strauss-Hirshberg Company. He was head of the Community Chest and practically every organization in town. Then there were the Hartzel's; there were many, many of them, just too

many to mention. And their proportion was a great deal more than their population proportion and that's always been true here.

In the 1930's when a person thought of juvenile delinquency, they felt that the best way to overcome it was church involvement. The community had courage enough to appoint a Jewish person, a young man, by the way, yours truly, as the chief probation officer of the Juvenile Court, the Juvenile Court referee and the Domestic Relations Court referee. So there was a time when in most communities it may have been difficult to do, whereas, no problem here. We had many lawyers prior to that time, one of which was assistant U. S. district attorney. We had a law director, too, even prior to that time, back in the 1920's.

The reason I say all of this to you is, I think so long as you're going to write your paper, I think you should have some knowledge that would convince you that even though a Jew all through the ages was very much interested in the resettlement of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state, still it didn't dilute his patriotism or his citizenship or his responsibility to America. As a matter of fact, Justice Brandeis, I think, made this statement. He was a very strong Zionist when he was a justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. He made the statement, "To be a good Jew one must be a good American and to be a good Jew one must be a Zionist." Then he explained that one doesn't dilute.

Another thing, so far as little Israel is concerned, most of the Jews all over the world don't care to go back to live in Israel. They want to live in their native land. I would hate to see the day when. . . I'm sure it would never happen, it couldn't happen because little Israel is very much of a westernized country. If the day ever came when there was war, let's say between Israel and the United States, as strongly as the Jew feels about Israel, his loyalty would be with the United States and he would fight for American in most cases, regardless of how strongly he feels about Israel. I believe this to be true. It's pretty hard for someone to understand these things to be true, but they are true.

H: Something I've discovered in talking to several of your Jewish friends is that there is a Jewish school, and they were older men who had not attended Jewish school here in the Youngstown community. I wondered if you could tell me more about the Jewish school. We know something about the Catholic parochial schools, but until I discovered it in talking to Mr. Hill, I didn't know that there was a Jewish

school.

D: Well, I'm not too familiar with the Jewish school so far as it pertains to the older people, but I do know something about a Jewish school as it was organized and developed in my day and I think it would be true even today. There was a school I went to and I went to it after school at 4:00.

H: In the afternoon?

D: Oh yes, after school we went for a couple of hours. And we were taught Hebrew; we were taught the Old Testament; we were taught ethics and that sort of thing. And in some of the larger cities, they have a regular parochial school set up, Jewish people . . . New York and I think they have it in Pittsburgh and I think they have it in Cleveland. I know they have it in Minneapolis because they have one of the finest in Minneapolis, including a high school. So far, I'm sure we don't have the parochial school concept in Youngstown. I think one of the main reasons is it's very costly and probably there aren't enough Jewish families for that purpose. As a matter of fact, my father was a teacher. He taught here. Mother did too. Very few women ever taught, but mother did, many, many years ago. But I don't know anything about any adult programs.

H: Where are these schools conducted?

D: The schools are conducted in the various temples, the Conservative Temple mainly, I think.

H: Is that out on Fifth?

D: On Fifth Avenue.

H: What's the name of that one?

D: It used to be Temple Emmanuel, but they merged. It's El-Emeth. It's a new name, for the last year and half or two years. It's the combined Temple Emmanuel and the Anshe-Emeth Temple and the name is the combination of both. Rabbi Meyers is one of the most sincere persons I've ever known in my life. Not only is he exceedingly honest, but he is exceedingly, exceedingly honorable, a very, very fine man. Money means nothing to him. He lives the concept, teaches it.

H: Along with the rabbi then, who would be instructors at this school that you are talking about?



- D: They have a superintendent of education. They have their regular schoolteachers. The superintendent, I think, is--now I'm not too sure about this--from Israel. I think he's getting his Ph. d. at Kent. His specialty, I was told the other day, is the Civil War, American. I think he's the superintendent of education. I just can't remember his name.
- H: Now, is that for all the Jewish youngsters in town?
- D: No, just for the one temple.
- H: For the one temple. Now, is there another one?
- D: They had the Reform and they have a Sunday school. I'm not sure about this, although I belong to the Reform.
- H: Is there an Orthodox temple?
- D: Yes, there's one Orthodox, a very small temple. It's also on Fifth Avenue across the street in an old house.
- H: Now, in these Jewish schools, how is this cost borne here? You've got a superintendent of education and some teachers.
- D: The Jewish people pay tuition, which probably would be included in our temple dues. Incidentally, whatever I've discussed with you concerning Israel, concerning Judaism . . . I am not an expert in this field as you can plainly see, but I tell it really as I feel. Another thing, you understand, I don't speak for the Jewish community officially. I speak only for Morris Devorkin and nobody else.
- H: Well, as I have investigated I don't find that there is anybody that can speak for the Jewish community.
- D: No, you'll never find that anywhere. When you have two Jewish people together, you have three different ideas, really. It's just impossible for one person to speak for the total community. The community consists of the Orthodox, Conservative, the Reform, the unaffiliated, the affiliated, and they're still Jews. So, it would just be impossible for one person to speak for all the . . . For instance, Rabbi Brockman couldn't speak for me; I'm not an Orthodox Jew. I was raised Orthodox but I'm a Reform Jew. Even within the Reform, Orthodox, and the Conservative, one can't speak for each of his own group even. It's just impossible.
- H: Is there something that you can envision that would rally

the Jews of the community together?

- D: Israel. Before Israel, compassion as represented by the Jewish Federation when money didn't go to help Israel. Mainly we used to help our own Jews in the community and so one. That rallied. That's a must for a Jew.
- H: They cross these different lines then, the Conservatives and. . .
- D: Oh yes, when it comes to charity, that sort of thing. We have our different classifications of charity, the highest and the lowest. The lowest is when your name is used and people know that you've given, the highest is when you're anonymous and help a person to adjust so that he saves face and becomes capable of earning his own living for himself, his self-respect; they help anonymously.

One of the biggest things in the religion going all the way back is to help, not necessarily one Jew to another, but humanity in general. That's the big thing. You asked if there were any characteristics and I think I said to you that there weren't. You remember that they're blue-eyed and they're brown-eyed and they're tall and they're short and they're dark and they're white, which is true, but if there ever was one characteristic, I honestly think it's compassion; it's charity and that sort of thing.

- H: One thing that you mentioned earlier when we were talking about Israel was the fact that there were so many Oriental Jews. Now, the idea of Jews as far as Americans are concerned are the ones that we have living real close to us in our own communities and so forth and then we know of some in Europe. But those would not be Oriental Jews, would they?
- D: Well, there's Eastern Jew, Western Jew, and the Oriental Jew. I think the Russian, Polish, and Romanian Jew is the Eastern Jew, I believe. The Western Jew I think is German and so on. Then you got the Oriental Jew and the Oriental Jew looks and acts like an Oriental. The Jews that come from those Oriental countries have lived on the ground and don't know enough to come in out of the rain, but they've practiced Judaism for many, many hundreds of years and they're Jews. Every Jew has the right to return. That particular Jew, during his generation in Israel, technically is a burden because he has nothing to offer.

Take the Yemenites, for instance. The Yemenite Jew lives back in the Dark Ages the same as the Yemenites as a whole,

and probably even worse because the Yemenite Jew was a Jew that never had rights as a human being, but he still lived by the book and kept his religion up and so on. He looks like a Yemenite; he's dark; he's little. As a matter of fact, we have a Yemenite Jew, I think, living in Youngstown, who has married a Youngstown girl and he's getting his Master's degree.

Now the second generation of the Yemenite Jew and the Oriental Jew is pretty much integrated and assimilated with the general Jewish population. I understand that the second generation Oriental Jew is the one who is given all the breaks in government as the blacks are here, to be given an opportunity to function. There's some feeling there as there is in every other country that they're going too far and leaving the others holding the bag. The minority feel that way, but the great feeling is that this is as it should be. They're human beings; they'll choose; they need a head start. They're accepted much better than probably the whites accepted the black situation at the head start in America. Yet they're human, they have some minorities that resent it.

H: Okay, you've mentioned Yemen. What other countries would these Oriental Jews come from, any of Eurasian countries?

D: Probably. I don't know of any, but probably they come from all over the world. They tell me--I've never been to Israel yet; I hope to go maybe next year--that there is a majority of the Oriental Jew. They're quite concerned and the reason they're concerned is because the first generation are not producers; second generation are producers that become the professional people, the workers in government, teachers and so forth. But it's that first generation, this is why they need money so desperately in addition to the fact that forty, fifty percent goes to defense. Again, I don't speak as an expert on this. All I can do is ape what I hear someone else say or what I read. I've never seen it myself.

H: You seem to be well informed because the things that you say are the same things that other men that have been to Israel have told me.

D: I wondered. It's my background. I want to know all about my background. I think it's a wonderful thing that, here I am an American citizen with two, beautiful traditions and cultures. I've got the American culture and tradition. I've got the Jewish culture and tradition. I think it's wonderful. I never did believe that America was meant to be a complete melting pot. I always felt it was meant to be, as I mentioned

before, somewhat of a pluralistic society. If we mean by melting pot that every ethnic group gives up his tradition, it was never meant to be that. It's the only country in the world that was never meant to be that way. We're meant to be completely heterogeneous. Every other country is pretty much homogeneous. After a generation or two, everyone in America has two, beautiful traditions and cultures. Don't lose it.

H: Can you think of anything else that we haven't talked about-- you've exhausted my list of questions--that you could tell us about the Jewish community in Youngstown that would help us to understand each other better?

D: So far as I know, we've been represented in every war, again, more than our percentage of the population. During World War II there were a great number of--probably beyond the proportion of its population--Jews in the armed forces. The most astounding thing is, I think we have a greater proportion that have become the leaders in the armed forces too. I know I talk about myself, but I never had a background in military service and I went in during World War II and I became a lieutenant colonel. There have been a number of field grade officers among the Jewish. As I talk about these things, I don't mean to brag, so help me. I just mean to show that we're at least as patriotic as others in the community and our patriotism and citizenship is not diluted one iota because we love little Israel; that's one reason I mention these things.

H: We appreciate all that you have given us and we thank you for your time.

D: You're entirely welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW