ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 3

Isaiah Berlin Online aims to post, in the fullness of time, PDFs of all Berlin's uncollected and unpublished work, including lectures, interviews and broadcasts, so that it is conveniently readable and searchable online. The present PDF is part of this series.

The PDF is posted by the Isaiah Berlin Legacy Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford, with the support of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust

Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 3

For more information visit ***bit.ly/GC-IB***

First posted in Isaiah Berlin Online and the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library
13 June 2023

Last revised 22 April 2025

Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 3

Conversation date: 15 November 1987
Transcribed by: Donna Shalev (bad recording: problematic transcription)
Dates of transcription: 24–5 July, 5 August, 21 September 1995
Hebrew consultants: Arie Dubnov, Norman Solomon

Selected topics
Staff of Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford
Avi Shlaim
Zadik Bino
Nazi–Zionist relations
Susan Zuccotti and Yehuda Bauer
Marshall Pétain
Alan and Nibby Bullock
Alastair Horne
Family attitude to religion
Hasidism
German Jews in Riga
Russian Jews in Riga
Riga's unofficial ghetto (Red Dvina)
The Schalits
Riga chocolate-makers
The Volshonoks
Eating kosher
Zionism
Ben-Zion Eshel (Lansky)
Bored by the Talmud
Hannah Podzius
Chayetta Berlin
Yitzhak Sadeh's wedding
Andreapol
Famous Yiddish joke
Katzenellenbogen
Moses Finley
Return to Riga
Anti-Semitism on the train
Bribes
Marie and Mendel Berlin

Surbiton
Early schooldays
Babes in the Wood
The kosher butcher
Zionist meeting in the Kensington basement
Kadima
The Creditors
Bialak and Emerson

Side A

GC I always wonder. There was such a noise in the SCR. How can one converse, really?

IB We can't. We'll just sit in the corner. The two of us. [*name unclear*] was there. Addison[?] came in afterwards. Who else was there? Tell me about Professor [*name unclear*].

GC Personally I don't know him.

IB You've never seen him?

GC I probably see him. He runs a seminar on Tuesdays, on Oral History. I thought that I would come. It's in the Middle East Centre. I can't say I know him personally, but from what I – from his writings, he doesn't appear to be impressive.

IB I don't know anything about him. I heard this afternoon at lunch, from some Fellow at Magdalen, that he was rather good-looking, young, and manages to be not anti-Israeli.

GC If he manages to be …

IB Can that be true?

GC He had an article in the TLS, of course. Rather strong.

IB What was that a review of?

GC That atmosphere in the Middle East Centre is much better now. The academic standard is nil, but there are less Arabs now, in the College and in Oxford. And less Palestinians. You don't feel it's very different from 7 or 9 years ago.

IB Who are the Middle East Centre?

GC I mean in Oxford in general.

IB Yes. Who are the Middle East Centre?

GC Who are …? Well, the main figure is Roger Owen, who has become a solid economic historian of the Ottoman Empire. I think nearly overcame his Leftist period, which impaired his historiographic – he followed those fashionable agrarian – I'm not sure he got rid of them entirely, but he is a solid historian.

IB Who else?

GC A certain Derek Hopwood, who rotates with him the Chairmanship of the Centre, who is good for nothing. He is good with geography. And a very good Professor of Arabic literature, Mostafa Badawi, who is also a Fellow of Brasenose. He is Egyptian, but he is an expert on Yeats on the one hand, but on Arab Literature on the other hand. Very nice man. Like old-regime Egyptians. He is probably 60 years old or something. I think that the permanent Fellows there, they are the three.. There was a Lectureship for Modern Middle Eastern History. It used to be the Readership of Albert. Then was a lectureship. The Readership was a personal appointment of Albert. I think it is from the University probably. Now, there is a Reader in the International Relations, not in the Middle East Centre, who replaced Adam Roberts. His name is Avi Shlaim. He is an Iraqi Jew.

IB Avi …?

GC Schlein [Shlaim].

IB What? S-H…

GC S-C-H-L-E-I-N [Shlaim]. And it's an Iraqi name, Schlein [Shlaim]. He, as he wrote on …

IB Avi is his first name?

GC Avi. Avi is probably shortened from Avraham [yes], or something. From Iraqi Jews. A Jewish family who emigrated to Palestine in the 1960s.[1] Commands perfect Hebrew. Married I think to the [great-]granddaughter of Lloyd George. A very nice man. […] He writes on Middle Eastern affairs. On Israel, I mean. He has the benefit of knowing Hebrew. But he is now publishing a book on the triangle Britain–Israel–Jordan. He will probably teach partly Modern History …

IB I've never heard of him.

GC He was in Reading. He was a Reader in Reading. People like him. […] He's a nice man.

IB Is he Israeli?

GC He is not Israeli. And he holds a grudge, from his childhood in Israel. You know, among all the immigrants, the waves of immigration, the most successful immigration after 1948 was the Iraqi immigration. In many ways like the Yekkes[2] before 1948, and there are many affinities. But on the other hand, unlike the Yekkes, they hold an inner bitterness and grudge. They will never forget and forgive the two or three years in the tents. Most of them came from well-to-do families.

IB And they were degraded?

GC They were degraded! Now, the Yekkes were ready to face it. They also they behaved all right.

[1] Shlaim was born in Baghdad in 1945, and in 1951 his family immigrated to Israel as part of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah.

[2] The Yiddish 'Yekke' is a pejorative nickname for German Jewish immigrants to Israel, implying extreme formality, punctuality and politeness.

IB They didn't like it, but they still … Better than the Nazis, yes.

GC I mean, to pity their parents. Those merchants …

IB Like Kedourie, yes.

GC Like Kedourie. Exactly. But they are very good Israelis. They are entirely integrated.

IB And anti-Arab?

GC Part of them, yes. They are hawks, many of them. Not all of them. No, there is a generation – the Iraqi elite of intellectuals are not hawks. The Iraqi politicians are hawks. Among the North Africans there are more doves than among the Iraqis, and it's the influence of their relatives in Paris.

IB Of course.

GC And many of them are on the Left. But there is not such – but the Moroccans, they are not integrated like the Iraqis.

IB No!

GC Well, I always explained that the Iraqis, the Iraqi Jews are in many ways lie the Yekkes – like the Germans. It's the only community that really went down by immigrating.

IB Yes, quite.

GC Like the Yekkes. And they are very hard-working. There is a tradition of education, Yiddishe Mammes and so on. Very good mind for economics, banking, and to me the symbolic fact was, half a year ago, when an Iraqi Jew was nominated the Director General of Bank Leumi. That was Anglo-Palestine, in the tradition of [*names unclear*].

IB That is terrific!

GC That's the real …

IB They really came up.

GC There are many Professors. And they are well-to-do.

IB Who is the head of it?

GC His name is Benno Tzadi [Zadik Bino]. He grew up in a ma'abara [transit camp], tent camp, and in an 'ayerat olim' [immigrant town]. He is a self-made man. Very able. People had their doubts how he would be in international banking, but he did very well in the bank, and he's Director.

IB This reminds me. There's something I have to talk to you about. Ma'abara reminds me of ha'abara [(process of) transfer].

GC Ha'abara. Well, that's it. Economically they were not very soon [?]. Some of them brought money; they are very hard-working. Socially, it took some time. And they are now all right. But, as I said, some of them …

IB Sediment. It's a sediment of being socially treated – looked down upon.

GC But he doesn't – people tell me that he speaks about it from time to time. Now, politically, he is very critical of Ben-Gurion. Critical of Ben-Gurion years. And he reads into the documents more than there is there. He is not wise enough to be a good historian, but he is a very very nice man. A very nice man to talk to, and he was just now elected to the Readership when Adam Roberts took the Chair. Well, that's more or less …

IB He's not in International Relations?

GC Yes. He is a Reader of International Relations. But he specialises in the Middle East. It's International Relations that he teaches. Very nice man. And I hear that his wife is very nice. And you see, he has no problem, speaks Hebrew.

IB His wife is Welsh.

GC Whenever he meets Israelis he speaks Hebrew. No complexes.

IB No complexes!

GC From this point of view, fine. And very nice, too.

IB It's more than one can ask for.

GC Pardon?

IB One can't ask for much more.

GC Yes, really.

IB Many Israeli patriots do us no good. I'll tell you about the ha'abara, what I thought about ha'abara. As you know, I have this obsession about the need to write a book about the Nazi–Zionist relations. I told you about that.

GC Yes.

IB And I found this good woman who has written a book on the Holocaust[3] in [*unclear*].

GC Ah yes. The one who now published a book.

IB Zucotti.

GC Ah yes, Zucotti.

IB She's a pure WASP. She is a straight New York Protestant, married to an Italian descendant in New York. By the name. Thought she was Italian. She's gentile, she's very honest. I went to her lecture, and loved it. At the Italian Institute. Clear, honest and interesting, perfectly fair-minded, as for the research. She is very human, anti-Nazi in the proper way. Perfectly noble and honourable

[3] Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival* (New York, 1987: Basic Books; London, 1987: Halban).

and good. Very very un-Jewish. I thought she would be the perfect person to do this. If she was sure of the [*unclear*]. I thought that they would be ashamed, anxious, a bit suspicious – a goya. The book would speak for her, also I would speak for her, and other Jews could be found to say that she is kasher [kosher]. Now I learned from a man called Posen, whom I know, I received a letter, that – of course it might have been expected – Yehuda Bauer was writing a book on that very subject.[4] In a way, that's a disaster. I don't think it can be stopped. That is his subject. What else can one do? Commissioned by the Institute of Jewish Affairs, in London. When I put in for Zuccotti, they said nothing about having commissioned a book. A book written by a Jew, a Zionist, an Israeli is not authoritative on such a subject. Can be thought to be [*unclear*]. But he could never. Probably conceals the more embarrassing episodes – there must be some. Sort of hides a few things. There is nothing one can do about it. Just unfortunate.

GC When you thought of commissioning the book, under which auspices did you think?

IB There are no auspices. There is a committee called the American – the English Jewish Diaspora Trust [Israel–Diaspora Trust], or something. They said they would pay. You see, she would need research assistants: German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Hungarian. All that. Bauer also doesn't know all these languages. That's what I thought. I thought it would take three years, a project.

GC I'll tell you. There is room for two books.

IB Can't be done simultaneously. Could Bauer share the material? For obvious reasons he just wouldn't. It's his field, it's his monopoly. It's his life. That's what he exists for. 'Ze hamatzav' ['That's how it is'].

GC Maybe he personally behaves this way. But generally speaking there would be entirely different groups.

[4] Presumably *Jews for Sale? Nazi–Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven and London, 1994: Yale).

IB Of course there would. That's what I mean, yes. She has to get some very sensitive material. Bauer probably knows where it is, part of it. If he is writing a book he can't encourage a rival, of course, at the very moment of writing it.

GC He will probably finish the book before she.

IB He's only just begun it.

GC Yes. But he has an advance.

IB He knows a fair amount.

GC He knows a lot.

IB He's lived in that. I understand. The book will also probably take two years.

GC Hers will take more than three years. If she is mostly new at the subject, and Yehuda Bauer – so it will take four – she will come out after him, two years after.

IB We will have to wait for his book to come.

GC And one can persuade them that there is a need for a book by a gentile.

IB I understand. But I think in that case one has to wait …

GC Let's wait.

IB … for Bauer to publish his book. Then she can use it. On top of that, she'll know what she writes.

GC And we'll see how it will be received. Yehuda Bauer: what I don't like about him, but it can be an asset, he's a politician, he's not a historian [not true]. But he is a politician, in this respect, in a good sense. He knows what the sensitivities are about the subject, and what people suspect, and he will cope with it. Which means, I believe, the book will be better than you expect.

IB Oh no, I don' t expect it to be …

GC From the point of view that you said. And then there will be room anyway for another book. And she's young.

IB The only thing wrong is that Bauer is a Jew and an Israeli. That's the only thing against him.

GC Yes, I see what you mean.

IB However good the book is, it will not stop the mouths of anti-Semites. No book published in Jerusalem, or under Jewish auspices … obviously a politician's book; obviously it will be assumed that he doesn't tell the truth. It doesn't matter how good or bad it is.

GC That I can see.

IB There is nothing you can tell them or I can tell you. All I can do is offer it to people who want to put up the money, or I can write to Mrs Zuccotti in Paris. I had a long talk with her; she's an extremely nice woman. Perfect for the part. She's now writing on the Holocaust in France.[5] Which is anyway going to take her a year.

GC You see there is new material now in France. I mean new books now. There is a new book on Pétain. I read a review now, apparently the writer managed to find some new material. In French historiography only now start the stages of trying to deal with it from – not in a detached way.

IB Presumably it was written by a Jew, of course.

GC Yes, I see.

IB In France. Not Pétain and such.

GC Yes, but still, that's the background.

[5] *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (New York, 1993: Basic Books).

IB Obviously, naturally. That time was terrifically unseemly.

GC Even those who tried to rehabilitate Pétain, and there are many, and some solid people, can't explain his attitude towards the Jews.

IB Very anti-Semitic. He just was an old-fashioned Catholic.

GC Yes, exactly.

IB And a bitter anti-Semite.

GC Exactly.

IB Anti-[*unclear*]; exactly so. Simply straightforward anti- – typical French Catholic General. Plenty of such people in France.

GC Oh ho!

IB Extremely common. The point is that, because people defend him, that he tried to save France, etc., to make things easier, saved lives – probably did, but that's not the point: the point is …

GC But for your purpose, even Zuccotti will not solve the problem. You need a reputed, either German historian, or Continental historian for writing the book you want on Nazi–German relations. One who has already established a real reputation of a historian. And I am sure there are some Germans that would be ready to do it, because Nolte really …

IB Upset them.

GC He really upset them.

IB Yes, I know. But they will not be allowed to look at the documents. If an American went, it would be all right, but Germans.

GC After all, even the people in Israel, like Bauer and others, they understand the need, not less than you, but sometimes …

IB Nazi-German–Zionist relations is a comparatively small subject. There is not a question of Jewish Germans; it is not an exact subject. It is simply a subject of – Teddy Kollek and Eichmann, and [*unclear*].

GC I know what you mean.

IB That's all it is. It's the story of Kastner. It's the story of …

GC By the way, Yehuda Bauer, his knowledge is the best.

IB Naturally

GC To cope with this. Every book will …

IB Yes, I know. He is the authority.

GC On Kastner and on …

IB I'm sure that is right. Maybe he ought to write it first, and then she will profit by it.

GC But then, no, what I had in mind is that, if, say, one of the young Mommsens, or …

IB They are not interested in Zionists.

GC Yes that's true.

IB Jews, yes. Of course our problem with the Jews. Nobody would be interested in [*unclear*]. Holocaust, yes. Not at all the same subject. Completely different subject. How far were the Zionist favourites with the Gestapo, God knows.

GC Yes, I see what you mean. I know what you mean. And I know how important it is. I know.

IB What were the considerations of these Judenretter [those who save Jews]?

GC Yes, yes. I know what you mean.

IB That is what it is about. All the things that Hannah Arendt accused them of.

GC I surely realise the necessity. The other night, in St Antony's, at High Table, Alan Bullock was there, with his wife, and a certain writer, Alistair Horne: you may know him …

IB Oh, yes.

GC … was there.

IB He is not at all favourable to Israel. I know.

GC That I found out already in the conference on Suez.

IB You may have found out by sitting next to him.

GC Yes, easily. He has his memoirs of 1946 in Palestine. He was a young Intelligence Officer. But he was sitting – he admires Bullock, because when he, Alistair, published his first book, Bullock reviewed it positively, and so on and so forth. And he talked to Lady Bullock. And then he asked, 'What is your husband's opinion of David Irving?'

GC She was taken aback, and said immediately: 'I don't know, except that if he could he would hang him!'

IB Yes. Directly.

GC And Alistair of course was …

IB Taken aback.

GC Taken aback. Because that means that he is ready to judge: not that he is in favour, but …

IB … to take it into consideration. Maybe there is something in it.

GC And this reply, really …

IB Very good reply. Nibby [Bullock's wife's nickname]. Very good answer.

GC Strong, too – it was superb.

IB The same is true of Trevor-Roper: also 'Hang him.' Has a libel suit against him.

GC I know.

IB Or whatever it was. Exactly. Some other one thinks 'Maybe, how can one tell? Did Hitler really not know that was to go into it?'

GC And whole number, the whole region …

IB What?

GC There are no six million, and so on and so forth; the whole …

IB The whole thing.

GC Well, are you ready that we'll …

IB Yes, I'm ready

GC … start?

IB One more. I saw Teddy Kollek …

GC Yes?

IB … was worried: should he stand for Mayor? Again the usual thing.

GC I know. He's very nervous.

IB He's under tremendous – yes. And we had the usual conversation of the Rabbanim [Rabbis]. It's too awful what is going on. A waste

of money. And he says the University is going under. Jewish studies is in a decline.

GC Oy, it's a tragedy. But let's discuss it later. All right?

IB OK.

GC Because I have to discuss with you [Arthur] Fried and the College, later.

IB All right.

GC I had a very good talk with him, but …

IB With Fried?

GC With Fried, about a grant.

IB I am seeing Fried on Tuesday.

GC Yes. We will discuss it after we'll do some. All right? Because we cancelled three meetings.

IB My fault.

GC No, it's all right. Now …

IB Wait Let's go over the meetings. Just verify it. [*tape turned away momentarily*]. Let's do Fried now.

GC Not now, because it will take too long.

IB No, it will not take too long. We'll say what we have to say. [*tape off and on*]

IB A violent attack on him.

GC How interesting.

IB A minor attack on Pemberton [?], to whom he didn't speak, and [*unclear*].

GC Very interesting.

IB But the main thing is, a ferocious attack on [*unclear*].

GC But I am sure he is right; but why should he make such a commotion?

IB I know. He can't help it. It festered for years.

GC He can't help it.

IB It festered for years, and finally broke him.

GC Oy, it's a real pity. He thought he is able. And he now got his status …

IB Indignant; he'd give his way back. The only way that [Walter] Eytan [?] did for years [*unclear*]. [*laughter*] What he said about Gibb is quite correct.

GC Yes, I am sure. Of that I am sure. Though Elie is paranoiac.

IB Oh, yes.

GC Sometimes he sees.

IB I just wonder what his relation is with [*unclear*] in the LSE; after all they were close colleagues. Is he doing all right?

GC Yes, I think it is all right. But, generally speaking, he's very paranoid. And everything is either black or white.

IB It is paranoiac, it is; yes, absolutely. Who else did I think would write a book on Zionist–Nazi relations?

GC No, certainly not. Though he changed a lot.

IB Yes.

GC Though not in response to his traumas. That's true. Not when it comes to his traumas.

IB The traumas come from the Arabs.

GC Yes.

IB From the Arabs, and ultimately from the Zionists.

GC Yes.

IB Nationalism is the invention of what we call the Western Jews.

GC All right. What I have in mind now is, I thought, to devote a good part of this meeting, and maybe more, to personal questions.

IB Go on. Go forward.

GC All right. And then I plan to go on tomorrow.

IB Anyway you want to.

***

GC All right. Now, let's go back to your childhood in London and your family. What was the attitude in the family to religion, to goyim?

IB Yes. I'll tell you exactly. As for religion, both my parents were brought up in typical religious circumstances of the Hasidic colony of Riga. My father was a kind of favourite because he was the favourite grandson of his pseudo-grandfather, of his father's adoptive father, who was this millionaire, a relative of mine [Isaiah ('Shaya') Berlin]. And therefore, as a bright boy, he went to the Polytechnic in Riga, not to the University. He grew a beard, he went to the synagogue, he did what every observant Jew in Riga did. There was no kind of – but on the whole his behaviour was typical of that of the Church of England. He was not particularly interested

in the Jewish religion; he knew what he had to; he learned the Talmud, he learned the Bible, he did the ordinary Jewish education. But there wasn't any particular emphasis. He was not in any way super-pious. He was a conventionally brought up orthodox Jew of the Riga Hasidic community.

GC Which was the minority in the Jewish community.

IB Certainly.

GC Not only the Hasidic. Most Jews in Riga were not religious at all, I think.

IB One can't say that, no. In America maybe that is true. I don't [know] about the demography. My impression is that the Jews in Riga were divided into three categories. There were the German Jews …

GC Yes.

IB They were certainly not religious. They sent their children [*unclear*], I think, to Berlin or Königsberg, and not to the Russian universities. They could go to the Russian universities, but why should they?

GC Why should they?

IB They spoke German, they were part of the Yekke-German intelligentsia. Well, I knew some of them, of course. They were top-notch, socially. Some of these people obtained offices in the Latvian government, because they were probably literate and useful, even administrative [*unclear*]. Then there were the Russian Jews, who were bourgeois and not particularly religious.

GC Yes.

IB That was the media in which my parents lived, although because of their family they were pious. The others probably did not necessarily eat kasher [kosher]. There was the ordinary …

GC Yes.

IB Riga Jewish middle-class Jewish community. And there were intermediate types between that and the community, like Leibowitz. Comes from an East European, Russian Jewish – Russian Jews, not German Jews. But nevertheless, he went to Berlin, his sister went to Berlin, they became assimilated …

GC Yes.

IB … to the more educated sections. Underneath all that was the ghetto.

GC Ah. There was a ghetto?

IB There was a self-created ghetto. There was no official ghetto. It was called – the ghetto where we lived was called the Rote Düna, Red Dvina. The river was Dvina in Russian, and Düna in German. Reite Dina was the Yiddish word. That is the section of Riga, called the Red Dvina, that was Yiddish-speaking, shtetl stuff. Socially and religiously straight shtetl. That is where my mother originated.

GC And did she come from Lithuania, or …?

IB Her family came from western Russia. It was Lithuania, actually. I'll tell you. She was born – I can't remember what was the name of the shtetl. I wouldn't say it was Lithuania, but it certainly was in western, in west …

GC But maybe.

IB … western Russia. Yes. The rich Berlins came from a place called Sourozh, which is certainly today – was Poland at one time, but I think it was in Lithuania at some other time. On the border with Lithuania. What was my mother's little village? But of course the Hasidim tended towards Lubavitch. There was a rebbe there. And that was the centre of interest of my family, because they were descended from …

GC Schneerson.

IB Shneur Zalman, yes.

GC Now, and your grandfather – no, the grandfather of your father, who was a rich man, was it your grandfather, or was it his grandfather?

IB My father's pseudo-grandfather.

GC Pseudo-grandfather.

IB Adoptive grandfather.

GC Yes.

IB He was a millionaire.

GC A millionaire. A Hasidic?

IB He created his own synagogue …

GC He did.

IB … to which my family went. Some kind of shtibl [room for communal prayer]. It was a synagogue which he created, paid for, which was attended by members of his staff, people he employed; it was a company union.

GC And he was the major figure of the Hasidic community?

IB Easily.

GC By far. And …

IB He and his brother. As far as I knew there was a brother.

GC And your father used to belong to a family of eminence among the Jewish community.

IB In Riga?

GC In Riga.

IB Only because of that, because he bore the name Berlin. The Berlins were rich. There were other rich merchants, for example, the Schalit family.

GC Yes.

IB Of whom there are representatives in Israel. They were nothing like so rich as the Berlins, but still, they were prominent, also I think they were Hasidim.

GC That I didn't know. Oh, there were other rich families.

IB But the Schalits were very near with my family. They knew each other very well. They were very connected, socially. What other rich families were there? Not very many rich …

GC Not among the Hasidim, but among the German-speaking, I think there were.

IB Not very many, no. Though after the war there were – after the Revolution, there were the *nouveaux riches*.

GC Yes.

IB There existed …

GC Yes, I see.

IB But before the Revolution, I don't think the Germans were very rich, no. Quite prosperous, but not millionaires. None of them were. [Sergey] Eisenstein comes from Riga, the film producer. He was born in Riga. His father [Mikhail] was baptised, the engineer. That's typical of the Russian-speaking Riga Jew who became baptised and left the community. That was very difficult. Who else comes from Riga?

GC There were some families who came to Palestine in the late 1920s.

IB [Benjamin] Ak[t]zin, for example. That's straight ghetto.

GC Yes, that's right, he was not German.

IB Straight ghetto.

GC Yes, I know. But there were five families who came and established 'Elite', the factory of chocolates [in 1933].

IB From Riga.

GC All of them from Riga.

IB What were they called?

GC Moshevich [or Moshivitz/Moshiov], Kopilov …

IB Moshevich?

GC [David] Moshevich, [Eliahu] Kopilov, [Abba] Fromchakov [Eliyahu From(en)chenko; Laima chocolate in Riga, Elite chocolate in Israel].

IB They all became very rich in Israel.

GC Right. They came with some money.

IB They came when?

GC In the late 1920s.

IB After the Revolution!

GC I see what you mean.

IB They were *nouveaux riches*.

GC Yes. I see what you mean. That's different. My grandfather belonged to that …

IB A man called Samuelias [?].

GC Yes.

IB Who was a millionaire in the 1920s. That's a completely different picture. By that time we were gone.

GC No, that I can see.

IB By that time the relations we left – the relations who never had any money. The only person who had money in the family was my father. My uncle, for example, my mother's uncle, who was head of the Jewish community, who was called Victor Volshonok, which was my mother's name – Volshonok was a corruption for Volchonok; Volchonok was the Russian for a wolf-cub. It's a Russification of Wolfson. A German name we can't have, so for some reason it was thrust on us. These were [*unclear*].

GC Yes.

IB My father, after the Revolution, was not rich, but before the Revolution he was. He already began to evolve in the direction of non-observance long before the war. So when he went – he married my mother – I don't know when he married my mother, he married her, in, let me see, he was born in 1883 [1884], and she was born in 1880 [1882] – I think she probably [married] in 1904, 1905 or something like that – 1903, 1904, 1905 [March 1906]. When they went to England for the first time, he did not eat kosher.

GC He didn't.

IB Abroad, he did not eat kosher.

GC I see, yes.

IB I don't think this was reported in Riga, but he had no …

GC But he didn't mind? He didn't mind. He wouldn't like his parents to know.

IB No. Nor my mother.

GC No, they didn't?

IB No. By that time not.

GC Fantastic.

IB I'll tell you a story about that another time.

GC Fantastic.

IB But so long as they lived inside this community in Riga, they conformed. It was quite natural to conform. They were not shocked by its absence. When my aunt [Zissele Zelma] ran off with a Latvian sculptor to Paris, my mother says they practically sat Shiva [mourned] for her, terrible thing – goyim! Or was his mistress, and everyone was embarrassed. Nevertheless, when she came back to the family, she was absorbed without difficulty, and she stayed in Russia for the rest of her life.

GC And what?

IB She stayed in Russia for the rest of her life, married a Russian non-Jew, the grandson of a Patriarch [Sergey Zhmudsky].

GC Really? [*laughter*]

IB And remained in Moscow till the end of her days. She was some kind of minor school staff [*unclear*].

GC So, that was one aunt, and then Mrs [Ida] Samunov, the other aunt.

IB Then my mother's next sister, she married a Misnaged [opponent of Hasidism], called Samunov, whose son [father] was the Rabbi of Windau [Latvian Ventspils].

GC He was a Zamenhof, wasn't he?

IB Zamenhof, originally. Changed, again, because of Russification, I guess.

GC Yes.

IB Zamenhof is right. He was a very respected Rabbi in Winda, not at all like the Hasidim, decent, honorable, well-dressed, decent German type of Misnaged Rabbi.

GC And your mother was from a Hasidic family?

IB Certainly. First cousin of my father.

GC Ah, she was … Royal

IB My mother's mother [Rodsia-Freude Zuckerman] and my father's father [Dov Behr Zuckerman, *later* Berlin] were brother and sister. They were both descended from …

GC From Schneerson.

IB But my mother's father was an awfully poor man, employed by Berlin; since she was my father's first cousin, her father was automatically employed by the rich man. So was his brother. So were other men in the family. It was a clan.

GC And the name Berlin, does it go in the family of your adoptive grand-grandfather?

IB Nobody knows.

GC Nobody knows. That you told me once.

IB His father was certainly called [Berlin], yes.[6] We know in 1850, 1840. How far back it goes …

GC You don't know.

IB We don't know. I'm sure it had nothing to do with the town.

GC And nothing to do with the Rabbi that you don't like?

IB No relation. Which Rabbi? You mean Meir?

GC Meir Berlin [Meir Bar-Ilan?].

IB I didn't dislike him. Political priest!

GC Yes, you once wrote to me that if there ever was a political priest …

IB … that was he!

GC [*laughter*]

IB Perfectly true. I didn't dislike him. I was on very good terms with him.

GC Yes.

IB He was amusing. He certainly was a …

GC He caused Weizmann troubles.

IB Did he?

[6] According to the genealogical website Geni, Shaya Berlin's father was Berko Simonovich Berlin, son of Shimon Berlin, son of Rabbi Jacob Kopel Berlin, son of Rabbi Shmaryahu Berlin, son of Rabbi Moshe Berlin, son of Eichanan Berliner[?] of Hrodna, son of Rabbi Avrohom Nothon Berlin, son of Yaakov Berlin, son of Rabbi Naphtali Hertz Berlin, son of Rabbi Yaakov Berlin, etc. (the later stages being somewhat confused). So the name seems to go back a long way.

GC He was always on the hawkish side. He criticised him in 1944, 1945, when he came back from New York.

IB Could well be.

GC But he was able.

IB He saw me in the Embassy in New York – in Washington. He used to come and see me. He was my uncle's relation. He was a close relation of Samunov. Samunov's mother – Yitzkhak Samunov, the husband of Ida, my aunt Zvia Ida, her – his [YS's] mother was the daughter of Haim Berlin [Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin], who was the head of the Volozhin Yeshiva. That's what Meir Berlin's from.[7]

GC And that's my road. Ha-rav Berlin street is Haim Berlin.

IB That is correct.

GC He was an eminent Volozhin …

IB He was the head of the Volozhin Yeshiva, and he was Yitzhak Samuvov's grandfather, quite straightforwardly: his daughter married the Rabbi of Windau [Gershon Mendel Samunov]. These are all Misnagdim.

GC That's what I was going to say.

IB All of them. Absolutely.

GC It was not that common in those days for Misnagdim to marry Hasidim.

IB It was not. By this time it was no longer that objectionable. By 19… – I don't know what – 1910 or 1908 or in 1907 nobody paid any attention. These were not fanatical at all.

[7] Meir Berlin was brother of YS's mother Tema Samunov née Berlin..

GC Yes.

IB My uncle was brought up – my uncle was, as you know, an early Zionist , who never called himself Isaac – Yitzchok, on his plate, as a barrister – he was a lawyer in Petersburg, on his plate it was written 'Yitzchok Samunov'. It was uncommon. Ivrit bei-Ivrit [Hebrew in Hebrew: language teaching by use, without translation].

GC Yes.

IB And he was 100 per cent Zionist, which certainly his father was not, the Rav Samunov.

GC So, in his generation, he was the Zionist.

IB. He was, yes, true, absolutely. Moved in entirely Zionist circles. He converted my aunt.

GC He converted your aunt?

IB No doubt.

GC And your parents?

IB Are, that's a different story. My father was not a Zionist. He was not anti-, but never thought it was a utopia: he didn't think it was heaven. He had no particular feeling about it. My mother was, from my memories of her, 100 per cent Jewish nationalist. Didn't belong to any Zionist group.

GC That's interesting.

IB And she didn't know Hebrew, but she was conscious of being nothing but a Jewess. No nonsense. She went to a German school, her German was perfect. Her Russian was perfectly good. She spoke Yiddish, of course, otherwise she couldn't really communicate with her parents, but the point about my mother was that she had absolutely no doubt that the Jews were Jews, and she strongly sympathised with the Zionist movement, without becoming

particularly associated. But when we went to Petrograd, the point was that she was terribly anti-assimilationist. And when …

GC [*unclear*] Uninherited.

IB Oh, exactly. Completely uninherited. And when we – I'll never forget it, when we went to Petrograd [*unclear*] Jewish as the [*unclear*] my mother was triumphant, as many Jews were.

GC Yes.
Hope
IB It was a common triumph. My uncle of course was already [*unclear*], but my mother was not a member of any societies, she didn't do flags, but nevertheless I was taken to parties at which schoolboys marched up and down with some kind of Magen David emblems made of silver, that kind of thing. And songs were sung at these meetings, I still remember, which were the only Zionist songs, like 'Tag für die Zeiten', 'Shomrei ha-Arazim' ['Guardians of the Cedars'] – you know that song?

GC Yes.

IB Well, it was sung in German. It was originally in German. 'Tag für die Zeiten, die Volken' something something. And 'ha-Tikva' ['The Hope'], of course, was sung. And I'll tell you a story about my mother. I was given this Zionist student as a tutor in Petrograd. I was not sent to school because by 1916 I was too young. I was given a governess who was Jewish, a Jewess, and given as a tutor a man called Lansky. He was a student in a University somewhere, he was a straightforward kind of typical Russian Jewish Zionist who went to Palestine; I lost touch with him.

GC And his name became …

IB Lansky.

GC Ben-Zion Eshel.

IB You know that?

GC You told me that you had him as a teacher.

IB Who investigated?

GC Twenty-five years ago I found out that he became Ben-Zion Eshel.

IB He was Ben-Zion Lansky.

GC And he was a teacher in general, and geography in particular, and there was the names committee of the Keren Kayemet [Jewish National Fund], in the good old days of the Keren Kayemet; the nomination, the names committee was particularly important because they would decide every …

IB In [*unclear*].

GC Yes, and he was an eminent member of this committee, representing historical and archaeological knowledge whenever you could find biblical names.

IB He was an absolute decent man, that I can assure you. He must have died when?

GC Probably 25 years ago, or maybe …

IB I blame myself. I've never looked him up.

GC Yes.

IB I didn't know how to find him.

GC So I found out later.

IB My aunt knew him, also did nothing about it. That was my teacher and he made me write little Hebrew poems.

GC I intend to ask you about him, because you mentioned him.

IB He taught me Hebrew.

GC I didn't know that, whether it was Petrograd or in London.

IB He would read me Ivrit [modern Hebrew] and the Torah every morning. And I used to write little poems, which were called Hadashot li-bekarim ['New Things in the Mornings'].[8] That's what it was called.

GC Fantastic.

IB He also gave me my deep Hebrew consciousness.

GC That's the – so that's the origin?

IB So I'm told.

GC And that's your mother?

IB That's my mother; oh, no doubt. I was also given the Rosh Yeshiva to teach me Talmud, which bored me to a degree I can't imagine, so I read it, but it didn't take. He was called Rev [Rabbi] Baer, and he was the head of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, I think, at that time.

GC So how was it that he was in Petrograd?

IB Because it was shut. Closed.

GC Really, the head of a Yeshiva?

IB Closed by the Revolution.

GC Aha! I see, you mean after the Revolution.

IB In 1917. Lansky appeared already in 1916, the end of 1916. But Rev Baer appeared somewhere in 1917. He had to make a living. And all the yeshivot had closed down by then. The emigration was

[8] Perhaps an allusion to Lamentations 3:23, where the phrase is 'Hadashim [feminine] la-bekarim', referring to God's mercies.

later, and all this business with Israel, I don't know how – what the continuity is – but he was head of Ponevezh, and he was a very nice man, but failed to make me interested, I'm afraid. I got terribly bored by Shor she-nagakh [et ha-]para ['Ox which gored a cow': opening words of the Mishna[9] tractate Bava Qama, chapter 5, on liability for damage caused by one's property; a popular topic of study in the yeshiva].

GC You remember Shor she-…

IB Sure, it's the beginning of 'Bava Qama'.

GC Yes. And it was boring.

IB Unbelievably boring! Still, I knew what it was. I remember the technique. I understood – I knew what the Talmud is. Otherwise I wouldn't have known: there was no halakha [the laws of Jewish life] as far as I was concerned. I never became a lamdan [one who is learned in rabbinical literature] in any sense.

GC Yes.

IB And then after Lansky – Lansky for some reason disappeared. I don't know what happened with him. He disappeared. And then I got another teacher – two more.

Side B

IB He and Shazar were colleagues and friends.

GC Colleagues with Professor Ginsburg.

IB Probably, yes. They were both scholars – Ginsburg scholars.

GC Yes.

[9] The Mishna forms the core on which the Gemara comments; Mishna + Gemara = Talmud.

IB Quite right. That is exactly what they were. They didn't know anything about that, then.

GC At that time.

IB The Rabbi was a very severe teacher, and I was not a very good pupil. I didn't like him much, but he used to fill my head with heretical things, such as that Esther was really Astarte, that Mordechai was the Babylonian god Marduk, and similar …

GC It's very typical to this school of Shazar and others in Moscow, Bikoret ha-Mikra [biblical criticism]; Soloveitchik, Shazar, he was in this milieu.

IB Bikoret ha-Mikra.

GC Yes.

IB Soloveitchik was the same.

GC Yes. He wrote a book with Shazar on Bikoret ha-Mikra, the first …

IB The real Soloveitchik [Joseph]?

GC No, it's another Soloveitchik, who was Minister …

IB Oh, in Lithuania.

GC In Lithuania

IB Absolutely, and so one, sure, of course. The Minister of Jewish Affairs [Max Soloveichik held that post in Lithuania 1919–22].

GC And then came to Palestine.

IB Yes. Of course. And I think a Polish man who did much the same, I suspect. What's his name? What was the chief Zionist?

GC Itzkhak Greenberg [Yitzhak Gruenbaum].

IB Greenbaum, not dissimilar.

GC Yes, quite right.

IB Yes, that was the thing. Bearded Jews from those parts of the world, they had quite a solid Yeshiva education, at some stage.

I forgot to tell you, before I went to Petersburg, or to Petrograd, as it was, we spent a year – what happened was this: we were in Riga until 1915, where I had – my first language was German, because my nurse was German. My nurse she was a Lett, really, a German-speaking Latvian, called Hannah Podzius, and spoke to me in German till I was three. I remember being three – at the age of three, the following facts about myself. I was taken to see my so-called grand- – pseudo-grandmother, no, my, yes, Yishayahu Berlin's wife, who was called Chayet, Chaya.

GC Chayuta.

IB Chayeta [Chayetta]. This was a kind of Europeanisation of Chaya. She used to have a song, it was always begun with the words 'Chayetta, jolie coquetta.' She was an old lady of 92 [*c.*70] probably by then, or some such age, and I was meant to be presented to her, I was meant to advance into the room and to kiss her hand, which I sharply refused to do. I was an awful disgrace.

GC That's 1915.

IB No, 1913.

GC Ah!

IB We're going back in time.

GC I see.

IB In 1913 I was four; no, 1912, because I was three. This I remember; at present it is clear, yes. The other thing which I remember is Yitzhak Sadeh's marriage.

GC Yes.

IB To my aunt [(Hinde) Evgenia Berlin]. It was this tremendous affair, and I was – his father was quite a rich man, called [Jacob David] Landoberg.

GC He was I think the husband of his mother [Rivka Fradkin].

IB What?

GC He was his stepfather, I believe. His mother married twice.

IB Yes. His stepfather was called [Izchok] Ginsburg.

GC I see.

IB It had nothing to do with Ginsburg.

GC I see.

IB He was called Yitzkhak Ginsburg.

GC I see.

IB That was the second husband.

GC Yes.

IB … of his mother. His mother was the sister of my grandmother [Shifra Fradkin]. He was doubly related: first of all, he was my father's first cousin, because their mothers were sisters, and secondly, he married his first cousin, my father's sister. So that when I was taken to the wedding, I was put into a little white dress and hat of silk, it being a dress since I was three, and I was led off as this tremendous klei-zamir was going on, 'klezmer' [Jewish dance music/musicians] …

GC Klezmer.

IB … they were called. There was this tremendous klezmer going on, and I said in German 'Ich hasse diese Schreimusik', 'I hate this …' – Schreimusik was not …

GC Schreimusik?

IB I invented it.

GC Ah, really?

IB There was no such word. There was no such word. Schreimusik means screaming …

GC Screaming.

IB Screaming music.

GC Of course.

IB In a burst of tears I was taken away. I did not attend the wedding. As I recall it – anecdotes from my childhood. But I was not given any Hebrew or anything else of that sort then. But I was taken to synagogue. I was certainly taken to synagogue. And then the Germans came rather near Riga in late 1914, into Buddendorf [?]. My parents – my father was afraid of the Germans coming in. Naturally, he had no anti-German feelings. The feelings were anti-Russian.

GC Of course.

IB But this was a time when the Commander-in-Chief, Nikolay Nikolaevitch, who was the Tsar's uncle, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies, suddenly expelled the Jews, 48,000 of us, out of the country on rather pretentious grounds. The Kaiser scattered leaflets over Latvia saying 'Meine liebe Juden', 'Yiden', 'Meine liebe Yiden', promising all kinds of Yiddish. What my parents were afraid of – my father – was being cut off from the timber, the trees, the forests, from which the income came. So we moved in 1915, about spring, early summer, May, April [June] 1915, the Germans still outside, into a little village called Andreapol.

Andreapol was what is called – under the *gouvernement*, the Government [Governorate], in English, of Pskov, still called Pskov, in Western Russia, between Riga and …

GC Andreapol.

IB Not far from Tver, as it was called for some time, not far from Kaliningrad [not near either Tver or Kaliningrad]. And that was a company union. There was a village, which in effect belonged to my father's firm, the millionaire. There were 2,000 peasants in the village. They did the timber-cutting, and the sawing, sawed the timber, and – didn't saw it, they simply axed it, and then bound it into rafts, which were floated …

GC On the Dvina.

IB … on the Dvina, to Riga. Landau. Exactly as in Canada. Played on concertinas. That's what the peasants did. In front there was a tiny little railway station with, I don't know, a hundred houses, not more, in which there lived the clerks, the officials, all the businesses, everyone who had to do with anything, plus 15 shops, plus other Jews who happened to be around, who were also shopkeepers, or clerks, or agents, or whatever it was. They formed a Jewish community. Then there were Russians: the police, the administration, the stationmaster, not many.

GC Doctors?

IB The doctors were Jews.

GC There was a doctor?

IB There was one doctor, he was a Jew.

GC The chemist was also a Jew?

IB No, I think the chemist's shop was a Russian. The grocer was Russian.

GC Do you remember it?

IB Of course I remember it

GC Or is it a story?

IB No, I see it.

GC See it.

IB Visually. I was much older, this was 1915, I was six. That's an age when one remembers things. No, I remember very well, I was with my grandparents, I think. My mother's parents went away to live there, and where they lived, half the place was a shop that was kept by a man called Isaac the black, because he looked black. And the other peasants came to buy leather and leather goods and various types of things, and he used to bring flowers sometimes – [*unclear*] and they talked a bit of Russian. That was a typical Jewish shop. At the back of the shop lived my grandparents. That's where the Hasidic meals on Shabbat were consumed. That was the Oneg Shabbat [Sabbath joy][10] one spoke of. And there were some shops owned by Russians. And one used to go there to buy bread or to buy herring, or whatever it was. Ordinary Russian shops. Plus the colony of Jews of about, maybe, 80,000, all connected with the business, in one way or another. And the trains stopped there because there was a railway stop organised. That was where, I remember, my governess also came, who continued to teach me, and there was a German there, who was hiding from the Russians. They didn't want to be arrested. He was hidden in somebody's – her attic, and he had an affair with my governess. And that was discovered and my governess was removed. But I remembered it vividly, because the Jewish clerks, some of them were quite well educated, their daughters and their wives wore large sort of country-dresses. There were plenty of Russian officers, before they were sent to the front, who fled through these parts. Some Russian, some Jewish. They all went to the forest to collect mushrooms and berries and play balalaikas and sing. This was pure Turgenev Russia.

GC Turgenev.

[10] Cf. Isaiah 58:13.

IB And I went with the soldiers. This really was an idyllic period. Sometimes the soldiers would take me in lorries to bizarre sort of evenings, where the balalaika was played and they drank, and I sat in the corner. The smell of rubber, to this day, burnt rubber, reminds me of the tyres, of these huge lorries which these soldiers travelled about in. All I know is up to the cheder, to this cheder where I was sent, there was a melamed, and I did the Bible with the other boys. Just that I was the rich man's son, I was treated, given special treatment, which, if I had known it, had I understood it, I would not have liked. It was clear to me afterwards that I was treated rather cautiously, because all the other little boys were poor little boys, and I was the sort of squire's son, and the Rabbi would translate the Bible into this sort of semi-German Yiddish. I remember very well the famous joke which was very good. 'Kohelet.[11] Do you know the translation of Kohelet into Yiddish? Yes, it goes as follows: "Divrei kohelet ben-David", you remember, "Le-Shlomo. Divrei kohelet le-Shlomo, melekh yerush… – melekh Yehuda be-Yerushalayim." Uh, how does it go? "Hevel hevel …".'

GC 'Hevel havalim ha-kol hevel.'

IB '"Ha-kol hevel." It goes as follows: "Divrei – die Wörter. Kohelet – von gornisht." Of course names can't be translated. "Shel – der, Shlomo – gornisht. Melekh – der meilekh. Yehuda –Yuda. Bi-yerushalayim – in Yerushalayim. Hevel havalim ha-kol hevel – gornisht von gornisht – all gornisht." '

GC Gornisht. [*laughter*]

[11] Thanks to Norman Solomon for the following explanation of the joke. 'The butt of the joke is the method of translating by rote from Hebrew to Yiddish common in the old-fashioned cheder. The chosen text is the opening of Ecclesiastes ("The words of Kohelet the son of David, king in Jerusalem: vanity of vanities, said Kohelet …"). Proper names (including "Kohelet", for which some translations have "the preacher") are not translated, so *gornisht* (gar nicht) = don't translate. But *gornisht* is also the appropriate Yiddish equivalent of the word for which English has "vanity". So the Yiddish translation runs something like "The words of *gornisht* the son of *gornisht*, king in *gornisht*: *gornisht von gornisht*, said *gornisht*." '

IB Famous joke. That I heard, typical Jewish joke from the other boys in the cheder. But I attended my lessons, I learned a certain amount, I was taken to the cinema, and I was treated to drinks, and the exaggerated respect of the parents of these children, because I was a sort of special child. The great social centre was the station. That's where people used to go to meet the trains. They didn't know anybody. They liked seeing it – life. Sometimes people got off, people got on, people drank tea, drank coffee, and so on. The social centre was the railway station, particularly for the Jews. That was where the gossip was. That's where the wives met. They would say to their husbands, 'Put on your trousers, let's go to the station.'

GC To the station.

IB That was a unique form of life, let me tell you. I learned something from this. I'll tell you what I learned. That's something which has really given me a rather good idea of what Judaism is in that part of the world. In Andreapol – it was called Andreapol because the squires' names, who owned the place, were always Andrey. They were relations of …

GC It means Andrey.

IB Andrew.

GC Andrey. Yes.

IB They were all called Andrey son of Andrey son of Andrey, there were generations of Andreys. They were Kushelev. That was their exact surname. He lived in the manor house, old, half-ruined, drank too much, it was a decayed manor house – I can't begin to tell you. Sometimes we could see, after these expeditions into the country, he would occasionally invite some of these people to come in and have some coffee on the terrace. He was a very broken old Russian squire of a Russian of good family. And I saw what that was like, too. So I really was acquainted at first hand with the decay of the Russian gentry. Just in this one case. Nobody knew of a wife or the children, they lived with some serfs. They had no money, they probably borrowed it from the Jews. And then there was, for example – there was a Jew who lived next door who was some kind

of merchant, who had nothing to do with Andreapol, who had a tremendous horse-drawn carriage with four horses, terrific chap, who went out, tremendous gambler in some kind of casino, in some local town, used to take my mother for rides. The officers used to come and see my mother in the evening, used to read aloud from Russian novels to her. Flirted with her mildly. All this was quite all right. Nobody minded. And that was a kind of Chekhov life, rather reminiscent of the *Three Sisters*.

But what I learned from this, I was going to tell you, was that there was no difference between kodesh va-khol [holy and profane]. If you ask what our life was, the Jewish religion was part of our lives intrinsically. It did not matter who was pious, or who was not. Some people were genuinely pious, and some people probably were not. But the Jewish religion and the quotation of the Bible, the Biblical tags, formally, oral mention of the Bible, and the kind of Hebrew which comes from Yiddish, and references to the Talmud, which Weizmann also had, exactly the same point.

GC Ah, yes.

IB You see? That was universal, and from that I understood what the Middle Age was like, for the goyim, not just the Jews. When you had a religious attachment, it didn't matter if you believed or not, there wasn't something called 'Something secular, something religious', there was one, just one. There was something, the sort of language they used was soaked in the Bible, in the Talmud, in the taryag mitzvot [613 commandments], in what they did. In the kashrut [food rules], in all the business, it was a full Jewish life, it was a natural life, absolutely unartificial.

GC Now, when you describe this …

IB This I realised later.

GC Ah. Good.

IB At the time, obviously not.

GC Again, to the decaying gentry, probably you also, later, when you read Turgenev, it was the illustration …

IB Oh absolutely. Of course, when I now remember I know what I remember. But above all, this kind of life which was so – there was in fact no frontier between religion and ordinary life, is something which I saw there. Never in Riga, and never in Petersburg.

GC Yes of course.

IB You see, it was never like that. The ghetto of Riga was also like that, but we never really got there. We lived in a handsome apartment on a smart Riga street which was called the Albertstraße, Albertovskaya; there were relations of the family, but I never saw them; there was a kitchen co-op.

GC Now, your mother, she didn't complain that she wanted to go back to Riga?

IB No.

GC Never?

IB Never. Didn't particularly like it, wasn't particularly attached to it, nor was my father. My father was an Anglomaniac, from a very early phase. He travelled in Europe for the business. He was THE European, he was *évolué*, like the Lebanese who talk French. He went to Germany, he went to Holland, he went to France, he went to England. He talked these languages – not Dutch, but the others. And he had English friends who were businessmen, acquaintances. He stayed in their houses sometimes. He stayed in London, he stayed in Paris. He knew Western Europe quite – it was quite normal. And that was part of the melting of the religion, too. And they thought they would be all right, so they were all right in Petrograd. First he went from Andreapol to the main office, round about 1916, I think. And Samunov was in another similar village near, probably near ours. He was as unsuccessful lawyer. All right.

Then comes Petrograd, Lansky, all of that. Among the pupils, I can tell you immediately, there were three families with which I was associated. A family called Trainin. Some of them settled in Israel. One interesting case which I'd like to tell you. There were two

Rabbis in Petrograd. You know the Russian system. One was a real Rabbi, and the other was the official Rabbi.

GC Rabi mi-ta'am.

IB Rabbi what?

GC Rabi mi-ta'am. Nominated by the authorities. That's the Hebrew name.

IB Mi-ta'am.

GC Rav mi-ta'am ha-shiltonut [government-appointed Rabbi].

IB Oh, I see, mi-ta'am.

GC The official Rabbi.

IB The real Rabbi was one Katzenellenbogen. He was a saintly Talmudist of considerable order. The other one was called Eisenstadt. Perfectly nice, thoroughly decent Jewish Rabbi. He was not at all official, he wasn't a Russian, he spoke German. The other one spoke only Yiddish, of course. No contact with goyim at all. Eisenstadt was the one who naturally wrote birth, and death – did all the official things. He went to Paris afterwards, and moved among the rich, white-collar Russian Jews. Quite a nice man. Now, Eisenstadt. Katzenellenbogen had a son, the son was my fellow pupil, and he was called, I wish I could remember his first name. His nephew was Moses Finley.

GC The classics historian. Finkelstein.

IB This man's daughter, this lady's uncle, his aunt, his sister, must have married Finkelstein.[12]

GC It's the Katzenellenbogen or the Eisenstadt?

[12] Finley's father Nathan Finkelstein married Anna Katzenellenbogen, daughter of Rabbi David Tebele Katzenellenbogen.

IB Katzenellenbogen. Because when I got to know Finley, I simply saw him one day – when I knew Finley, I suddenly discovered that he was somehow, I don't know how it came up, that he was the nephew of my schoolfellow, who went to Israel, no doubt. He certainly did. And our Rabbi was always telling me how much better he was than I.

GC About?

IB How much better …

GC Aha.

IB Just as my teacher in Riga after the Revolution – we were there for four months – used to tell me how much better Leibowitz was than I was.

GC [*laughter*]

IB Now, what was the name of the – no, I always meant to look him up, before he's dead. Now let me think. Katzenellenbogen was the name.

GC Yes.

IB Quite a normal Jewish name.

GC There were several Katzenellenbogens in Israel.

IB Sure. He was called, a Russian name, like …

GC The first name.

IB The first name: a Jewish Russian name, like Yakov, Yitzhak or …

GC You mean a Jewish name?

IB Biblical.

GC Biblical.

IB Avraham, or Yitzhak. Either Yitzhak, or Avraham or …

GC Moshe?

IB Or Moise, or one of these Russified forms of – yes.

GC There was an eminent dermatologist by the name Katzenellenbogen in the 1930s and 1940s. Maybe …

IB What was his first name?

GC I can find out, and there are others.

IB Anyhow, I'm friendly with the nephew. And that was my – and there were other peer boys, who were also my fellow pupils, and that's where I met Leonard Schapiro.

GC You met him in Petrograd?

IB Of course. His parents were grander. Socially. They were also from Riga.

GC Yes.

IB His parents – his grandfather was called, I forgot his name, Philip Schapiro. Jews in the ghetto were not called Philip.

GC Philip, yes.

IB His grandmother I knew. I knew Philip Schapiro's mother. Afterwards she lived in Germany. Perfectly nice woman. His [grandfather's] son, Leonard's father, Max – Max's brother was called James, all of which was already superior.

GC Oh, la la.

IB Max was sent to Glasgow to learn some kind of trade, married the local hazan's [Jewish precentor's] daughter.

GC And Leonard is their son.

IB Leonard is their son. She was called Leah Schapiro. Her brother – one of her brothers was the Reverend Ephraim Levine, of the New West End Synagogue. Another brother was a professor of philosophy called Levine, in the University of Exeter. The third brother went to South Africa. The fourth brother was – he changed his name; no, he's called Levine, changed his name to Arthur Levine, who was the chief actuary for a Rothschild insurance company. That was the Levine family from Glasgow. But she was English, she spoke English and very bad Russian. Then Leonard was their son. Max Schapiro came from Riga. His uncle, Max's uncle, Leonard's great uncle, Shukman, who had just written in light fiction this Russian biography over some document. He sent it to me. He says his uncle is wrong: I didn't know that. His great uncle was a member of the Duma.

GC A great uncle of Leonard?

IB Great uncle.

GC Was a member of the Duma.

IB Yakov Schapiro. And him I knew in London afterwards. He came to London in 1912, and he left the Duma. He became an Anglomaniac, became an authority on the seventeenth century in England. And he sold all his books to Max [*unclear name*], and he was killed during the war by a bomb – destroyed him, his books, his dog, everything else about him.

GC The second war?

IB Yes. And Yakov Schapiro, his name was. Strange man. A Duma member. Never became a British subject, because he did not want to be a second-class citizen. Didn't want to be naturalised. Now, I'm getting on to other stories. I knew Leonard there. Leonard was about two years older. He was gifted. He introduced me to the paintings of Renoir, Bakst, all the Diaghilev painters of that time.

Rather more sophisticated than my family was. He made little sculptures of the dying Marat.

GC Who, Leonard?

IB Leonard. Not genuine, no. He was not much of a Jew, but they went to synagogue, of course. We'd meet in the synagogue. In the chief – the head synagogue of Petrograd, which was built by Aline's grandfather. And we used to take holidays in the same suburbs of Petrograd together. And there he and I used to wander: we knew girls together, used to go to parties and so on together. He was a friend of my youth, but much more sophisticated, much more – altogether superior. And he used to lend me novels by Alexandre Dumas, things like that.

GC That was in the …

IB Oh, he spoke English already then, because his mother spoke to him in English.

GC He spoke English.

IB Leonard. Talked Russian to me.

GC Where was it, in Petrograd?

IB Yes: 1916, 1917 and 1918. In 1919 [1920] we all left Russia at more or less the same time. We all went to Riga.

GC So his father married a …

lB In Glasgow.

GC In Glasgow, and brought his wife to live in …

IB Leonard was born in Glasgow.

GC I see.

IB Thereby he was a British citizen by birth. But then he came back to Riga, where he grew up, and – but more sophisticated: we used to go to their house, used to act little Chekhov plays at Christmas, or they did [*The*] *Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickensian plays, it was all much more European. But still, I also went to the opera in Petersburg, of course. I went to concerts, and so on. One time I saw Boris Godunov, and Chaliapin and Mariinsky and all that. On the one side. On the other side, I went to cheder with Lansky, which had nothing to do with Leonard. He had no Jewish education of that kind at all whatever.

GC You would go with your friends or with your parents to the opera?

IB With my parents until later; no, with my – yes, with my – one of my distant cousins became a governess to me, I think I probably went with her. I read all the novels, French, Jules Verne, in Russian. About 40 volumes. Then came the Revolution. I was not sent to school; Bolsheviks – during the Revolution the schools were no good. Bolsheviks' school was impossible. So then, that's when I got Lansky [*unclear*] – that was all during the Revolution. Last one was called [?], they didn't like that, and I asked for somebody else. I was given ordinary Hebrew lessons, like all children [*unclear*]. And then we repatriated to Riga, as Latvians, ur-Latvians. People born in Riga. Quite legal. They didn't quite want to believe, even though it wasn't difficult to prove, but my mother spoke Latvian, because one of her nurses deliberately spoke Latvian, a Baltic one. Nobody else spoke Latvian, except people of that dialect. It was not a language …

GC Of course.

IB … people used, except to peasants who they spoke to, were Letts, a completely downtrodden population whom Baltic barons completely crushed, and that I'll tell you about. When we left Russia, we travelled in a train – that I told you – from Petrograd to Riga.

GC There were no problems? Were you running away, or you were just going?

IB We were going legally.

GC Legally

IB No running. We were allowed to go where we wanted to. Anybody from Riga could determine – self-determination – determine to be a Latvian citizen, in which case you were let out. This was something in the instinct. My father's brother remained in Riga, but my father and mother and I left. So did the Schapiros in the same way. So did my mother's parents, and so did my father's father. That generation came back to Riga. Samunov, from Windau, near Riga, they had Latvian origins. Now, we went first of all to the frontier, and then there was a – the train took about ten days, about 2 miles an hour [*unclear*]. Then we came to a quarantine, Latvian quarantine, diseases, Soviet, then we got nitrate treatment. My mother, unfortunately, understood Latvian. She was sitting opposite two men who made extremely anti-Semitic remarks to each other. Then my mother, who was not prepared for that, through her Latvian, she said to them: 'There may be a great deal which is wrong with the Soviet Union, but that does not exist there.' Which is not quite true, but in 1919 …

GC One believed.

IB … you could say it. Jews were in power. There was no official anti-Semitism, and you did not come across it. Secretly …

GC Quite right.

IB 90 percent of the people completely ostra… – completely out. Whatever Lenin was, he was not that. These men were extremely taken aback, and she went on telling them, what terr… – more or less denounced them. At the next station we got out, and they made a telephone call to Riga, saying my mother was a Soviet Agent. My mother the Soviet agent! A comical idea. When we arrived in Riga, the next station, two policemen entered and arrested her. My father was beside himself. We arrived with no money to Riga, poor, refugees almost; we didn't know if we had anybody in Riga or not. We had some money in Russia, but it was taken out, and we were destitute. But still, it was agreeable to arrive under guard. When we arrived in Riga at the station, a man approached my father, and said

he was a detective; he was in the train, he was in a carriage. For a sum of money, he was prepared to swear my mother didn't say it, was completely innocent. The money was handed over and my mother was allowed to go home. Because the detective immediately testified at the police headquarters that this was all false. The men went on prosecuting. All the family in Riga were brought in in the case against her as a Soviet Agent. Finally, the 'juge d'instruction', the judge who investigated – French system – said, ' Look, are you staying in this country?' 'No.' 'Are you going to some other country?' 'Yes.' 'Where are you going to?' 'England.' 'Well then, go.' The case was then quashed.

GC Fantastic.

IB I'll remember that for ever. I am only telling that story to show what my mother was like. Anti-Semitism was not to be tolerated.

GC Did you remember it, or did they tell it?

IB No. I saw it.

GC You saw it?

IB I was there. I saw my mother under guard. I wasn't told then. I saw the policemen. I saw my father dreadfully upset. I saw my relations who came to meet us, upset. The whole thing was terrible. Arrival with an arrested mother. Of course, nobody understood what could have happened. Denounced by two little anti-Semitic Letts. It was talked about.

GC I saw your mother, and I'm not surprised. I'll come back to it.

IB My mother was exceedingly proud, very solid. She felt what she felt. There was no compromise. And she was a Jewish nat… – and when Zionism came, she was 1,000 per cent Zionist, from the beginning. With no doubts. No hesitations. Nothing was wrong at all. She wasn't even critical of given attitudes, and she joined Zionist societies, she came to a little Zionist women's circle in Hampstead, where Lord Goodman's mother was a member.

GC Well, yes, I had plenty of questions, but I'll ask only one.

IB That's good.

GC All right, but that's good. And I was coming to your mother, because I was always impressed by her, but wanted to ask you some questions.

IB My mother was very eshet-khail ['Woman of Valour', Proverbs 31:10–31, sung before the Friday night Shabbat meal to honour the matriarch].

GC She was eshet-khail.

IB Strong personality!

GC That's the impression I got. I remember one dinner, one lunch at your place. She was there and Aline's mother was there, and your mother dominated the scene.

IB No doubt.

GC I shall never forget it.

IB Where was this?

GC In Headington.

IB Headington?

GC It was probably 1962, or 1961.

IB My mother had an extremely powerful temperament.

GC And very energetic.

IB Yes.

GC More than energetic.

IB Life, vitality.

GC Band one could sense it.

IB She had no wish to go to England.

GC I see.

IB She'd never been there. She spoke German. In Germany you could buy a house for two and sixpence; the inflation in 1919 was already beginning. 1920 it was. She always had a hankering to go to buy a house quite cheaply. She deeply respected Germany and the Germans. Because that was the Riga education. So why not live in Berlin? My father spoke perfect German. So why England? My father was an absolute rabid Anglomanic.

GC Anglophile.

IB Who refused to go anywhere [else]. He was determined I was to go to school in England, wherever they lived. He had an English partner when he did business in England – his partner and he were on very close terms – called George Payne. George Payne told him that the English did not live in towns, that they live in the country. So my father was not to live in London. London was full of Jews, Russians and other undesirables. My father was fundamentally an assimilated Jew.

GC That's what I was going to ask.

IB All right, he went to synagogue.

GC Yes. But mentality.

IB Mentality was that he did not create friends among Jews. He didn't spurn them, but basically a bit like Aline's father. Basically what he liked was an ordinary gentile life. He liked French comedies, and the stage. He liked reading French and English novels. The old Jewish part had clearly come off. He was a very easygoing man, very amiable, who had never done very much in his life. He never made or lost money. Was rich, never poor. Timid, tactful, very gentle. He

never gambled. Never: all these Russian Jews, the Schalits and people, were tremendous gamblers – Beloffs, all these people, despise him, as a rather …

GC Timid.

IB Not that. He didn't play bridge, he didn't drink. The life of the Russian Jews in Hampstead was Bohemian. My family didn't see them. Met them very very occasionally. They never invited anyone, and they never went out. They led a very very quiet life, in Kensington, not in Hampstead. He didn't want to mix with these people too much. He knew them, quite liked them. The English was what he liked. And so we didn't live in London, we lived in Surrey [Surbiton, not in Surrey], which was an absurd suburb of London, which was not at all the country. It was where Mr Payne lived. They called it the country. It was a comical suburb of London. There were no Jews. We arrived. We went via Berlin, Calais, Dover. My father met us in Dover; he was already in England by the time we left. We struggled to buy a special compartment from London to Surbiton, and then we stayed in some typical English bungalow [house]. I was angry; I didn't like it. It was built by some Anglican. In the morning we had eggs and bacon. I tell you, we had an English maid; I spoke no English. I did have an English teacher in Petrograd. I spoke 50 words. But then I got an English teacher, a Russian woman who was an English-born person. I went to private school in Surbiton. The story about my mother which I want to tell, not so much about what happened at that school. All the English boys and girls – I spoke broken English, I'm sure – they were infinitely kind. l was not bullied, I was not laughed at, very lovely little class. No, one boy once said to me 'Aren't you a dirty German?' – Berlin. The other boys beat him up. Unique. Unbelievable. Fundamentally I grew up in an anti-anti-Semitic atmosphere. It was rather unusual. You see, they were rather innocent at school; you're outside the main currents of English life. They were children of shopkeepers, doctors, local solicitors, people who – and so on, you see, retired officers. You can imagine. It was really a deep Victorian life. Still.

GC How long did you stay there?

IB A year. Already at the end of the year I took part in the school play: *Babes in the Woods* [*Wood*], it was called. I already got the second prize in English. For some little English essay, a little description of an imaginary scene in the Russian Revolution. Now, my mother therefore ate treifa [non-kosher meat], and so did my father, eggs and bacon.

GC She didn't mind.

IB It appeared not. And began a completely English life. No Jews in Surbiton, a few relations and friends in London occasionally. But broadly we had an absolutely isolated life. I played cricket, I played football, all that. Perfectly normal. One day my mother went to the butcher, Mr Henshaw, to buy some meat, and she saw a little old gentleman in the corner with a little beard. She looked at him, and Mr Henshaw said, 'That's the Reverend Mr Vogelnest' – bird's nest – 'from Reading. And he's here because he does the meat for the little – two Jewish families who eat it.' We didn't know they existed. My mother naturally went up to him. He talked to her. She braced her tears. After that, kosher. For ever after. My father didn't care whether he ate it or not. He'd put up with it. Outside the house, we were allowed to eat everything. My mother, not. The kashrut was not a very superior kind. It only meant kosher meat. Apart from that, the mitzvot [laws] were not specially kept. But still. Her point was, no treifa was allowed. No. And there was some uneasiness about her. That we refused to accept. That was all right. No shellfish appeared. Let me see: what else happened? By this time, of course, we all went to the synagogue on the High Holidays and occasionally on Shabbat. We lived an ordinary bourgeois English life near London. In Surbiton we discovered there was a minyan at Rosh ha-Shana and Yom Kippur. Some sort of neighbouring Jews who came together. And there we found Mr Scott, the gabbai, whose name was Schulze, who spoke no English. He had to change his name during the war because there was terrible anti-German persecution in the First World War. Schulze. Now, there was somebody called Englander. Englander was also a German name. Two Jewish families, who produced a few others with difficulty, the minyan. We went there once, but by that time we were already in London. My mother broke her ankle, and in order to mend it, she had to go to a nursing home in London. After that we all moved.

GC Now, did they argue, your mother and your father, about the attitude towards Jews and Gentiles?

IB In Surbiton I was a goy. Surbiton was my most goyish period. When I was at school, it never came up. I was a Russian. The headmaster was extremely nice to me. When my mother broke e her ankle and had to go to London, I practically lived there. I had my meals there, my father was in the City, and he used to come home in the evenings, by train, and I simply had breakfast with him. Lunch and tea and dinner with the headmaster and his wife. Extremely nice people.

GC In Surbiton?

IB In Surbiton. They treated me as a little Russian boy. The fact that I was a Jew never emerged. I didn't mention it, they didn't mention it. I just saw that there was no occasion, you see, and they never really asked me if I was a Jew. You see what I mean? Anyhow, I suppose they were reacting in some way. Anyhow, as far as I knew, all my friends were little English boys. There was one Jew, one little boy, whom I did not like. I think he was called Fatty Englander. Leonard Schapiro came to see us, and Max and his wife visited; as circumstances permitted, we went to see them, in London. But fundamentally I had a totally English life which was for something like a year. Till February or March [5 January] of 1920 [1922]. No. We came to England in 1920 – 1921. From February, early [8] February 1921 till March or April 1921 [January 1922] life was Judenrein. I had no contact, in Surbiton.

GC Did you get *The Times* every day?

IB No. Certainly not. My father read *The Telegraph*. My father was a Conservative. But he liked Lloyd George, and greatly admired Churchill. He used to talk about politics, which bored me beyond words. I couldn't listen to it. He took a very intelligent, lifelong interest in English politics. When he came to Oxford during the war, the last war, when I was already a don at New College, he used to talk about politics to David Cecil, my friend. They got on extremely well. Something terrible.

GC You didn't read newspapers at the period. You were not …

IB Not in the least interested. I may have looked them through.

GC Yes, but …

IB All I remember is that an Australian cricket team came. That was very important.

[*remainder of conversation (after a gap) from tape E*]

GC Well, that's an important question, of course. That I know. But I didn't want to ask it now. But as you raised it, it came naturally. It was not that it came late in life, but was it part of your Hebrew education? National, Jewish attitude of your mother?

IB It was all part and parcel – it was all the same thing. Jerusalem, Magen David, Bar Kochba, the lot. There was a Russian Jewish journal. A Jewish journal in Russian, a monthly, which Jewish children in Russia read, which told the story of Bar Kochba. It was quite natural for me to read it.

GC Before 1917 or after?

IB No, no. In, ah [*unclear*]; no, before and after. It went on being published. It was called *Kolosya* [Колосья], which means 'sheaves [ears] of corn'. It was perfectly Russian. It was a typical sort of nationalist, semi-nationalist Jewish periodical founded by 'maskilim' [proponents of the Haskalah] of some kind.

GC But after all, still it was – to be a Zionist or a 100 per cent Jew, it was not that simple. Most of your friends were not?

IB Where? In …

GC In England.

IB In Petrograd?

GC No, in England.

IB In England, no.

GC And yet, for you it was natural?

IB You know something, I don't think anybody was. Schapiro never went to Synagogue.

GC Maybe not.

IB I'm just trying to think. I am trying to think of the Minister whom I knew used to go to the synagogue, in London, to which he had to wear a top hat on Shabbat. It was tremendously rare.

GC Certainly!

IB Couldn't be less … Impossible [? – *unclear*].

GC I'm sure! Now, is it, was it you? After all, you were still young.

IB It was my uncle.

GC Or was it your mother?

IB I was subordinate to [him]. He came to England at the same time. And in our house, and that was in Kensington, in the basement, in the dining room, in 1923 there was a Zionist gathering to which came Tiomkin, Ben-Zvi, who had another [*unclear*] conference, Ben-Zvi – I'm trying to think.

GC Berel Katzenelson was in London during this meeting, but maybe he didn't come to it. Anybody else?

IB And [*unclear*] Jaobson.

GC Yes.

IB They were Russian-speaking. That's the point, you see? That is why Ben-Gurion didn't come to all of them. Wait a minute.

GC Prokofsky?

IB Who?

GC Shmuel Prokofsky was still there?

IB I'll tell you, most of them became Revisionists afterwards. It was that sort of type. Let me remember. I can't entirely remember, there were lawyers, very …

GC Rozoff possibly.

IB Rozoff? Yes.

GC You remember the name?

IB Rozoff? Yes. Certainly. Absolutely.

GC There was one meeting. How do you remember the names and the people?

IB Because my uncle talked about it and so on. Also, I went to it: I was fourteen. No! I was thirteen, my Bar Mitzvah was in 1922. I was allowed to sit in the back. They talked in Russian about what to do. There were about fourteen people, perhaps. These were the Russian Zionists in London. I'll tell you who else …

GC Chelnov was still in London?

IB Who?

GC Yehiel Chelnov?

IB No.

GC He went back to …

IB When did he go?

GC To begin with, he was sent to Russia after the Balfour Declaration.

IB I know. But he stayed there. Did he come back?

GC I don't remember now.

IB I would have known. He was not in London. [*unclear*]

GC I don't know.

IB Died there. He never went to Israel, Palestine. So he must have died there.

GC His daughter went to Palestine.

IB That is correct.

GC Yes, well, the majority of the Zionist leaders were in Russia in that period.

IB But then in due course, in Kensington, I joined a little Young Zionist circle. It was called Kadima. I remember the first man who gave a talk there was Stanzl [*name unclear*], who was the Secretary of the Zionist Organization, and was a more or less Polish Jew.

GC He was a graduate of Gymnasia Herzliya.

IB Exactly.

GC First or second.

IB Levi [*unclear*]. Stayed in London

GC He stayed in London. Married I think a goya.

IB Exactly. Dancing was his thing.

GC She was a dancer.

IB Was she? He got prizes for dancing. Ballroom dancing. He was called Doctor Packi for these purposes. I don't remember what she was. But I remember the young Zionist circle. I'll tell you who was a member of it: Harry Creditor. Harry Creditor was a brother of Mrs Gaitskell [Anna Dora Creditor].

GC Max Beloff says her father was your teacher.

IB That is correct. He was not only a Hebrew teacher, but also he was the editor of a Yiddish newspaper in the East End. There were two papers. One was called *Die Zeit*, and that was a man called Maurice Mayer; the other was [Leon] Creditor – it was called something else. He was the editor of it. He was also the editor of a Yiddish paper, and, according to her, a saintly man. Her brother Harry Creditor was part of the Zionist circle. We went about collecting money for the Jewish National Fund. Little blue boxes. When I was a schoolboy. I certain l y did. So my Zionist education was [*unclear*].

GC I remember you told me once, or you wrote, that you met Bialik during this period. He asked you about Emerson.

IB That's right. It was Emerson.

GC When was it again?

IB I was at Oxford.

GC Ah, it was already in Oxford.

IB 1928, 1929.

GC How come you met?

IB He gave a talk at some Zionist society of which I must have been a member. We gave a sort of dinner for him.

GC How interesting.

IB He came to see the students.

GC He came to Oxford!

IB London. There was a man called Temkin, Tyomkin [?], who then went to Israel, who – I think it was a kind of …

GC Temkin or Tyomkin? A functionary here in the …

IB That was the man who organised it. He was a man who organised an evening for Jewish students with Bialik. And we went to this meeting. He gave a lecture, a talk. And then some people went to a cafe afterwards with him.

GC He spoke Hebrew, or Yiddish?

IB [*thinking*] Could he have spoken English? Not likely. No. I think he spoke …

GC German?

IB No, Hebrew. And then we went and sat in a cafe somewhere. Perhaps it's not more than – I was sixteen [*whole clause unclear*], and that's where we talked about Emerson. I was an undergraduate. I'll tell you who came with me: Halperin [Halpern?], the son of …

GC George?

IB George. Son of George Halperin [Halpern?], who was killed in the war. He was called Aviram. He was the son of a Zionist, he was from Riga. We were rather good friends. I was at Corpus. 1930, 1929, 1930, 1931.

GC Well, I can check when Bialik came to London. Was he impressive? He looked like a merchant.

IB No.

GC He didn't look like a poet.

IB He looked like a butcher.

GC Yes.

IB He looked like a 'katzav' [butcher]. No, he was not impressive. He was awfully nice, very nice. Talked about Emerson. Talked about [*unclear*]. But he was not impressive. Nice old man, he seemed to me. But he was not very old.

GC He was ill. He had pains. He came for treatment.

IB Could be.

GC It was an ulcer.

IB No, we worshipped him because he was Bialik. But if he hadn't been Bialik, one would not have been very impressed.

GC But did you …?

IB I must be going out to dinner soon. We'll have to leave it here.

GC It's high time.