



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 30

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Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 30

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Selected topics

[to come]

*[No contemporary transcript of this conversation was made up to the point marked on p. **13** or after the point marked on p. **60**. No doubt Cohen would have been able to make improvements in the remaining section which have eluded the current editor. Thanks to Arie Dubnov for invaluable and generous help with this section, and to John Shedden for spotting several errors.]*

Side A

GC *b'Yanuar, elef t'sha me'ot shmonim v'tesha* ['January 1989']. All right. I have – we [?] the list of other questions last time, but I'll start with [?]ing you something, because it occurs to me that I never asked you about him, and I think I ought to do it now. What were your relations with Yigal Allon?

IB Of no possible interest. I'll tell you. Of no interest whatever. Perfectly good, always perfectly happy. I met him in Ginosar in, I suppose – can't tell you exactly when, but I should guess either in 1947, or in somewhere like – when was I there again? when was I in Israel again? – must have been in, maybe the summer of 1951, something of that sort. Teddy Kollek introduced us.

GC Teddy, not Yitzhak Sadeh?

IB No. Yitzhak Sadeh said nothing whatever about him. I talked to Yitzhak Sadeh about him: he had no interest in him whatever. That's by the way. I know that he was his patron, and there are photographs of him with his [arm around Allon's] shoulder – no, he wouldn't talk about him. I can't tell you why but he didn't. No, Yitzhak Sadeh never talked to me about anybody in Israel. That's a separate chapter. No, Yitzhak Sadeh ... [?].

GC [? – *talking over*]



Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Sadeh and Yigal Allon at Kibbutz Hanita, 1938

Jewish National Fund

GC When he came up to England he had a letter of introduction to you from somebody.

IB No. [?] I met him. I met him already.

GC [?] You met him before in Israel, you say?

IB I met him in Ginosar. And he made a very good impression on me. And I talked to him about his father, and about the Rothschild colonies, and he explained to me that they were run by [Robert] Gottlieb [general manager of PICA] and by his predecessors, and I remember coming back to London in 19... – probably, I don't know what, end of 1951, may have been end of 1952 – and I told Jimmy Rothschild that if he wants to generate Communists in Israel, there is no better machine for producing Communists than Rothschild colonies. (GC [?]) *I* said that. (GC Ah, you said that.) *I* said – no, not he. And I said to Jimmy Rothschild that, if he was to produce left-wing people of a very indignant and anti-capitalist kind, the Rothschild colonies are a superb machine for generating such people.

GC When did you say it to him?

IB Probably about 1952, maybe 1951, maybe 1948 – I don't know – the last time I met Yigal Allon. On the strength of that I said his [Allon's] name was Peikowitz, his father was badly treated, as always, by the *pkidim* [bureaucrats] – by the Baron [Rothschild]'s agents. It may not have been Gottlieb; it may have been his predecessor, whoever he was [Yehuda Zil Rozenheck?]; and that on the whole they didn't like him at all. But I told him that again and again, and I said that was before the – PICA had been given up. So you'll probably know the date of that. When would that have been? When did PICA go? Only after the state? When, all right, the state was created in 1948. When did he give up PICA?

GC In the early 1950s. It took time, it took some time.

IB I know, it wasn't immediate.

GC It took a few years.

IB Yes, he terribly wanted to get back the colonies in Syria. And he thought that [Major General Sir Edward] Spears, of all people, would help him. Because he knew Spears. [He was] a friend of Spears, who was a raging anti-Semite, of Jewish origin, everybody thought, named Spier [*pronounced 'Shpayar'*], grandson or son of a Jewish money-lender in Belgium. Duff Cooper told me. I don't think that's true.

GC If there *was* a man who came in Syria ...

IB It was Spears, I know. But my point is that Duff Cooper assured me that he was a son of a man called Spier from Belgium. I don't think that's true. But it's a good idea.

GC But is it believed all over?

IB That he was of Jewish origin?

GC Yes. People say that he's from Alsace or ...

IB Oh, I admit he was a horrible man.

GC He caused a lot of trouble to English [?].

IB I know. In Lebanon. That I know. Yes.

Spears on his forehead,
Spears on his toes.
He'd sow his trouble
Wherever he goes.

Michael Wright repeated that to me. Of all people. Anyway, no, he was wildly unpopular.

GC But the point ... Churchill.

IB But he was a protégé of Churchill, exactly. He was a member of the Other Club, which were Jimmy, Churchill, Beaverbrook, F. E. Smith. That was the world. Anyway, I've seen him, I saw him. Amery he was a friend of.

Now [*resumptively*]: I probably said that to Jimmy in the late 1940s, maybe, early 1950s. He always used to enquire, 'But why do you think this?' I used to explain to him that there's nothing more awful than when the parents shed tears, the children shed blood; and that he is the originator – the Rothschild organisation originates this. I never repeated this to Dollie, as you can imagine. And not even to Jacob. Though I could. Jacob would take it quite calmly. So would Victor, even. But [?], of course, was responsible. And then – I can't remember how I got him to St Antony's.¹ The process I don't know. I knew that he wanted to. He certainly wrote to me (GC Yes), and I certainly played a part in talking to Bill Deakin. No doubt. I know.

GC It was a very brilliant idea. He wanted to take an undergraduate degree. But for an elderly man to go to an undergraduate college was stupid.

¹ Allon studied philosophy and history at St Antony's College, Oxford, 1950–2.

IB Yes. Perfectly suitable. And I knew about that relation to Yitzhak Sadeh. But I had nothing about him directly. So I realised he was a brilliant soldier who wanted to take time off simply to educate himself. That's what he said. He said he felt he knew nothing, he was a barbarian, and he wanted to learn these things. And he always talked about me as his teacher, which I never for a moment was. Never. It was just a *bracha levatala*.² It was a compliment which I appreciated which was not founded. And in fact, then he came to St Antony's. I saw him here. I don't know how much I saw him. But I saw him – he used to come to lunch with me in, I'm sure, All Souls. When did he come here? Fifty-something.

GC 1950 or 1951.

IB Thenabouts.

GC [?].

IB In that case I met him in Israel in 1947. Because I don't think I was in Israel before that. I didn't go in 1949.

GC And you saw him before he came to England? That you are sure of?

IB Oh, no doubt. Absolutely. Oh, no: in Ginosar.

GC In Ginosar?

IB Yes. Not in Jerusalem. Teddy took me to his own kibbutz. What's it ...?

² A blessing inappropriately given.

GC Ein Gev.

IB Ein Gev. *En route* we went to Ginosar.

GC [?].

IB Certainly. Why? You wouldn't bel[ieve]? But it's improbable.

GC No, it's not improbable. But ...

IB They were not such [good?] friends.

GC They were not [?].

IB I think at that time they perhaps were more than you might think. And then I went ...

GC [?].

IB Who? Yigal? No. I went to see him also. I went to a Seder in Ginosar.

GC [?].

IB That's much later, yes. That must be with Aline.

GC That I remember [?].

IB In the 1950s. [?] Well, then he came here. And he went to lectures. I don't know who taught him or with whom he worked. But I had nothing to do with him professionally. He may have come to my lectures. But I couldn't ... (GC [?].) No doubt. At that time I was not Professor yet. I was just at ... I had just moved to

All Souls in 1950. And I must have delivered lectures on various topics to which he came. And I used to see him from time to time. I liked him very much. And he used to see socialist leaders here. He saw [Richard] Crossman. He saw Aneurin Bevan.

GC Mainly Bevan.

IB And Crossman too. Crossman liked him very much.

GC Yes, but Bevan was ...

IB ... *the* friend. Bevan, Crossman, I can't remember who else he might have seen.

GC Oh, he saw many of them.

IB The Labour Party.

GC But Bevan was ...

IB ... his particular hero.

GC He even tried to imitate him politically. He developed a political concept in a Bevanite way.

IB Bevanite way, yes.

GC And Bevan came to see him in Israel.

IB Bevan came to Israel?

GC Oh, yes.

IB But once or more than once?

GC I remember once.

IB Jenny Lee etc.

GC Yes, Jenny Lee etc.

IB Yes, Michael Foot.

GC He even came specially to Bevan's funeral.

IB Quite. Jenny Lee and – he must have known Michael Foot.

GC Michael Foot and everybody.

IB I'm just wondering who they were.

GC Barbara Castle and ...

IB Barbara Castle.

GC They didn't like each other.

IB No. She didn't like Israel either, Barbara.

GC Later on, Harold Wilson. They were very close later.

IB Yes. I can imagine.

GC But there were many others.

IB Left wing of the Labour Party, as it then was.

GC The mild ... [?].

IB There was no extreme left.

GC Ah yes. George Wigg he knew well, for example, I don't know why.

IB He was an ally, or – he was a friend of Bevan. (GC [?]) He was. Certainly. Otherwise [Arnold] Goodman would not have had his present career. He created it. It's a paradox, but it's true. He was a horrible man, George Wigg. Horrible man. He really was.

GC I met him [?].

IB Awful.

GC I interviewed him.

IB Awful. But, I should think, pro-Zionist. That's the left wing. There was nothing left for them. Communism didn't exist.

GC I'm sure that he had some relations with the centre, too: with Gaitskell and the others. But Bevan was the first.

IB Yes, I understand. All right. Then after – he stayed in Oxford for – (GC Two years) two years?

GC And then he was brought to Israel back, to do a very constructive political thing. To split Mapam.

IB That's right. To split Mapam. I remember when he had to go back. He told me about this. He talked to me about it. And he said he didn't want to leave. But he had a political duty. (GC [?]) Quite. Of a direct kind. And it had to be done to save the Labour Party,

save Israel, etc. All of which I understood. Then I saw him every time I went to Israel.

GC I remember. (IB Without exception.) Because once or twice I remember he invited me. (IB No, of course, yes.) And I remember particularly one ...

IB I never came to Israel without seeing him. Never. I always got on extremely well with him. When he was Minister of Education he was very amusing. Everybody was asking for universities. More and more universities. He succeeded ... [Zalman Aran, Allon's predecessor as Minister of Education].

GC Then he came back to Oxford [?] another term of study. (IB Spell.) And he studied a year or so in St Antony's and again was called to become a minister.

IB Quite.

GC And you would meet then. When he came either to the funeral of Bevan, or I think you invited him and Stuart [Hampshire] was here, I don't know who else, and he brought me with him. I think maybe that was the first time I met you here.

IB Perfectly possible.

GC No, we met in Israel before [?] ...

IB Quite, quite. Perfectly possible.

GC And he felt very much at home here.

IB Yes, yes, he did. (GC That's what I wanted to ...) In this house particularly. (GC [?]) In this house. Yes, he did. Our relations were

very natural and perfectly easy. And I liked talking to him. He liked talking to me. He used to call me Ben-Amotz,³ which for some reason was a tremendous joke. And so on. Ben-Amotz. All these jokes about Ben-Amotz. All right. And so on. And we used to talk about Ben-Gurion, we used to talk about Weizmann. He talked very freely about everybody and about the party and about relations in Russia and communism and all this. Otherwise I really have nothing to tell you. I remained friendly until the end. I think I was in Jerusalem, maybe, even when he died.⁴ I think I was, you know.

GC I think you were, but it was very – there was snow, and ...

IB Oh, it was that terrible winter. I couldn't move. I couldn't move in Jerusalem even. I couldn't walk. I was immured – I was completely confined to the King David. I walked – I remember there was that snow and ice and everything. Couldn't move out. Herbert couldn't walk out.

GC Was he a personality, or was he for you a stereotype of a certain kind?

IB No, he was not a stereotype.

GC He *was* a personality.

IB No, he *was* a personality. What did I think about him? He was obviously imaginative. He was brave. He was full of vitality. There's no doubt. He was a politician, deeply, through and through. He was gay. He was very cosy. The two qualities I like

³ Possibly an allusion to Dan Ben-Amotz (1924–89), controversial Israeli bohemian actor and writer.

⁴ Allon died on 29 February 1980. IB was in Jerusalem with Herbert Hart from 27 February to 5 March for Rothschild Fellowship interviews.

best in the world are gaiety and cosiness, which he combined. That's why we got on so naturally. I never quite knew where he stood, nor did he. I had the impression that he moved with the wind. He didn't stand as a kind of pillar of some kind who has absolutely consistent ideas so that you knew exactly where you were. He moved with circumstances. But, as far as I know, nobody ever accused him of unjustified opportunism.

GC He sacrificed his career in 1949, standing against Ben-Gurion.

IB Exactly.

GC In that way [?].

IB Exactly. Quite so.

GC By the way, he was wrong in his judgement. He should have gone with Ben-Gurion. But ...

IB Could be. But, at any rate, he was not an opportunist. Perhaps a little vanity. Vanity played some part.

GC No. No? Loyalty to [Yisrael] Galili.

IB Ahdut haAvoda. (GC There was another [?].) Who were they, Galili and ...?

GC [Yitzhak] Tabenkin [?].

IB Tabenkin, yes.

GC And other generals.

[*The contemporary transcript of the conversation begins here.*]

IB I met Tabenkin, as you know. I met him twice.

GC I think you told me once that you met him.

IB I met Tabenkin ...

GC I remember when you told me. We had a very long walk in Paraggi on the hills. All along the [?].

IB Quite. Tabenkin. I met Tabenkin twice. First in 1947, when I was going to stay with Weizmann. He was on [?], the same boat, which started from Marseilles, I think, and went to Haifa.

GC Ah, yes, coming back from visiting the DP [Displaced Persons] camp.

IB Very possibly, and there were various other people there whom we knew. I don't know, nobody introduced us, I was with my father, and he was simply coming to Palestine as such, and to see his brother-in-law, and so on, and I was going to stay with Weizmann. Somehow we got into conversation with a number of people, and he talked to me, and ...

GC [?].

IB Yes, certainly. And I realised that he was a kind of dervish. That I could see. He was very very passionate, narrow, dedicated, eloquent, fiery, and got the nature of the Soviet Union completely wrong, of that there's no doubt. He wasn't Communist, and he said he wasn't, and he explained why he wasn't – all that was all right. But he had much friendlier feelings towards the Soviet Union than history afterwards ... – just because they voted – no, they hadn't

voted yet, but it was the general mood of large sections of Mapam at that time.

I remember I had a great friend called Rachmilevitch, whom I talked to you about. He was in Israel in the end. He stayed there for a year; he was in a hospital, next to a Mapam member, and he began talking about Stalin. And the man said, 'Please stop telling me about Stalin. It makes me sick, I can't sleep. It depresses me too much. It's too painful to me. Don't mention that name again.' Because he was pro-Stalin, and that was about the time when, I think, the Hungarian trials occurred – the Czech trials.

GC That was – in Tabenkin's case, that was the [?].

IB The breaking point. Because that was when that man was arrested.

GC And that's why he needed Yigal Allon to save Mapam.

IB Mapam, exactly. Well, what happened in Czechoslovakia was, there was a man, I don't remember, what was his name?

GC [Mordechai] Oren.

IB Oren, who never ceased to be pro a certain Stalinism, in spite of that. Oren. I remember.

GC By the way, Tabenkin had in him a strong ingredient of anarcho-syndicalism.

IB Oh yes.

GC He really didn't accommodate fools[?] at all.

IB Quite so. When we went to Lebanon, we stopped in Beirut. He said, 'Ay, Lebanon, Lebanon,' he said. 'Why can't we be friends? Ay, Lebanon, Lebanon, we're so – it's so natural we should be allies. We were allies in Biblical times. Why not now? What is wrong? Why do they hate us? We have no real quarrel with the Arabs.' A lot of that went on. Then I saw him again in his kibbutz.

GC Ein Harod.

IB Ein Harod. I went to see him. I think I was travelling about. I don't know what I was doing. I liked him very much. He gave me cups of coffee. And again, foaming at the mouth a little bit, which he used to do, he began telling me about the crimes of Ben-Gurion. Mainly that. And about what he – I liked him very much. Tabenkin was a pure spirit. [?] he was wrong, and rather simple, and sometimes mistaken, and politically naive, but he was absolutely – he was pure-hearted, ambitious maybe, but pure-hearted, and utterly decent. Of that there's no doubt.

GC And you see, it's not by chance that he attracted all the best ...

IB ... people in Mapam. Of course. And he was very ...

GC Berl Katzenelson's main envy was that Tabenkin – they were [second] cousins, they were of the same quality ...

IB They were cousins?

GC ... but Tabenkin managed to rally to his support all the best young people did you ask...

IB ... the best young people. We got on very well. I went to see Tabenkin because he asked me to go and see him. He said ...

GC Who asked you?

IB Tabenkin.

GC Tabenkin.

IB He sent me a message ...

GC I'm sure.

IB ... to Jerusalem, and asked me to go and see him. I got on very well with him; I got – I went to Emek – what's it? – not Emek, to Tel haMishmar.

GC Mishmar haEmek.

IB Mishmar haEmek, where I saw ...

GC Hazan.

IB Not Hazan.

GC Yaari. No, Hazan.

IB Neither Hazan nor Yaari.

GC Bentov.

IB Bentov, with whom my relations were absolutely golden in spite of his Communism and everything else. I thought he was ...

GC [?] the right wing of Mapam.

IB Who, Bentov?

Up
GC Yes.

IB Very pro-Communist. (GC Mmm ...) He assured me.

GC Yes, but less than the others.

IB Less than the others. (GC [?].) And he used to tell me about his close relation with the Egyptian Communists. That's what he used to talk about. I liked Bentov. Bentov was nothing like Tabenkin. Bentov was not pure-hearted. He was rather an intriguer.

GC Tabenkin was an amateur, but well read.

IB Yes.

GC Tabenkin was a kind of, you know, the intelligentsia (IB Yes, [?]) – he read German, he read French, he didn't read English. [?].

IB No, quite so. He was in Russian what is called *polu-intelligent*, half an *intelligent*.

GC Did he talk to you about Russian literature and this kind of thing?

IB No, he didn't talk about that.

GC But coming back to Yigal ...

IB Yes.

GC You knew that Yigal was considered to be not only the best General in 1948, but an admired – the leader admired most by our

generation. Did you ask yourself ever why? Because you didn't find in him such a charismatic or ...

IB No. I didn't. Simply – I could see that he had a certain power for inspiring people. The vitality, the sincerity and the idealism were very strong. By the time he was Minister of Education it had slightly died away. By that time he was just a member of a cabinet.

GC Now I am thinking about the early 1950s.

IB Of course. No, he was a kind of young lion. I could see that. I could see why. Certainly I met nobody else like that. I knew Yitzhak Sadeh very well. Yitzhak Sadeh was an adventurer, you needn't tell me about him. Him I knew very very well. He was not a Zionist, he was not much of a Jew. He was splendid, but that's another matter. Fascinating. Splendid and wonderful, he had remarkable qualities, but he was not a (GC Not serious) serious person, in the end. Just very brave and romantic. That's something different, whereas Yigal Allon was something else. And ...

GC Did Yigal ever try to – about that time – to use your contacts for political ...

IB up Never.

GC Did he come to consult you on political ...?

IB Never.

GC But he admired you ...

IB Never. About Israeli matters, never. He may have talked to me about English statesmen, people, asked what I thought about them. If so, I've forgotten. It's unlikely that he didn't. We probably

chatted as I might chat to you. About who people were, what they thought, and so on. But on the whole he relied on his own judgement. On the whole he thought he knew.

GG Generally speaking, from your first – in 1934 when you came to Israel, did you see a kibbutz?

IB He went to see Jimmy Rothschild. That I remember. Yigal. He went to see him.

GC And you know, the story was that Ginosar and Rothschild were at odds. Ginosar was the only kibbutz that was on PICA's land, and it was quite an event for a member of a kibbutz to come to visit Jimmy Rothschild. But Yigal Allon, being a General ...

IB Quite. No, I told [?] Jimmy Rothschild about him. I prepared it.

GC Jimmy apparently liked him.

IB I prepared it.

GC But Jimmy asked him – so Yigal says – 'Come and see me again', and Yigal told him, 'I'll come to see you in a year time, after I'll be able to speak English.' And apparently they met several times, I don't know. Then, of course, Dollie helped him in the Open University and the other other – all right. But coming back to 1934, did you visit a kibbutz then?

IB In?

GC Did you visit a kibbutz?

IB When? 1934? Yes, certainly.

GC Do you remember ...?

IB I went round with John Foster, we were taken around by Yehoshua – what's his name?

GC Yehoshua ...

IB A kind of guide.

GC Yehoshua Gordon.

IB That's right. He was attached to John Foster. Important Englishman. Who I was, he had no idea. Nor was I anybody. But anyway, he took us round. We certainly went – we went to Ein Harod, maybe, yes. I'll tell you who I met on that occasion. On that occasion the people I remember meeting were – what's her name? – Manya ...

GC Manya Shochat?

IB Shochat, certainly.

GC But she was not a member of Ein Harod. She was from Kfar Giladi.

IB [?] Kfar Giladi. I went to Kfar Giladi.

GC Oh, usually Manya Shochat is [?] fascinating.

IB Well, must have been fascinating. It was. (GC Really fascinating?) Manya Wilbushevich was her name.

GC It's a mind-boggling ...

IB Of course. You could call it a goldmine. We didn't talk about Odessa and the Chief of Police, and her whole mysterious relationship. We talked about Weizmann. She described her journey to Palestine with him before the war. But she was an old lady by then, [?] 1934, yes. She was quite old.⁵ And ...

GC She looked older than she was.

IB Perhaps. But I could see that she was an old-fashioned Russian Revolutionary type. Exactly what they were like. I didn't take so much interest at that time in Russian matters. I was an Oxford philosopher. I was an Oxford philosopher in All Souls, who didn't talk about 1905, or 1917 either. But I was impressed by her. She was a real tough lady. Rather like, the same stamp as Ben-Zvi's wife [Rachel Yanait].

GC [?].

IB I know. That was the pretty hard types. They did not go in for murder, or anything like that. They knew however what they had to do. They were educated in a tough school, and they knew what was what. They had firm ideas, and quite ruthless – not unscrupulous, but ruthless. Except that Manya Shochat tended to lecture one a little bit. Tended to moralise. [?]

GC Did you talk to her Russian?

IB Yes, sure. (GC Now ...) Oh, in Hebrew, too. Such as it was, yes. She talked Hebrew. I did talk Russian a bit, but she insisted on always going back, didn't want to talk Russian. Didn't want to. And then I went [to Ein] Harod, too. I can't remember whom I met

⁵ She was 53/4. Her dates are 1880–1961.

there, probably nobody I knew. Now let's see what kibbutzim I went to.

GC Yes, now, did you stay in a kibbutz at that time overnight?

IB No.

GC Then you went to Ginosar, you saw Yigal, and you went to [?] several times, and you went once to a Seder with Yigal.

IB That was much later, but that's not – I went to these kibbutzim without John Foster. He had gone, he was not there. With him I went to Jerusalem. The first thing we did was to go, I think I told you – police sports. Have I told you that story? Oh well. We arrived ...

GC Let's [?] [*recording interrupted*]

IB In 1934 I met John Foster in Salzburg. No, yes, we went to Venice. From Venice we took a boat to Alexandria, in Alexandria we got off. And then we went and stayed a night or two in Alexandria and Cairo, and then we took the ferry across the Suez canal and got into a train, and suddenly I realised we were passing Sinai, and then we passed El-Arish, all this, and then I realised I was about to enter Palestine. I've never been so moved in my life as on that occasion. That's undoubtedly true. The whole idea of – then a Jewish ticket-collector came into the train. That, curiously enough, made a tremendous impression on me. I almost cried. I suddenly realised: this was it. There was a Jewish Establishment, or some kind of independent Jewish political life existed. I was a lifelong Zionist, as you know, and that moved me beyond words. So: John Foster didn't quite understand all this, and I didn't really tell him, but he saw that it made a sort of – I virtually did cry, I think. Then we arrived in Jerusalem in the morning [?] late

morning. I went to see my uncle and aunt – Samunov. We stayed in the King David Hotel, where [?] served by various Nubian waiters and – black Nubian waiters in long white shirts, I remember. The hotel belonged to a company which Mr Frank Goldsmith, who was the head of, was a Jew, a friend of Jimmy's, Jimmy's greatest friend, was the owner. And then, after that, I walked about Jerusalem in a dazed state. I was absolutely moved beyond anything. It really was absolutely wonderful. Then I went with John Foster ...

GC A lot of elation, euphoria?

IB Mmm. Moved, [?] euphoria. But I suddenly felt, 'This is it. They've done it. It exists. Something absolutely brand new here. This is what we worked for, that's what we are talking about. True, I've seen photographs of it, people – Zionist *shlichim* talked about it; it wasn't the same.' All these Arabs, and then of course I met brilliant – various British persons on that occasion. I remember meeting Perrowne, I remember meeting ...

GC Stewart Perrowne.

IB Yes. I remember meeting the man, the intelligen... – what's his name? The Chief Intelligence Officer, his name was ...

GC His name I don't remember.

IB Not Colville, but like -ville, something ending in ...

GC Ah, Domville!

IB Domville, yes.

GC Patrick Domville.

IB He was there, yes. Yes. I met him. And then I went with John Foster – no, I went with Domville and Perrowne to see the father of my pupil Taji al-Farouki [Abdul Majid Taji Farouki], who was an undergraduate at New College, whom I taught. And the father was an effendi, living in – what was the Arab name of Ness Ziona? Next door to Ness Ziona. It was called ...

GC Wadi something [Hunayn/Chanin]. I know what you mean. [?]

IB Wadi something no doubt. [?] we had lunch there, and so on; I remember very well that the translator from English to Arabic said to him, ‘He says he’s’ – about me – ‘he’s a very important man.’ But what I said was, ‘Look, I’m not the most important person teaching your son. Above me there is another tutor, and above him is the head of the College.’ The translator said, apparently, ‘He says he’s important, but there is a man who is more important than he, and there’s another man who is more important still.’ It went in that order. He was called Shukri Bey. [GC Shukri Bey.] Yes, he had large estates. Ultimately went to Egypt. [His] son was very mild; he was not a – he was a Conservative Arab who would not – who had no PLO-ish qualities whatever. Not a friend of the Mufti, or anything like that. Not at all. Shukri Bey – Farouki I think. Taji was my pupil, who kept on sending me fruit, because he thought ...

GC [?] house[?] on the top of a hill, above Ness Ziona.

IB Very likely. I’ve forgotten what it’s called. [GC Yes.] Anyway, the British officials were very pleased to take me there, naturally. And I then realised what the atmosphere was. Then John Foster and I went to Jordan, Transjordan, we stayed in Djerash. We stayed

the night, I spent the night on an inscription, which says the Emperor Trajan,⁶ I think, was there in a certain year.

GC [?].

IB In Djerash.

GC In Djerash.

ἀγαθὴ τύχη

1. ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Ἀντοκράτορος Καίσαρος, Θεοῦ Τραϊανοῦ
Παρθικοῦ νιού, Θεοῦ Νέρωνα νιωνοῦ, Τραϊανοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ
2. Σεβαστοῦ, Ἀρχιερέος Μεγίστου, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὸ ἰδ',
ὑπάτου τὸ γ', πατρὸς πατρίδος, καὶ τυχῆς καὶ διαμονῆς τοῦ
3. σὺνπαντος αὐτοῦ οἴκου—— ἡ πόλις Ἀντιοχείων τῶν πρὸς
τῷ Χρυσορόα τῶν πρότερον Γερασηνῶν ἐκ διαθήκης Φλαυίου
4. Ἀγρίππου τὴν πύλιν σὺν θριάμβῳ ἔτους β' ς ς'

“TO GOOD FORTUNE”

“For the safety of Emperor Caesar, son of divine Trajan Parthicus, grandson of divine Nerva, Trajan Hadrian

“Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, holding tribunician authority the 14th (time), consul the 3rd (time), father of his country; and for the good fortune and perpetuity of

“his entire house—the city of the Antiochenes, on the Chrysoroas, the former Gerasenes, in accordance with the will of Flavius

“Agrippa, (has dedicated) the gateway, with a triumph, in the year 192.”¹

From W. F. Steinspring, 'Inscription of the Triumphal Arch at Jerash', Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 56 (December 1934), 16

IB Or Gerasa. [GC [?].] No. The other people had beds in the hotel. There was no bed for me, because it seized[?] them, so it was a warm evening – the summer, it was; August – so I spent the night

⁶ Trajan (Traianus) was Hadrian's adoptive father, and for that reason Hadrian was called 'Traianus'. IB confuses the two Emperors.

on my back on a very hard stone inscription, some kind of tomb.⁷ I remember the letters cut themselves into my back. It said that the – I think the Emperor, either Hadrian or Trajan, had been there in 123, or whenever it was [130]. Tommy Hodgkin came with us. He was at that time Secretary to ...

GC Wauchope.

IB But nobody knew he was a Communist. I didn't know it. He certainly was. Member of the Party, certainly. Still, he was an old friend from England. I told you that last time, I think, about Portofino and all that. Now, what happened then was that I went with John Foster to Jordan, we looked at Amman, we did not go to ...

GC Petra[?].

IB ... Petra, no. That was too far away. Too hot, and so on. But we went to Syria. We went to Damascus, where I saw the Umayyad Mosque, that kind of thing. Interesting, and then from there to Lebanon. From there we went to Aley, above Beirut, on Yom Kippur, when a certain number of Israelis were seen by me hiding there, like, for example, one of the Supreme Court Justices – what's the name? – the father of Mrs [Michal] Smoira-Cohn, Smoira. He was there in Aley, with two other important Israelis, officials[?], in order to escape Yom Kippur. That amused me. Then we came down by that marvellous road which goes from Beirut to Haifa. [?] and so on, through whatever it was ...

GC Ras Al Naqoura.

⁷ Not so. The inscription had fallen from a triumphal arch. See F 99/2.

IB Ras Naqoura, yes, or Bin Yaaqub[?] [?]. And then he left, Foster. I stayed longer. I stayed on. That's when I told you I met [Avraham] Stern on the way back. I told you that story.

GC Yes.

IB And came back to Jerusalem. I don't know where I stayed. I think probably in the King David again. And it was then that I did my little tour with, no with – Joshua Gordon was already with Foster. But I then went on and saw various people. That's when I must have met – ah, I was about to tell you. The first thing which happened to me in Jerusalem, when I came with Foster – the first man we met was the Director of Education [Humphrey Bowman], whose assistant was [Ismail] Khalidi, the brother of the Mayor [Hussein Khalidi]. And I thought he was one of the most awful men I ever knew – Arab. Awful man – horrible, Khalidi. The father of the [GC [?]] present Professor [Rashid Khalidi]. What?

GC Him I don't know.

IB Cunning. Intelligent, but not nice. Flattered the British officials to such a gross degree that I really was nauseated. His chief, who was an Englishman, was a terrific anti-Semite.

GC Was it Bowman?

IB Bowman. Very nasty fellow, I thought. I didn't like either of them. We then met the Director of Immigration, who was a very cynical, tired old Englishman, who was rather pro-Jewish.

GC What was [?]?

IB Mills.

GC Eric Mills?

IB Eric Mills. He was tired, old, he didn't really mind, he was more amused by the Jews than by the Arabs.

GC [?].

IB Perrowne of course was very pro-Arab. Domville inclined towards the Jews to some extent.

GC Because of the Intelligence ...

IB Intelligence, exactly – I knew [?], so exactly why.

GC You realised it when you – already?

IB Even then, yes. He more or less explained it.

GC That is when our Intelligence relations started.

IB Quite. That's when I met – what's his name? – [Reuven] Zaslani.

GC Yes, Zaslani was [?].

IB Exactly. In 1934.

GC You met Zaslani?

IB Yes. How, why, I cannot tell you, but I did. And then – certainly, I must have met – that's where I met Scholem, with Roth. With Leon Roth. He gave a party for me. I knew him. And that's when I met Shmaryahu Levin, too. 1934. So I had quite a good time. Whom else would I have met then? I must have met Professors at the University. Not the President. [GC Not Magnes.] Not Magnes,

no. And I was prejudiced against Magnes anyway. [?] Weizmann of course hated him. But I didn't then know Weizmann. It wasn't that. No, I did not meet Magnes, nor did anyone suggest it.

GC Bergmann, Hugo Bergmann?

IB Maybe. Yes, I knew him afterwards, a bit. Hugo Bergmann, yes. [Michael] Fekete was the Professor of Mathematics. [David Zvi] Baneth, who was an Oriental scholar, who was an Arabic scholar, whose sister [Noemi] in London I knew very well. She was called Mrs Snowman. Her husband [Henry Snowman] was my father's solicitor in Berlin. Very nice man. [GC ?].] Rather saintly. Very nice indeed. Oh, I met a number of people in the University, and that's when they asked me, was it really true about Victor Rothschild and the roadhouse. Do you remember the story? Let me tell you. Roadhouses have gone out of existence. That was a British – they were restaurants, with hotels, along the side of motor roads. You could eat dinner there, and you could stay the night. The same exists, but they are no longer called roadhouses. Victor, who was then at Cambridge, tried to spend the night in a roadhouse, but when he wrote his name down, they said, 'Are you a Jew?' He said, 'Yes.' They couldn't – they were not going to let him stay for the night. 1934. He got into a state of great fury, and, typically, he bought it, which proved nothing. Just [?] annoy the man, sacked the staff, sacked the man. That's quite typical great man behaviour. Just simply bought it. Presumably got rid of it in the end. But that was – that got into the papers. So people there said, 'Is it really true?' Everybody knew the story in Jerusalem. It got into all the papers. That in England such a thing – Lord Rothschild. I remember being asked, in the University, by various people. One or two professors, who nervously asked me if this could be true. I had to explain to them that there was quite a lot of anti-Semitism in England at that time, and there still is now. Then, who else did I see?

GC The Bentwiches?

IB Not in Israel, I don't think. I knew them very well, but not – they always stayed in Arab hotels when they were in Jerusalem.

GC Only some of them were in England.

IB No, but they always stayed in Arab hotels afterwards, when they came. After he retired. Was he in Jerusalem in 1934? Was he Attorney General?

GC No, he was not. He was [?] Professor of the University.

IB Already in 1934. But when they ...

GC But Joseph was there, the younger brother.

IB Who?

GC Joseph Bentwich.

IB Ah yes. I met him much later. After the War. Yes. [GC *tries to introduce a new subject, in vain.*] He was extremely eccentric. Not extremely, but still. As you know, he refused the Fellowship of Trinity College, Cambridge, because he didn't believe in inequality.

GC That's true. But I didn't know that he refused.

IB Yup. [?] he was a mathematician.

GC Pardon?

IB He was a mathematician.

GC Joseph?

IB I think so. Or Classics.

GC But he was the head of the Education Department ...

IB That's nothing to do with it. He would not accept a Fellowship, I think Mathematics. He was a brilliant mathematician. Maybe a classical scholar as well, but he didn't believe in inequality between dons and students.

GC [?] very nice. When he retired he went to live in a kibbutz.

IB Very typical. And [Norman] Bentwich was very pro-Arab, particularly after he was shot [in 1929]. After he was shot, Bentwich had to show how friendly – he and his wife always stayed in Arab hotels in Jerusalem. Very deliberately.

GC It's not Norman, it's because of his wife [Helen née Franklin]. His wife was very anti-Zionist.

IB Surely.

GC She never came to Israel. She was in London ...

IB She stayed in Israel, yes. She came.

GC But only to visit.

IB Yes, only to visit.⁸

⁸ They did in fact also have a home in Jerusalem.

GC She was active [?] ...

IB No. LCC [London County Council]. LCC, it was called. Quite right. She was a Franklin.

GC Ah, she was a Franklin.

IB Yes. She was a cousin of Samuel. Of Herbert.

GC Have you met Kisch?

IB No. I never met Kisch. Colonel Kisch. Never met him. I don't think he was really about by then.

GC No, he was not. Yes, that's right. Sharett succeeded him. I want to go back [?] ...

IB Did I meet Sharett? No.

GC No, that was already too [?] ...

IB Not then.

GC ... but I wanted to ask you, what was your ...?

IB I stayed with Tommy Hodgkin in the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem. We went for a ride on donkeys, he and I. We came back on Friday afternoon. I was stoned by the pious Jews of Jerusalem. That I remember. And I realised that Tommy Hodgkin was violently anti-Zionist. He had Communist [?] – he was. No doubt about that.

GC But I want to come back to the question, generally speaking, since then, until your last visits to kibbutzim [IB when?], what was your impression of the kibbutz? Or your attitude to them?

IB They don't – they are very different from each other.

GC Pardon?

IB I was entirely favourable. It was impossible not to be. The kibbutzes made a very very touching impression on me. I thought the people I met there were extremely nice people. I thought their life was a perfectly honourable life. I have never met anybody in a kibbutz or from a kibbutz whom I've disliked.

GC To this day?

IB To this d... – well, perhaps I didn't know they came from a kibbutz if I didn't like them. I'm trying to think. Some people are nicer than others.

GC Surely. That's very interesting.

IB Who was a man whom I didn't? There was a man called Ilan some...

GC Amitzur Ilan.

IB Amitzur, who is always writing me letters. He wants a job somewhere, in Jewish History in some way, in England now.

GC He's now in Durban.

IB Now in?

GC Durban, South Africa.

IB Durban, yes.

GC Unfortunately, he had to leave the kibbutz.

IB Because?

GC He quarrelled with the kibbutz, and when one in his age leaves a kibbutz, he has no means, so he has to accumulate some money.

IB I was always very nice to him, and I wrote testimonials for him, and he's a hard-working and useful man.

GC I know.

IB His books are useful books. I didn't like him terribly.

GC I know why.

IB Why?

GC Because he's not a nice person.

IB Quite. But still, he's the only man I can think of, from a kibbutz, who is an exception to this rule.

GC Probably among the politicians ...

IB I doubt that – no.

GC From the kibbutz, there are some you like, some you like less, but, yes, generally speaking, human nature is human nature [?] ...

IB Which politicians come from kibbutzim now, or before, that I could have known? Ben-Gurion never was in a kibbutz.⁹

GC [Ya'akov] Hazan, [Meir] Ya'ari, [Mordechai] Bentov.

IB Never met them. I never met Bentov. Bentov, yes. Tabenkin, yes. I never met Ya'ari. I never met Galili.

GC You never met Galili. Teddy Kollek ...

IB I know. [GC *laughs*.] That's all right.

GC But he's not a typical kibbutz politician.

IB He must have been once. You know, when he was very young.

GC Ehud Avriel you knew.

IB Avriel was [from] a kibbutz? Pretty tough.

GC A devotee.

IB And a devotee. I liked Ehud.

GC Ehud was a very complicated man ...

IB Pretty tough.

GC ... but very interesting.

IB Tough and complicated.

⁹ He retired to Sde Boker, the kibbutz where IB visited him in 1962. See PI3 236, 241.

GC Full of contradictions.

IB Yes he was. The last time I saw Avriel was when in Rome, at the airport, when he said – what was it? – ‘We have the Mystère’ – not the Myst... – what was ...? [*side ends*]

Side B

We met in the airport. We shook hands. And all he said was: ‘Hurry, the plane.’ He said, I suppose, [?] either ‘Mystère’, or whatever it was. ‘We have them.’ I shook him, and I said [?] ...

GC Called ‘Mirage’.

IB Or Mirage [?].

GC [?] Mirage [?].

IB From the French. ‘We have the Mirage.’ He was getting them then. He came via Rome. When would that have been? 1956?¹⁰

GC That was towards the War of Ind... 1956. It was ...

IB 195....

GC The Mirage was after Sinai. Between Sinai and 1967. I can’t remember the date now. However: so, in general – but personally, you probably thought that you couldn’t live in a kibbutz, right?

¹⁰ Israel did not buy Mirage fighters from France until the early 1960s. She acquired 24 Super Mystères in 1958.

IB It never occurred to me that I could even try. A man who was very pro-kibbutz was that foolish fellow Edwin Samuel, who loved kibbutzim, in a very English way. No. I could live in a kibbutz for six months. But I couldn't settle there, no. Nor could I anywhere, in Palestine anyway. I asked myself that question. Naturally. I realised that I was too far gone. That I was too far gone in my career, in my ideas. There would be nobody there for me to talk to. I would admire them. I felt exactly like a Russian socialist of the Russian villages of 1880. I would be prepared to do anything for them. But I didn't know – I'd get up in the morning – I wasn't idealistic enough, I think. I don't think I wanted to live a simple life. I think I wanted – I'm hopelessly – I think I was an intellectual. And in Is... – in Palestine at that time, there wasn't much room for intellec... – neither then nor ever, for a kind of – adequate intellectual life. Maybe there is now. Much more than before.

GC There was probably more some years ago than [?] ...

IB Well, I mean, all right, I mean ...

GC Because, yes – now, those are of course two different questions. Being [?] to live in Israel in the 1930s or the 1940s, or, let's say, in the 1960s or the 1970s.

IB As you know, I was offered a job by Sharett on the telephone, in 19... – in 194...7. I told you this story. [GC Yes.] I was sitting in my room in New College, talking to David Cecil. The telephone rang, and, 'This is', he says, 'Moshe Sharett. Would you like ...? We have a post for you. Would you like to be the Head of the East European department of the Agency? The head of it is Walter Eytan.' This anyhow wouldn't have suited me, but I said, 'No, afraid I can't do that.'

GC But you came in 1947 or 1948.

IB 1947.

GC Because in 1947 ...

IB Summer of 1947.

GC ... it was not divided into [IB 194...] – so it's not East Europe.

IB 'I can't help you.' Yes. He said Bulgaria, Yugoslavia ...

GC Really?

IB Yes! Poland, whatever there was. Certainly.

GC In 1947?

IB Summer of 1947.

GC Sure?

IB Sure. After I came back – was it after I came back from Israel?
Or before I went?

GC At the time Eytan is the head of it?

IB Yes. For the Agency. It was the – and he said, 'The pension is very good.' I said, 'I'm very sorry. No good to me. I cannot do it. I'm not the man. I know I can't.'

GC Just by the telephone?

IB Three minutes.

GC And even then you were not close to Sharett, you were not ...

IB I was never close to Sharett.

GC Never. [?].

IB Close? Never. I met him. I met Sharett – wait a minute, when did I meet Sharett? I certainly met him in Washington towards the end of the war. But I must have met him before that. I met Sharett in 1945, at the British Embassy. He came to see me. Undoubtedly, but I think I must have met him before. I wonder when. No, I can't have done, because I was in Israel in 1934, I was not there again until 1947. Could I have met him in London or New York?

GC Maybe yes, but that makes no difference. It's not the kind of relations that just by telephone one offers a job, you know.

IB He was Shertok when I met him. So I think still. He came to see me in Washington in 1945 and tried to get me to tell him all kinds of things. Tried to fish – I couldn't tell him very much. But I had a long and amicable conversation with him – told him all I could.

GC But coming back to the kibbutz, you still maintained this positive attitude ...

IB Throughout. I never lost it. They were the most wonderful thing. I thought it really was. That kind of idealism which comes from the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, plus Tolstoy, which is where it comes from. It was exactly like the corresponding Russians of that period, who were also moving characters. No, I thought it had a certain purity and a certain devotion to a kind of honourable life, which only East Europeans had. It was impossible in the West. In that sense you could say that the East was – than

the West. It couldn't occur in Western Europe. And it was deeply Russian, the whole thing – that's why it appealed to me. Polish–Russian, but specially Russian. Old-fashioned, nineteenth-century.

GC And you believed from the very beginning that it has a future, that it can exist? [?].

IB Yes. Certainly. I didn't know what the economic facts were.

GC No, I mean from sociological point of view, from human nature point of view.

IB Oh yes. All the people I met then, and afterwards, were – seemed to me entirely without – it didn't look to me as if it would disintegrate. I didn't meet – but I didn't feel as – there were quarrels there, or there was jealousies or No doubt there were, but I didn't feel – when I used to lunch with them, I used to go to meals in kibbutzim at those long tables, I used to feel entirely happy, and entirely at home.

GC And the Seder in Ginosar?

IB Ah, that I told you about before. The Seder in Ginosar I thought was terribly bogus. Terribly phoney. Simply the Seder was a Seder. But the things – first of all, the deliberate production of bread, to show...

GC There *was* bread?

IB Oh yes! Slices of bread to show [where we were?]. Quite a – matza, and bread. It was anti-clerical in a very violent degree.

GC Aline was with you?

IB Yes.

GC [This was] already later.

IB; Yes. Certainly. 1950s. After we were married, after 1956 [2–12 April 1956]. Must have been late 1950s. Then the things they said. I had to recite a few psalms. But mainly they read things: Emerson, Bialik. You can imagine. I don't know what. Probably John Stuart Mill, God knows what. All these secular texts, as opposed to the horrible ...

GC [?] French Revolution [?].

IB Exactly. Anti-clerical, secular texts. Deliberate. [GC [?] nature [?].] Flouting.

GC Putting accent on the natural aspects of the feast, and not the religious ...

IB Exactly. There was the feast of liberation, Yetziat Mitzrayim ['Exodus from Egypt']. That was all right.

GC [?] spring.

IB And spring. Yetziat Mitzrayim they had, certainly. They believed it. It might have happened historically. But mainly not – spring in general, it was a spring festival, songs, children. Who did I meet there? I remember some London girl, who was the daughter of a man called Epstein. [GC Claire Epstein.] Yes. She was there.

GC She is still active – a member of the ...

IB She is still there? And alive?

GC [?] is archaeology. And she discovered in the Golan Heights quite interesting things.

IB I see. Her father was called Mortimer Epstein. You had to be something to be called Mortimer, for a Jew.

GC He had a quite good library. She studied in London, when I was here in the 1950s. And I went to see her. He had a very good library in [?].

IB Oh no, he was a learned Jew. No, he was. He was very much a Jewish scholar. He edited yearbooks, I think. The Statesman Yearbook [*The Annual Register*, ed. 1922–45], which was really statistical stuff, Mortimer. And, she's a nice girl. Very idealistic. And I was moved by the fact that she actually went from London when she had a perfectly nice life here. And joined a kibbutz and stayed there. The man I never saw in Israel, and I blame myself for that to this day, is my old Hebrew teacher from Petrograd.

GC Yes [?] name.

IB Vansky.

GC Yes. Eshel.

IB He became Eshel?

GC He hebraised his name.

IB What happened to him?

GC Ben-Zion Eshel.

IB He was Ben-Zion Vansky. When did he die?¹¹

GC I don't know.

IB I never looked him up. I never knew where he was.

GC He was active in the – in the Keren Kayemet [Jewish National Fund] there was a committee that gave Hebrew names to [?].

IB So he did that?

GC He was very active there.

IB What, names?

GC And he produced geographical maps of Eretz Yisrael.

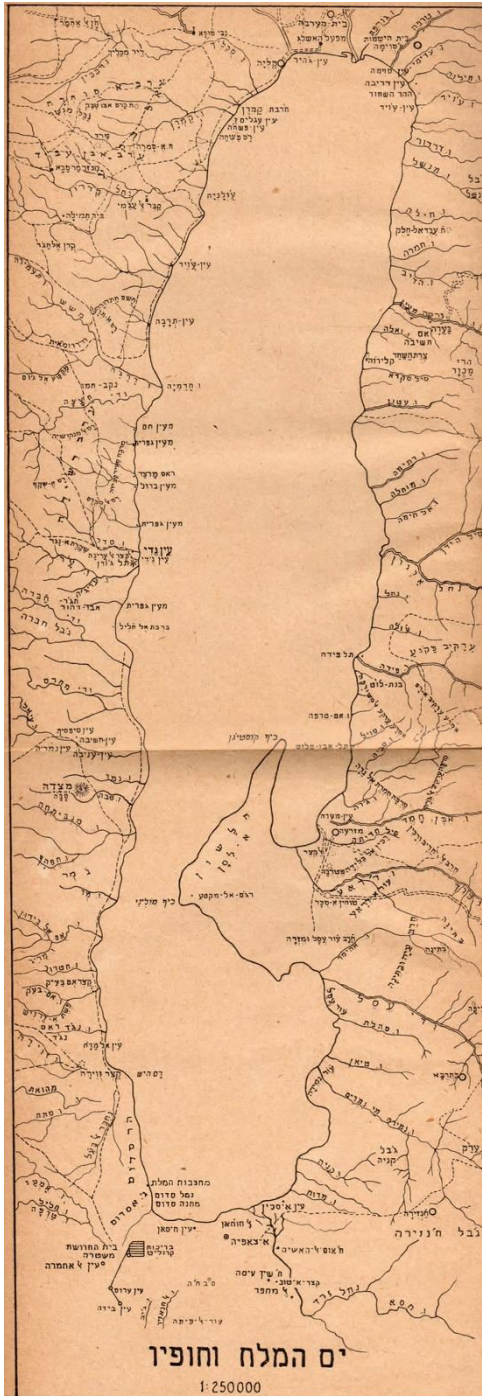
IB The kind of thing [?]. I remember very well what he looked like. He was a student in his twenties. In 1916–17. I am – I was very fond of him. I was devoted to him. And he was the man who used to make me write little Hebrew verses called – what was it called? *Hadasot livekarim*¹² [laughter].

GC It's interesting that he didn't try to get in touch with you when you were in Israel.

¹¹ His dates were 1894–1973. As B[en] Z[ion] Vansky he co-authored a Hebrew book with Yehuda Kopelovitz [Almog], *The Sodom Region: Tsoar, the Dead Sea and the Plain* (1944); as Ben-Zion Eshel he wrote *The Dead Sea Region*, published in Jerusalem in Hebrew (1957) and English (1958).

¹² Literally, 'news in the mornings', a play on Lamentations 3:22–3, 'The Lord's [...] compassions fail not. They are new every morning.' Cf. John Keble's 1822 hymn 'New every morning is the love'.

'The Dead Sea and Its Shores': fold-out map facing p. 430 in Vansky and Kopelowitz (see note on p. 44)



IB I don't think he knew. [GC I don't know [?].] I don't think he knew that I was there.

GC I'll find out.

IB [?] had no idea that I was there. In 1934 I wasn't known to anybody.

GC Not in 1934, but later.



Yeshayahu Safriel taught IB Hebrew in London in the 1920s

Yeshayahu Pisarevsky (Safriel) Archive, National Library of Israel

IB Well, he might not have – I don't know how old he was. Then there was a man called Pisarevsky, whom I liked rather less, who

taught Hebrew in London. He was called – called himself, not Sifri ... Sofer ... something to do with – ‘pisat’ in Russian is ‘to write’, so his son I saw – Safran, something, I don’t know. Not Sofer.¹³ He was a rather crude type, from Kiev. Those were my Hebrew teachers. Well, I’ll tell you who taught me Hebrew also, that was that rather nice man whose daughters married so well.¹⁴ Schwartz. Zvi Schwartz.



Zvi Schwartz (1896–1991)

Geni

GC Zvi Schwartz taught you Hebrew in England?

IB In London, yes. For about six months. He was at the LSE. They all needed work to make money. There was a man called Livitsky.

GC Pardon?

¹³ Yeshayahu Safriel né Pisarevsky (1889–1974), Zionist activist, publisher, journalist and teacher. In a letter of 9 July 1989 to Safriel’s son Uriel, IB writes that Yeshayahu ‘made a powerful impression on me which has never evaporated’ (from the archive linked to below the photo above).

¹⁴ Schwartz had two daughters, Ruth m. Moshe Dayan and Reuma m. Ezer Weizman.

IB There was a lawyer called Livitsky. He taught me for a bit. Schwartz taught me for a bit. I didn't take – I didn't learn too much. But I liked Schwartz. I saw him. Is he alive? No.

GC He's still alive.

IB He's ninety?

GC Yes.

IB Came to London not so long ago.

GC Yes, he's still alive. His wife is still alive.

IB Wonderful. His daughters married ...

GC One daughter married Dayan, and one daughter was married to Ezer Weizman.

IB [?]. Yes, I remember. Perfectly nice man, and a respectable lawyer. What was his Party? Mapai?

GC Always Mapai. He remains in Mapai.

IB Surely. He looked like that.

GC In the same group David Hacohen was in London ...

IB Whom I met – him I met in Israel. David Hacohen. Him I never knew really. And not – for about half an hour. I don't think I knew him at all.

GC But coming back to the question whether really you settle in Israel. Did you ever consider it seriously, or ...

IB Oh yes.

GC ... or it was easy for you to decide that [?] ...

IB No, I decided immediately. I decided at once. After 1947. I realised why I didn't think the job which Sharett wanted me ... – quite apart from Eytan. I realised that if I went, there was nothing I could do. First of all, I would have to learn Hebrew, for which I was too old. It would be rather painful. Difficult, painful. I would have to make terrible efforts. Secondly, I didn't particularly want to teach at the University, because I thought the standard was not too high, there would be nobody for me to talk to about my subject. Thirdly, I thought if I did anything political in Israel, I would be torn to pieces in the first three hours. I realised I couldn't survive. My temperament and character: it was too violent, I was too thin-skinned. I couldn't take it. I love being there, as you know, even now, less now than before, for obvious reasons. But in general, when I used to go to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, and even the early 1970s, I used to feel 'It's my country.' As soon as I emerged into a street, I felt totally at home, with everything. Whether they spoke – whatever language they spoke, wherever they came from, whether they were Sephardim or Ashkenazim, black, white, anything, whatever they sold, whatever it was, I was completely familiar. I felt no kind of barrier.

GC I know. You told it to Raymond Carr, apparently. Either in your interview, or after the interview. When he interviewed you.¹⁵

IB Could be.

¹⁵ Not in the **published text** of his November 1986 interview with Carr.

GC And he was so impressed by it.

IB Quite [?].

GC He said it to me the other day: we went to see him in Devon.

IB Could well be. You did. What, that I felt comfortable in Israel?

GC Yes. That you felt that that was your home [?].

IB Comfortable. Totally comfortable.

GC But how come that you never came, let's say, as a visiting professor for half a year, or a year? I know you were invited.

IB No I don't think I was. I don't think I was much. Later, when I couldn't anymore. You see, when I was a Professor here, I could never get away for as long as that. When I used to go to Ame... – from All Souls I was never invited.¹⁶ I have delivered lectures in Israel.

GC Oh, yes.

IB Not often.

GC But I remember all of them.

IB Yes, I did. Papers and But I don't think – I think I may have been invited. I don't think the Philosophy Department ever invited

¹⁶ He was invited in 1955 by Benjamin Mazar, President of the HUJ: see E 480/1. The postponed lectures were given in April 1956: E 524/1, 781.

me. I don't think they ever did. Whether I could have done it or not, I don't know. But I was never invited.

GC It's odd.

IB Yes, but I think they are rather thin-skinned about that.

GC They still are.

IB [?] You see, by the time people like Stuart and Freddie Ayer were invited, I was already too ensconced, I was no good.

GC Yes.

IB I was no longer doing philosophy anyway. I stopped doing proper philosophy in about nineteen-fifty-something. Anyhow, it never really happened. Don't think so. If it did, I probably – mainly didn't go because I couldn't. No. No, Rotenstreich never invited me.

GC But others, even the Historical Department, it's very odd.

IB I don't think I noticed.

GC Fantastic.

IB I don't think I noticed. I was never part of the academic life of Israel. I really wasn't, [if you] see what I mean. In the way in which other people, [?] to say someone like Neiberger[?], made himself very familiar with all these professors. I never was, no. I was never put on any particular committee, I was never put on any academic

committee of the University, nothing of that sort.¹⁷ I don't think so.

GC Before we finish, let's come back to one question from the previous meeting. I think we have ten minutes. Ah, no [IB ?]: still with Israel. Were you impressed by any of the Israeli military men?

IB Yes. Other than Yitzhak Sadeh?

GC Or Yigal Allon.

IB Or Yigal Allon. Yes, certainly. I was impressed by certain qualities in them. First of all, I was impressed by the man who came to St Antony's.

GC Haim Laskov.

IB Haim Laskov. I thought he was a very honest, upright, solid, dependable, excellent man to be employed in any capacity. Not brilliant, not terribly intelligent, not very enterprising. But the kind of bricks from which one could build a building. A good citizen, and, entrusted with a task, would carry it out. Totally uncorrupt. Completely solid. I liked him therefore. He was not at all interesting, but that's not what I asked – OK. That's number one. I found Dayan not uninteresting. I realised that he was not exactly straight. I realised that he was a complicated, somewhat devious figure, but I could see that he had a certain charisma. And I could see that he – quick-moving mind, and that he was rather brilliant, that he had particular – gifts beyond the normal. That I saw. And he was – Weizmann liked him particularly. Because he liked

¹⁷ IB served as Vice Chairman of the Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and his *Who's Who* entry names him as Honorary President of the British Friends of the University of Jerusalem; but perhaps these are not strictly counterexamples.

Nahalal in general. He liked his father, liked him. But I realised that he was not exactly a man of unimpeachable integrity. That I knew, but still, I can't say I wasn't impressed. Whenever I talked to him – not very often – I always went away with something. He always said something intelligent, interesting, important. What other Generals did I ever know?

GC Are you generally impressed by Generals? I mean, by military [?].

IB No. Nor did I ever know very many. What Generals have I ever known? British Generals – I never knew any during the war. I wasn't here. I met a few, but only – General Swinton I knew, a Fellow of All Souls, the man who invented the tank. I got on quite well with him. American General, no.

GC Let's come back for a second to your publications, articles, and so on. When we discussed the relative importance of your articles, in prior conversations, we didn't refer to the lecture on Disraeli and Marx, and Moshe Hess.

IB On which one, which is the first?

GC Marx and Disraeli.

IB Ah yes.

GC And the other one was Moses Hess. Now, to begin with, what's the attitude of those two articles, and secondly, did you have any special reaction toward them because they deal with problems of Jewish identity?

IB Entirely. My essays are about nothing else. '[The Life and Opinions of] Moses Hess' is not an article about Moses Hess's

Spinozist or Hegelian ideas. Of course, of no interest to me was the young Marx's – as a left-wing Marx – so-called 'true Marxism', I think, or 'wahre Marxismus' – he was of no great interest to me. No. The essay on Hess was entirely because of *Rome and Jerusalem*. And because he was the first person really to nail down the thesis about what is wrong with assimilation. I don't think anybody else stated it. He was the first. And displeased a lot of German Jews.

GC Who drew your attention to it? [?]

IB Nobody. I just knew who he was. I came across him because of Karl Marx, because he is rather involved in Marxist – history of Marxism. And finally I decided to read *Rome and Jerusalem*, quite spontaneously. Famous book. Why shouldn't I read it? I was deeply impressed, moved by it. I realised he was an entirely decent, honest man. Not very clever, but honourable. A man of great integrity, and the exact opposite of Isaac Deutscher, I decided, as a character. He was very pure-hearted, and honourable, and Isaac Deutscher was a twister. I met Isaac about that time. The second was also – 'Marx and Disraeli' ['Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity'] is entirely about Zionism.

GC Sure. Now ...

IB What else is it about?

GC Anyway, Jewish identity. Jewish – except Herder, that consciously or unconsciously ...

IB Quite.

GC ... [?] Zionism. But people cannot [?].

IB Herder was a Zionist.

GC Yes.

IB In a rather anti-Semitic way.

GC Yes, but I can see an average reader, who can read Herder *per se*, and don't realise that Isaiah Berlin came to it via his attitude towards Zionism and Nationalism.

IB Quite.

GC Disraeli and Marx, and Moses Hess, are clear articles of Jewish identity.

IB Certainly.

GC But [did] these friends of yours discuss it with you orally, or did people write about it because [?]?

IB Never. Nobody praised it. Nobody blamed it. I never got criticism of it. I never got discussions of it. I never got people – [?] some people said they were impressed, or, on the contrary, thought that I went too far, that I was wrong. Nothing. It produced no reactions of any kind. The only reaction which Marx and Disraeli caused – people took [?] – some people said they read it with interest, or that they read the other thing with interest. Nothing. No Jews, no Israelis. Nobody ever...

GC And among your friends?

IB No. The lecture on Hess I delivered in Rehovot. Before I published it. No reaction. Well, there was ...

GC All right.

I B... somebody asked me questions.

GC That's a natural ...

IB Questions were asked.

GC Would you add now your lecture on Albert Einstein to this particular ...

IB Certainly.

GC Why did you pick it up? When did you decide ...?

IB Because I wanted ...

GC You wanted to or you were asked to?

IB No. I was certainly invited to the centenary. Apropos of nothing. And would I like to lecture on Einstein? Just because I was by this time fairly prominent, I thought – I knew that Einstein's – people who surrounded Einstein in America were violently anti-Zionist, left-wing assimilationist Jews, and I thought I would write something to irritate these people. It was entirely naughtiness. And when I began reading what Einstein – I knew that Einstein was a Zionist – that's what everyone knew – of some kind, and when I began reading what he actually said, this was surprising to me. I didn't realise how Jewish he was, and how Zionist he was. And that delighted me, because by then I met him.

GC I was going to ask you whether you discovered it through working on it...

IB Oh no. I discovered it because I was determined originally to annoy the people – and I did annoy them. They were all in Jerusalem. Secretaries, and various German Jews. The last thing they wanted was Einstein and Zionism. They couldn't help coming to Jerusalem, because all the papers were left to the University. So they pop came. Anyhow, an Einstein centenary, what could they do? But when I delivered that lecture, it was very well received by the audience, and deeply irritating to the five–six old German Jewish intimates of Einstein.

GC But you knew, when you started working on it, you knew that you will be able to develop his Jewish identity ...

IB Well, I took – I decided to find out ...

GC ... [?] [it was] only through that that you discovered more than you expected.

IB Certainly. I had no idea. How could one know all these things which he said? I began looking at a little paperback,¹⁸ which contained all kinds of observations of a non-mathematical kind. There I found all these scattered Jewish references, but I mean originally – I suddenly thought, 'Well, we'll see what there is.' I didn't accept the invitation until I made sure there was enough to say. Then I wrote it with great satisfaction. I don't think Einstein would have liked it all that much, because I pushed him a little further than he probably was prepared to go. But I did that quite deliberately. I knew what I was doing. I was perhaps stimulated by malice.

¹⁸ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* (based on *Mein Weltbild*, ed. Carl Seeling, and other sources), new translations and revisions by Sonja Bargmann (London and New York, 1954).

GC I was wondering while reading it, what part did you know in pop advance, what part did you find while preparing it, and how far did you push it a little further. I see now. Yes.

IB I don't think I ever knew that he made a statement to the German Jews in 1931, or whenever it was – you know, the famous statement saying, 'Our ancestors were poor specimens physically, probably intellectually maybe, and so on, but morally they are superior to us.'¹⁹ That delighted me. That's really a Chabad statement, almost. [GC Yup. I'm afraid we] After all, when I met Einstein, it was a complete failure. My visit.

GC When was it?

IB 1946 [1952].

GC Yes. You went to Princeton?

IB Felix Frankfurter said, 'Would you like to meet Einstein? As a tourist.' I went to Princeton. I called on his office. Frankfurter had written me a letter, wrote a letter to him, that I was coming. He greeted me, no idea who I was. And said, 'Where have you been, what do you do?' I said, 'I work in the British Embassy. I'm just back from Russia.' 'What is it like in the Soviet Union?' I gave a description of Stalin's Moscow and Leningrad, which is what I knew. And I could see it was a little painful for him to hear this. He was never a Communist, never pro-Soviet, but by this time, he was violently anti-American, because of the atom bomb, and I suppose the Pentagon, and people around him. He was – by this time signed fellow-travelling, pro-Communist declarations. So

¹⁹ 'Our forefathers in those days were pretty poor specimens intellectually and physically, but socially speaking they enjoyed an enviable spiritual equilibrium.' 'Addresses on Reconstruction in Palestine', no. 5, *ibid.*, p. 181 (PI3 201).up
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then he said, 'You know, would you say that the Government in Russia has the confidence of the people?' I said, 'That is not a question which can be asked about that country. There's no evidence of confidence or the lack of it. That is not how it's governed. The country is not very – probably is not very interested in confidence.' 'Oh,' he said, 'that is not good. That is not good that the government does not have the confidence of the citizens.' Very simple, naive statements. Then he said to me, 'Do you think that things will become better now after the war?' And I said, 'No, I don't think there's any evidence of it. As long as Stalin was there, the system was very tight. I see no way in which it'll be relaxed.' And I went on [?] like this. I could see that he was gradually becoming more and more gloomy. And he began looking at me as if I was a colonel from the Pentagon. Obviously a right-wing anti-Soviet propagandist. So I said to him, after a bit, 'Professor Einstein. I'm sure you have work to do. I'm sure I oughtn't to take your time. I think I'd better go.' He said, 'Yes.' After which I left. I felt that – he then wrote a letter to Felix Frankfurter, which he forwarded to me, saying, 'This curious cosmopolitan figure who appears to have visited many countries – I could not discover what his basic point of view was.' Something like that. Baffled by me. He didn't take to me. I respectfully admired him. But I could see – the point is that he was childish, not just childlike. Childish, naive, and in some ways simply a silly old sheep. He combined this sharpness of intellect with great nobility of character and with tremendous gullibility.

GC Did he change your attitude towards him, let's say [?]?

IB In no way. In no way. Because he was not a hero before.

GC He was not?

IB No.

GC I was going to ask.

IB No. I admired him – of course the whole world admired him.

GC Yes.

IB He was a great scientist and a noble Jew and [?] in a way everybody thought about him. But nothing special. But I wrote my piece about him, as you can see, without the slightest ...

GC [?].

IB The visit did not influence me. [*The contemporary transcript of the conversation ends here.*] I didn't hint in any way that there was something weak in him, or something silly. No, no. I was completely – I was, in that respect, in no way influenced by my personal impression of him as a man. He was never a hero.

GC Among this, I think ...

IB I have to go and dress (GC I think ...) for dinner [?]. Yes.

GC If you could add to your list of heroes somebody from the sciences?

IB No. I don't know enough about science to be able to judge who really ... I know that people regard Einstein as a genius, but why I cannot tell you. I do not understand either the special or the general theory of relativity. I cannot tell you why it altered our views of time and space. I know what people say. But the people who say it don't understand themselves.

GC By the way, [?] I want to put in some observations. I don't know whether you saw some of the obituaries on Dali, on Salvador Dali. (IB Yes, I saw them.) There is something very amazing here. After all, obituaries about people like Dali are prepared in advance. (Top IB Yes.) And yet, so many of the obituaries are confused. And you see that people can't really decide what (IB ... to say) to write about him.

IB I think in England they were not prepared in advance. Very non-Dali-conscious.

GC [?].

IB In Spain, France, Italy, America, we did not [?] prepared obituaries. But anyway, they're confused because they couldn't make out what he was. Not because they weren't prepared.

GC [?].

IB But was he a charlatan? Was he a great painter? What do we make of him?

GC Who do you remember lately, during the last twenty years?

IB Nothing like that.

GC Nothing like that. It's a phenomenon in psychological ...

IB Well, he *wasn't* all these things. He was mad. He was a charlatan. He was dishonest. He was rather nasty. He was brilliantly talented. He was obviously a personality of the first order.

GC All right.

IB So what do we say?

GC And nobody decided what to – I know that he was all of that. And yet people can prepare[?] something more ... you know, to be fair ...

IB More coherent.

GC Not really. Either to stress on Da[li's] ...

IB No, they couldn't make up their mind. No, it's less problematic. I think you would find that obituaries of Cagliostro would be of the same kind. (GC All right.) Magicians and charlatans of a certain kind.

GC In my experience, that's the first time that I ...

IB They don't understand ... *[recording ends abruptly; this is the last conversation in the series]* up