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1

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15

Biographical information, oral history transcripts, interviews
by Marc Lee Raphael with Rabbi Jack Skirball and
Rabbi Leon Feuer, 1983.

Dr Raphael

Interview with Leon Feuer, June 14, 1983, as part of the Abba Hillel Silver biography project.

MR: Rabbi Feuer, as some background what I'd like to do is have you tell me a little bit about your youth up to the time that you came to The Temple in 1927 as Rabbi Silver's assistant. I know, for example, that you met Rabbi Silver prior to that when you were in Cleveland, and some of the highlights of your own educational background perhaps we could start with and along the way your early meetings with Rabbi Silver.

Feuer: My family moved to Cleveland from Pittsburgh when I was in the 8th grade of public school. I went to Glenville High School in Cleveland, graduating at the age of 16. I had not yet made up my mind about what I wanted to do professionally. Teachers of mine in high school on the one hand, science teachers urged me to go to Case School of Applied Science to study engineering. On the other hand, others were urging me, before I made up my mind permanently, to enroll at Western Reserve University. The two were then separate schools. They had not yet merged. Prior to that time, the idea of becoming a rabbi had been somewhat subtly implanted in my mind by my mother, but I had not given it much serious thought. My father, who was not particularly religious though he was very intensely Zionist and intensely Jewish, had not made up his mind whether he should join a congregation or not, but for one of the early holidays after we moved to Cleveland someone took him as a guest to the service at which Rabbi Silver was preaching, one of his early years in Cleveland. He was so impressed by Rabbi Silver that he decided to join that congregation. My two brothers and a sister went to the Religious School. I was already passed Religious School age, but he urged me to go and hear Rabbi Silver speak. One Sunday morning I did. I heard him speak and I was tremendously impressed, and that seed that my mother had implanted in me about some day becoming a rabbi along with the fact that my own mind was not yet made up, all that seemed to come together. I went to see Rabbi Silver, and he said, I'll tell you what I'll do. He said, I want to encourage you to pursue that career, but I think you ought to do some preparation before you make up your mind. So he had me go to a class which was being conducted in the Conservative

congregation which was then led by a then friend of his, Rabbi Solomon Goldman. They later had a falling out, which you may or may not know, but at that time they were very close friends. Rabbi Goldman also had quite a bit of influence on me and between the two of them I think that made up my mind and I decided to go and decided I would go to the Hebrew Union College because I was hoping that Rabbi Silver would be my sponsor. He not only was my sponsor, but he offered me the use of a Temple scholarship which they then had available for students who want to go to the Hebrew Union College, a Sisterhood scholarship, and that's how I went.

MR: Now, you had already entered Case Western. Western Reserve. You had finished one year?

Feuer: I finished that one year and then did the transfer. I was a sophomore when I went to Cincinnati.

MR: Now, obviously, by sending you to Rabbi Goldman to study Hebrew or History there wasn't anything at the Temple that would have been at your level? Why did Rabbi Silver send you to a conservative congregation rather than working with you himself or

Feuer: It was an adult study group. It was an adult program that Rabbi Goldman had at his congregation and Goldman was a particularly excellent teacher, and he felt that I would benefit more from that than anything that might be offered at The Temple.

MR: Let me ask you something about Rabbi Goldman because you've mentioned him. There is a biography of Solomon Goldman by Jacob Weinstein that I've read.

Feuer: Yes, I think I know about it.

MR: And he has a page or two in which he discusses Goldman and Silver and essentially claims that Silver threw Goldman out of town over an issue dealing with Western Reserve on a professorship at Western Reserve, a chair in Jewish Studies that Abba Hillel Silver, according to Solomon Goldman, tried to get for himself, and Goldman - is this the issue that you're referring to? Something dealing with the professorship at Western Reserve?

Feuer: Yes. I don't know that I can add anything to it. I think it was one of those unfortunate things where both men allowed themselves to be influenced by rumors, rumors floated by their followers and friends and so forth in the community. But it was one of those unfortunate things. Some years after that we had a somewhat similar episode involving Rabbi Barnett Brickner.

MR: That was over a different issue.

Feuer: Totally different issue, yes.

MR: That's well documented. Let's go back to Rabbi Silver. You mentioned that you heard him preach on Sunday mornings, at least you heard him that one Sunday. Can you separate your recollection of him that Sunday from all the other times you heard him?

Feuer: No, because I went ~~offen~~ after that, and particularly since I was think of studying for the rabbinate, so I went rather often on Sunday mornings and so I have no particular recollection of that particular Sunday morning except the vague recollection it made a tremendous impression on me.

MR: Okay. Now how does it happen that after rabbinical school you come to be the minister of religious education at The Temple? You come to be the first assistant.

Feuer: Well, that's a story too. I came home during my senior year for Passover and, as usual, I made my usual call on Rabbi Silver, I always went to see him when I came home, and he always bought lunch, and he said, are you doing anything special for lunch, and I said no. He said, well, let's have lunch together. Instead of going to our usual luncheon place which was a delicatessen near the corner of 105th and Euclid, he said, let's go downtown. We went downtown and we went to the Hollenden Hotel in Cleveland which was a very fine hotel, a very fine dining room. We didn't go into the public dining room. We went into the private dining room and there, to my surprise, were four or five members of the Board. We sat and talked. I was asked a few casual questions. Nothing was mentioned about position. No offer was made. Luncheon broke up. The men wished me

goodbye. I remember one of them saying to me, if I recall correctly, we'll see you soon. I thought nothing of it and they left and Rabbi Silver and I walked out. We went out to get his car and on the way to his car he leaned over and said, congratulations. I said about what. He said you've just been elected my assistant. He had never asked me whether I wanted to be his assistant. But he knew I did.

MR: This was in the spring

Feuer: Incidentally, he never asked me about taking a leave of absence here. He just told me I was taking it.

MR: That was some years after, so you began then a few months after Passover then.

Feuer: As soon as, he was, as usual, he went to Europe almost every summer as you know, he went abroad, Europe and Palestine, and I graduated, as I recall, my memory may be somewhat faulty, somewhere around the 5th or 6th of June, and two days after that I was working at The Temple in Cleveland.

MR: Now, why is it that he called you minister of religious education as opposed to assistant rabbi?

Feuer: He never explained it to me except to say that he didn't like the idea of an assistant rabbi, although as I noticed all of my successors were called assistant rabbis.

MR: Were you in any way trained in education?

Feuer: On the contrary. I learned everything, whatever it is that I know, from my experience there and from five or six veteran school teachers they had in various departments of the school. They taught me everything I knew about religious education.

MR: Were you the principal of the religious school?

Feuer: No, we had a principal.

MR: Did your role change between 1927 and 1935 over the years you were there? Were you doing different things towards the end of your time there than you were at the beginning or was it a fairly similar pattern?

Feuer: It was a fairly similar pattern.

MR: What was your wee like? What kinds of things were you doing as his assistant?

Feuer: I was editing the Bulletin. I was responsible for the Religious School, that is I was held responsible for anything that happened at the Religious School, and generally I officiated at all funerals and weddings of non-Temple members. And in a community as large as Cleveland you have quite a few of those so that it was no infrequent, in those days it was customary to have weddings in June, for a Sunday in June for Rabbi Silver and I, between the two of us having 8 or 9 weddings.

MR: So if somebody called The Temple and asked for a rabbi to marry them.

Feuer: Asked for a rabbi to marry them, are you a member. No. Would you like to become a member? No, I would like to just have somebody officiate the wedding. Well, Rabbi Silver will not officiate at non-members' weddings but we have a rabbi who will.

MR: What was the rationale for having the rabbi at The Temple officiate at non-members' life cycle events? Was that fairly customary, you think, in the 20's or 30's? Because it's rather unusual in the country today. Many congregations feel that the rabbi of the congregation services should be limited, by and large, to the members of the congregation. Since there were lots of Reform congregations, several Reform congregations in Cleveland.

Feuer: There were just two.

MR: Just two at that time?

Feuer: Euclid Avenue Temple and The Temple

MR: That was all, so there was no policy that someone had to be a member to have a funeral conducted or a wedding celebrated?

Feuer: Except by the senior rabbi.

MR: Okay, so you did life cycle events. Did you ever have an opportunity to preach?

Feur: Oh yes.

MR: Now, would that be on Sunday morning?

Feur: First of all, I did most of the preaching at the Sabbath morning services which were primarily religious school services because our school was so large that the upper half of the religious school, what we called the junior high department of the religious school consisted of the 7th, 8th and 9th grades which meant some 300 to 400 students, had their service on Shabbas morning and whatever adults wanted to come to the service could come. Not too many did, but some did. I preached at those services and every so often when Rabbi Silver had to be out of town on a Sunday morning, though he tried not to be away from his pulpit on Sunday mornings if he could help it, whenever he had to be away I would preach.

MR: Were those Sabbath morning services fairly structured?

Feuer: They were regular Sabbath morning service with the reading of the Torah and so forth, what was a classical Reform service and Union Prayer Book.

MR: Was the Torah read in Hebrew by the rabbi?

Feuer: Yes.

MR: There weren't aliyot, were there?

Feuer: No.

MR: What about Friday evening? What happened on Friday evening?

Feuer: Vesper service. It was designed primarily for mourners.

MR: Was it before dinner?

Feuer: And it was held before dinner. We called it the vesper service. It was from 5:30 to six o'clock and was always held in the chapel of The Temple.

MR: Were usually both rabbis there?

Feuer: Both rabbis were there. I would read the whole first part of the service and he would read the ^{2d} oration and Kaddish.

MR: What about Saturday mornings? Was Rabbi Silver involved on Saturday mornings?

Feuer: We'd sit on the pulpit and he would read the adoration and Kaddish and I would do the rest of it.

MR: On Sunday morning did you have any role?

Feuer: No. Sunday morning my job was in the religious school.

MR: So the lower grades might be going on on Sunday morning.

Feuer: And we'd have assemblies in our auditorium. We usually had two assemblies and I would have to speak at both assemblies.

MR: So you didn't get to hear and watch Rabbi Silver preach on Sunday mornings very frequently as the rabbi there?

Feuer: Yes, I would when I was through on Sunday morning with my second assembly I would sometimes, if I was particularly interested in the subject, go upstairs and wander into the balcony just to listen to the sermon.

MR: Was there a little service also on Sunday morning?

Feuer: Oh yes, we used the weekday service of the Union Prayer Book.

MR: So it would be awhile until he preached.

Feuer: He would begin preaching at about 11:15 and he would end at about 12 o'clock, then the adoration and Kaddish took another 5 to 6 minutes and that was the end of the service and this got me into trouble once. The first Sunday morning that he was away, out of town, I told this story at my 80th anniversary party at a banquet. He said to me, I'm going to be away on such and such a Sunday, an engagement I had made for some time, and so you prepare to preach. I prepared a sermon of 30 minutes in length, remembering the dictum of my homiletics professor, the late Dr. Bettan, who said the sermon should be no more than 30 minutes, if it has to be longer than that write a book, don't preach a sermon. So I wrote a 30 minute sermon, not realizing that by delivering a 30-minute sermon and ending the service at 11:45 instead of 12:05 or 12:10 I was throwing the whole religious school schedule off, and parents were wandering around looking for their kids. Rabbi Silver came back on Monday or Tuesday, he had heard what had happened. He called me in and he said, Leon, what happened Sunday? How long did you preach? I said a half hour. Dr. Bettan taught it to me. He said, young man, next time you occupy this pulpit and thereafter you prepare a sermon 45 minutes in

length. In this Temple a half-hour sermon is a children's sermon. And that got me into trouble here because I got in the habit of preaching 45-minute sermons and when I came here, for the first several weeks, I was preaching 45-minute sermons, and I noticed on the aprt of some members of the congregation when I would go to the back of the Temple to greet them as they left, a little coolness and I couldn't figure out what was going on. I thought, my God, I've only been here a few weeks, I am a flop already. And I decided to talk to a friend of mine, her name was Florentine. Her husband had been a rabbi of the congregation but had left the rabbinate and gone into the insurance business, , came from Cincinnati. Her sister, incidentally, also married a rabbi, Dr. Abraham Simon of Washington and I told her, I said, Birdie, what's going on, am I doing such a bad job? She said, no. She said when you preach as long as you do you keep many members of the congregation who want to do so from seeing the second movie, from going downtown and seeing the second showing of the movie. But I realized that, it didn't take me long to realize that actually, except for the unusual preachers like Silver, 30 minutes was plenty long enough.

MR: Were you involved in Zionist activities while you were the assistant at The Temple?

Feuer: Well, not to a great extent because I belonged to the Zionist organization because, as you may know or may have heard or will hear, Silver and the local Zionist district were not on good terms. Silver was not often on good terms with people who didn't think like Silver did, as you'll discover, and so I wasn't very active there, but I was active here. I served as President of the Zionist district here, and then, I suppose we'll get to the other things, my leave of absence later on.

MR: I am curious as to why, I didn't know he wasn't on good terms. I know he was not on good terms with the Joint Distribution Committee and people raising money for European Jewish causes, but I'm not aware that he had conflict with Zionist

Feuer: Not with the Zionist movement, but with the Zionist district.

MR: Some of the personalities?

Feuer: It's a complicated business, but one of the leading Zionists, one of the men who was one of the leading activists in the Zionist movement in Cleveland, was a man by the name of Ezra Shapiro. Ezra Shapiro was a member of and a close friend, almost a disciple of Solomon Goldman, and the Goldman problem was beginning to develop.

MR: I see. So it wasn't an ideological issue; it was more personalities. What kinds of things did you learn from Rabbi Silver while you were his assistant? Or, let me ask it in a different way. When you met with him, when you talked with him, were these sessions what made a permanent impression upon you?

Feuer: Very. I'll give you one example in preparing sermons. We talked about it one day at lunch and I talked to him about he worked and he talked about how I worked and he told me what he himself had done and what it had done for him. And he suggested that I do the same thing. He said for at least the first five years you're in the rabbinate, write every sermon out word for word and memorize it and you will discover, as a result of it, if you can escape the danger of becoming a slave to a manuscript which I don't want to happen to you, you will greatly enrich your vocabulary and you will soon discover that it will not be necessary for you to write a sermon out word for word, you'll be able to preach from an outline because your vocabulary will have been sufficiently amplified so that you won't be stumbling for words. And I discovered he was pretty much correct as far as I was concerned, it was my experience.

MR: You note in your article, in your memoir, that actually he brought a whole bunch of notes to the pulpit with him which obviously people might see, but nobody would ever be aware that there was any use made of it.

Feuer: He rarely made use of it, although my friend, Sidney Regner, tells a very funny story, joke, about that. The first time I took him to hear Rabbi Silver preach he came to visit me in Cleveland and I took him to hear Rabbi Silver preach.

I took him to hear Rabbi Silver preach and afterwards, did you notice Rabbi Silver when he would get to a certain point in the address would stop, pause rather dramatically, and Regner said to me, did it ever occur to you what he was doing while he's pausing? I said, no, what is he doing? He said, he's memorizing the next paragraph.

MR: Did he have an unusual memory?

Feuer: He had a great one.

MR: So it was perhaps easier for him to memorize a 45-minute talk?

Feuer: I'm sure it was.

MR: What other things do you remember about your 8 years at The Temple in terms of your relationship with Rabbi Silver? For example, one of the things you mention in this memoir is this incredible attention to detail from a mistake in editing the Bulletin to all the other things. Was this a lesson that you learned from Rabbi Silver?

Feuer: Yes, and it's a lesson that stood me in good stead. It taught me that when you try to administer an institution like this that you have to pay a great deal of attention to details. You can't just leave things to chance. He never left things to chance. No member of The Temple became a member of the Board unless he approved of him. Nobody became president of sisterhood or brotherhood unless he thought they were fit for the office and truly represented what he felt was the right values.

MR: Apparently he was able to dominate The Temple.

Feuer: He was able to do it. I don't know whether this is a compliment or not, but he taught me to do it.

MR: How did the congregation - well, let me ask it differently. What you have is a fairly classical Reform congregation. There's no Hebrew being taught. There's no Bar Mitzvah. There's no Sabbath evening service.

Feuer: There was Hebrew.

MR: There was Hebrew? Well, there isn't a Hebrew school such as there was,

apparently, at Euclid Avenue Temple.

Feuer: Hebrew was part of the curriculum. He insisted on it.

MR: Okay, but there wasn't a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzah?

Feuer: No.

MR: And the service was, among Reform congregations, closer to the 19th century patterns than new patterns that were emerging and yet, here's this man who's virtually at the forefront of Zionist activity.

Feuer: He was intensely Jewish.

MR: He reads Yiddish, speaks Yiddish, reads Hebrew, writes in Hebrew.

Feuer: He loved Yiddish jokes and quoted Hebrew texts freely.

MR: Well, did the congregation just overlook this idiosyncrasy of their rabbi? He probably didn't have large followers in his Zionist activities within The Temple.

Feuer: Ultimately, he did, yes.

MR: This maybe by the late 30's or 40's, but you certainly wouldn't characterize it as, in the 20's or 30's if he was raising money for Palestinian Jewry. The Temple probably wasn't a major source of financial support for Zionist causes, or am I mistaken? Let me ask you, during the years that you were there, do you think that would have been a good source of Zionist fund-raising?

Feuer: I can't tell you, I can't give you any details about it, whether, if it was it was through individuals. As I said, the official Zionist party in Cleveland and he were not on the best of terms and so he didn't work through them. He worked largely as an individual. You can only explain it by the, and I can't explain it, I haven't been able to explain it since, the overwhelming power and magnetism of this man's personality.

MR: You mention also Confirmation class and his meticulous preparation and your meticulous preparation subsequently. While you were there who was in charge of the Confirmation class while you were at The Temple.

Feuer: Well, the Confirmation class had its regular session on Saturday morning where it took the, whatever the curriculum required, and then the rabbis

taught an extra class during the week, usually on Thursday or Friday afternoon. The classes were very large so they were split when I came, split into sections. Almost all the years I was there I don't believe we ever had a Confirmation class less than 100 children, so the classes were split. Even those sections were too large, but it was the best we could do. We split them into sections of 50 and we would each take a semester.

MR: Was it primarily a lecture format, Confirmation at that time?

Feuer: It was both. He felt the need of a - he didn't use a text book at first because he couldn't find one that was satisfactory so he told me to write a text book which I did in collaboration with a close friend of mine by the name of Glaser. We wrote a book called The Jew and His Religion by Feuer and Glaser and that became the official text of the Confirmation class. That was about three or four years after I came. Then he felt that the youngsters were not getting well enough acquainted with post-Biblical Jewish literature. They were getting instruction in Bible, but they didn't even know there was such a thing as post-Biblical Jewish literature, so he ordered me to, of course, I'm kidding, but he suggested very strongly that I should prepare an anthology in post-Biblical Jewish literature. And I did along with Azriel Eisenberg who prepared, together we prepared the first volume, and the second volume I prepared myself, and the Union took both volumes and published them and then for quite awhile they were official texts.

MR: So Confirmation class was taught then with reading assignments and preparation on the part of the students.

Feuer: Right.

MR: What about the ceremony?

Feuer: A great deal of attention was given to it. He was a man who was never satisfied with anything less than perfection. He would begin, he would take the first two or three sessions. Then he would turn the class over to me. We rehearsed the Confirmation class for Confirmation for six weeks, beginning with once a week, then twice a week, and then the last couple of weeks before Confirmation three

four times a week.

MR: What did they do? Did somebody write a service?

Feuer: We wrote a joint service, a large part of it is still being used. He and I wrote the service together.

MR: You and Rabbi Silver? So it was an original standard service.

Feuer: Yes.

MR: Did the kids also have some original talks?

Feuer: He didn't believe in that. And that makes sense to me because Alan has tried this other thing and he admits now that what the kids write most of the time has to be rewritten.

MR: Did Rabbi Silver have a chance to get to know as individuals some of the Confirmands, do you think, even though the class was large?

Feuer: Yes, I think so. Of course, the children were terribly in awe of him. You know, it's the old, what would you call it, you ask a child, what is your idea of God and the child would say, Rabbi Silver.

MR: Even at this time, even in the late 20's?

Feuer: Oh yes, even then.

MR: He wasn't a real large person?

Feuer: He was a large person. He wasn't a fat person, he didn't have a bay window. He was very tall. As a matter of fact, he was very thin, very skinny. He had sunken cheeks, very tall, and flashing brown eyes. Well, I mean he was the kind of person that when you were with him you were with somebody who was somebody. It was that kind of impression.

MR: He wasn't a person who sat or stood quietly in a group? Would he dominate most any group that he was part of?

Feuer: Conversationally? No. He tended to be rather withdrawn. Danny's the same way. If you've ever noticed, he doesn't say very much.

MR: Right. One more thing about getting to know people, not Confirmands but members of The Temple. Did he, I don't want to use the word counseling, but were

there opportunities for Rabbi Silver to spend time with and get to know Temple members as individuals? Obviously, at a time of a wedding or something like that.

Feuer: If you're asking me was he a good pastor in the sense that we think of as a good pastor today, my answer would have to be in all honesty no. He made hospital calls, but it was under pressure and usually only to people who were desperately ill and such a thing as regular rounds of hospital calling, the same thing was true of me because I followed his pattern pretty well which I had to unlearn when I came here because here they expected a certain amount of pattern and I had to fit into that pattern.

MR: So the pastoral role was

Feuer: And he didn't think that was a rabbi's job. He thought this was a job for laymen. He said visiting the sick is a job for Jews to do, not

MR: You think a good part of his week when you were with him was spent preparing his Sunday morning lecture? You think he was able to do that pretty quickly or did that take a large part of his week?

Feuer: I don't think it took too much of his time. Remember, he was in tremendous demand as a public speaker, he was away frequently.

MR: In the minutes there don't seem to be any problems with that and the congregation; the congregation doesn't complain.

Feuer: No, you took Abba Hillel Silver as he was, that was it.

MR: When you were his assistant did you have much social contact with him outside the Temple?

Feuer: Yes, I was fairly frequently a guest at his home and he and Mrs. Silver came to our apartment, I lived in an apartment, and he would always tell my wife, remember, when I come to your apartment you know what I expect - potato pancakes.

MR: She cooked them well? He ate lots of them?

Feuer: Between the two of them they would make a stack disappear. Another famous story of Lauderbach and Freehof, they were both crazy about potato pancakes and the story goes that they sat down with a plate of potato pancakes which Mrs.

Freehof had prepared on one of Lauderbach's visits and the stack went down and down and down and one pancake was left. And Freehof said, yours Dr. Lauderbach. Lauderbach said, yours, but who counts?

MR: What made you decide to leave The Temple at the time that you did? You were there for eight years.

Feuer: Silver. He had been consulted by the congregation as to who he would recommend. He recommended me without my knowing about it, he never told me about it, and then the offer came, and when the offer came I went to ask his advice. I said, well, I'm perfectly happy here, I married a Cleveland girl and her family is here, why should I leave, and I'm enjoying my work here. He said, how long have you been assistant. I said, 8 years. He said, that's enough. If you stay any longer you'll be an assistant all your life. He said, you've got to get out on your own. Incidentally, he said something else at that time which I remember very clearly. Toledo had a very bad reputation as a congregation. They had trouble with rabbis and so forth and when the offer came, I not only consulted him but I also consulted Dr. Bettan who was my professor of homiletics who was quite a good friend of mine. He advised me against going. He said you'll have nothing but trouble there. Everybody who's been there has had trouble. And I told Rabbi Silver this. I said that his advice was contrary to Bettan's advice, Bettan advised me not to go and he was advising me to go. And he said, why is he advising you not to go? I said, because he says it's a bad congregation. He said to me, Leon, there are no bad congregations, only bad rabbis.

MR: You found that to be true?

Feuer: I think largely yes. That I won't say though that there aren't exceptions. There are congregations where the leadership falls into the hands of mamzerim, you know, and the rabbi is in trouble more frequently now than ever before.

MR: Okay, let's turn to the 1940's when you renew your association with Silver. Or, let me just ask you, is there anything else about your years at The Temple that you think are significant and I haven't asked you that you would

want to mention. I've tried to ask you things that interest me.

Feuer: I think you've covered things pretty well.

MR: Okay. Now, you mentioned earlier that Silver, maybe jokingly or not, Silver told me I'm going to Washington. What's the background to 1943?

Feuer: Silver had been approached by, as you know, by Weitzman to become a co-chairman of the reorganized, what had been called, I think, the American Zionist Emergency, something like that. It was reorganized anyway into AZEC, American Zionist Emergency Council. But it used to be the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, and he changed the name to the American Zionist Emergency Council. The war was on, Hitler's Europe was on, and we were beginning to get echos of it and so forth. And so Weizman asked Silver to become a co-chairman with Stephen Wise. But, interestingly enough, of the group that really ran the council which was its executive committee, it had only one chairman and that was Silver, and Silver engaged Henry Montor to be its executive director and they decided to open the Washington office. They decided they would not be effective unless they had representation in Washington where they would have direct contact with the government. Particularly with Congress, so I got a telephone call one day from him and he said, you're going to Washington next year to open our Washington office. I said, I am. I said, you know there's such a thing as a congregation here. I'll take care of it, he said, who's your president? I told him. He called him on the phone, told him what the situation was, and that was it. The congregation gave me a year's leave of absence.

MR: Now, let's talk about your relationship with Silver during that particular year. You would see Silver primarily in Washington.

Feuer: I saw Silver, we operated something like this. I would spend half the week in Washington, mainly working at the capital with individual Congressmen and trying to do an educational job in Congress. We knew we had a goal in mind, rather vaguely at the time. It crystalized in our mind as we went along, and I had two men helping me, one a Jew who had been the Scripps-Howard newspaper man

in Washington, his name is Leo Sack. He was a southerner who came from Tupelo, Mississippi, whose representative was the most anti-semitic Congressman and representative in the Congress in those days. What was his name?

MR: Rankin?

Feuer: Rankin, but they were on the best of terms, these two. Leo Sack knew every important person, even most of those who were unimportant, that was his function, to make appointments for me with Congressmen. My first impression was I was surprised at the total ignorance of the majority of Congressmen and Senators of the situation in the Middle East. They were Congressmen and Senators who didn't know that there had been such a thing as a Balfour Declaration. And so I would visit these people in the morning, then go back to my office at noon. See, they were usually in their offices until noon and then they went to meetings of the Senate and House which came to order at noon, and I went to my office where I did what needed to be done in the office. At that time the ZOA had its headquarters in Washington and we occupied part of that building. It was a big house on 17th Ave., I think, or some place like that, and on Wednesday evening I would go to New York where I would remain until Sunday evening and I would report to the Council the people whom I had seen, what their reactions were and so forth and so on on the basis of which reports we were beginning to formulate a policy. And the policy crystallized around the introduction of a resolution in Congress calling for the establishment of the Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine after the end of the war. Of course, you remember that at this time I think the Biltmore program had been adopted. I don't know this to be a fact, but I think that the reason Silver asked me to go to Washington, why he picked me to go to Washington, there were two reasons, number one because he trusted me, that's something that he didn't confide in too many people, and number two because I had written a book called Why A Jewish State? to which he had written the foreward. He liked the book and he felt that I was the kind of a person who could present the case effectively. Have you ever seen the book?

MR: Yes, I have. I haven't seen the first one you mentioned, the Confirmation text, but I've seen Why A Jewish State.

Feuer: Well, anyway, after several months, incidentally, I forgot to mention that when I first left here, I left here during Sukkos of 1943. I went to New York first and I stayed in New York six weeks. And during those six weeks I spent most of my time on the telephone, calling Jewish communities, Zionist groups, and where there were no Zionist groups Jewish communities throughout the country, asking them to organize a local chapter of the Emergency Committee which we could use whenever we needed to use politically as a result of which by the time I left Washington we had several hundred of these committees functioning. So then, to take up where I left off, after two or three months of this probing we decided to take the bull by the horns and introduce a resolution, calling it the Establishment of the Jewish Commonwealth after the war. We got two Congressmen and two Senators. We were particularly anxious to get Taft because of his prominence in the Republican Party, and Wagner because he had prominence in the Democratic Party. The Congressmen were Compton and who else, I've forgotten the name of the other man, and we got the resolution introduced. And it looked, when I reported, after we introduced it I began taking soundings about how people felt and these soundings gave me a fairly confident feeling that we would get the resolution through rather quickly. It turned out that I was overconfident. I wasn't reckoning with the executive. Silver testified for the resolution before both the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee and, as I recall, made a tremendous impression on both committees. Then we were pretty confident that we would get it through. By this time the war was raging in that part of the world, North Africa, Rommel was in North Africa, and apparently, and this I don't know, this is guesswork on my part, apparently the President, feeling that this resolution might represent some sort of danger to the war effort, got General Marshal to go up on the Hill and request the two committees, the Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committee of the House and the Senate, to defer action on these resolutions on two grounds: on

the military ground that such a resolution would certainly provoke an Arab revolt in the rear of the Allied armies and would hinder the war effort considerably, if not perhaps endanger it altogether. Secondly, on humanitarian grounds: the Arabs would arise, they would rebel, and the result would be a wholesale slaughter of the Jews who were already in Palestine. Ironic, in view of the fact that when the Arabs did decide to do something we let them. At any rate, in order to bolster Marshal's testimony, Roosevelt got Wise, Stephen Wise who was co-chairman of the Council, and Rose Halpern and one or two others of his cronies in Washington to come down and testify that this would in no way harm the ultimate aim of achieving some sort of Jewish homeland which he favored, but that it would be wise to defer it in view of the military objections and so forth. Wise came down with Rose Halpern and testified to the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate to this effect, that as far as the official Zionist movement was concerned they saw no objection to waiting, the Jews had waited this long, they could wait until after the war because they were sure that after the war the Jewish homeland could be achieved. I have never, in all my life, seen Silver in this condition. I didn't see him before he died, but it might have been something like that. We knew he was testifying and we were outside of the room and he and I were walking up and down the hall while he was reading and he was as white as a ghost. He said to me, can you imagine Jews stabbing Jewish people in the back this way? I knew what he meant because, you see, from the very beginning he mistrusted those leaders and was sure in his own mind, the famous quotation which he used, put not your trust in princes. He was sure in his own mind that Roosevelt would sell out the Zionist cause. You know what happened with the meeting between Roosevelt and Stalin? He was right.

MR: So you would make the preliminary contacts and then Silver would dash off to Washington early in the week.

Feuer: Silver would come to Washington on Thursday and he would then consult with me as to what key Congressmen that would be helpful for him to see, and he would go and see some of them himself.

MR: Would he take a train there, was there an overnight train?

Feuer: Just imagine this man for nearly ten years of his life, every Thursday night left Cleveland by train.

MR: Wednesday night?

Feuer: Maybe it was Wednesday night, went to New York. No, no, what I'm talking about. Sunday night he would get on the train Sunday night, go to New York, have meetings in New York with the Emergency Committee, come to Washington on Wednesday or Thursday, work there, take a train out of there Thursday night because he didn't want to miss his Confirmation class on Friday or his Sunday morning sermon, and Sunday night he would be gone again. He did this for nine or ten years and this, I am convinced, shortened his life.

MR: What about his effectiveness when he came to Washington.

Feuer: He was extremely effective, but what could you do, you see, when Congressmen are faced with, number one, a request from General Marshall whom everybody respected; number two, it was known to be the desire of the Executive Department that this be what happened, that it be deferred; and number three, it didn't matter, I mean it wasn't an issue on which people, on which they were particularly, democrats or republicans, particularly concerned.

MR: Where would he generally see these Congressmen, in their offices, at private meetings?

Feuer: In their offices, there is where I would see them, always in their office.

MR: Was there anybody

Feuer: I had a curious impression from a few of these people which might be interesting, particularly I know I have fixed in my mind, remember a Senator by the name of Burton Wheeler?

MR: Sure.

Feuer: He was a real anti-semite and he was for this resolution. By the way Hamilton Fish was for the resolution. In fact, Hamilton Fish had already introduced a resolution they used before that endorsing the Balfour Declaration. Remember that, the Fish Resolution? And I got the impression from a few people like this that they didn't think it would be a bad idea if all the Jews went to Palestine, including the American Jews. I'm saying this as an aside.

MR: In other words, Silver may have used Burton Wheeler as an example. Is this an example of someone Silver managed to convince?

Feuer: No, he was all for it. Incidentally, I had a very interesting experience with Taft. I asked him, I said, I went to see him and I said, Senator, Dr. Silver and I are both from the State of Ohio, we would love to have you there for reason our Senator from Ohio, the one that sponsors the resolution. And he said, I never sponsor anything that I don't know too much about. I don't know too much about this problem. What I'm interested in are the legal aspects of the problem; get me the literature concerning the legal aspects of the problem and I'll give you my answer in two or three weeks. So I did, I got out the Balfour Declaration and as much literature as I could get together, all dealing with the legal aspects of it and went to see him and he said, I've read what you've given me and I'm convinced that you have a sound legal case and I would, therefore, sponsor the resolution, co-sponsor the resolution. As a sidelight to this, it may be interesting, you know we had a number of senators and congressmen going out and making pro-Zionist speeches by this time to Jewish audiences. Taft made some of those speeches, but he would never let anybody else write his own speeches. The others took canned speeches, not Taft, he never used a canned speech.

MR: Interesting. Well, Silver continued to make these trips to Washington long after you left and came back.

Feuer: Oh yes, oh yes. He just went on and on and then he became, you know, chairman of the American section of the Jewish Agency.

MR: Who was his liaison in Washington after '44, after you went back to Toledo? Who did that kind of thing for him?

Feuer: One of the men from our staff who now lives in Israel, if he's still living. He in fact taught at the Hebrew University for awhile, but he was only there for a short time. The real successor was I. L. Kenen who had been a newspaper reporter in Cleveland and who had gone to work for the Emergency Council. They sent him to Washington and he was director of the Washington office for quite a long time.

MR: You know this man who, his name escapes me now, he's the head of the American Friends of the Hebrew University in New York. He worked very closely with Silver, I thought, for a few years after you did, lives in New York, I can't remember him. Is Kenen still alive?

Feuer: Yes, he's retired, he's still alive as far as I know.

MR: Could he have had ^{pretty} intimate contact with Silver in those years.

Feuer: Well, he carried on the way I did, I mean after I left, I had promised my congregation to be back at the end of the year and I kept my promise.

MR: Where do you think I should look for Kenen? What city should I start with? Or who might know?

Feuer: Get in touch with the Jewish Agency.

MR: Jewish Agency in New York? Now did you see Silver from time to time after 1944? Did you go to Cleveland or did he come to Toledo?

Feuer: Oh, he came here on every important occasion I had here in the congregation.

MR: 20th anniversary?

Feuer: He installed me. He came here for my 20th anniversary. He came here for the, we built an addition to the old Temple, before we built this new temple we built an addition to the old Temple down on Collingwood Ave. He dedicated that for me. He was here five or six times on different occasions. He came whenever I asked.

MR: What do you recall in those brief moments of meeting him, say in the 1950's, later on in his life, any difference in your relationship?

Feuer: Well, there was some difference. We both felt very close to each other and I'd like to tell you the story that I told my congregation on my 80th birthday. Shut this off if you want to. When I was elected President of the Conference, of course, I got letters from all my friends congratulating me, you know, offering me cooperation and so forth. I didn't hear from Silver and my feelings were a little hurt, you know. Knowing him as I did I shouldn't have thought twice about it because he was rather ingrown as far as personal relationships were concerned. Danny's the same way. He and I have talked about that. Anyway, I happened to be in Cleveland and I went up to see him. He invited me to the house and I went up to the house and we were talking and I said to him, do you mind if I say something rather personal? He said, no, go ahead. I said, you know, I'm a little miffed with you. He said, why. I said, you know I've been elected President of the Conference. He said, yes, I know. I said I got letters of congratulations and offers of help from all of my close friends, I didn't hear a word from you. How come you didn't write to me, being your disciple? He said, why should I write to you, I expected you to become President of the Conference. If you hadn't become then I would have written to you.

MR: He probably wasn't a man that

Feuer: No, he was not outgoing.

MR: It would be veyr difficult to establish intimacy with him.

Feuer: He loved Yiddish jokes. If I knew a Yiddish joke, nothing could please him better.

MR: Well, that about covers the things I wanted to ask you.

Feuer: By the way, turn it off, I'll tell you a few things.

Dr. Raphael

Interview with Jack Skirball, Wednesday, August 31, 1983. I'm chatting outside of San Diego at Vacation Village with Jack Skirball.

MLR: Let's start with rabbinical school. I think that's a good place to begin. Why don't you just share with me your recollections of Abba as a student at the Hebrew Union College, whatever you'd like to say.

JS: Whatever I have to say is this, that Abba was really a rabbi when he came in the sense that he was a thorough Hebrew student. He had been reared up with the Talmud and midrash. I'm sure he learned something at the College, but he could have gone out and been a rabbi and had he gotten semicha by somebody and performed just as well as he performed as a graduate. It's not derogating the value of being a graduate of Hebrew Union College, but I think that's really true. He almost got me kicked out of college.

MLR: Tell me about that.

JS: We used to spend evenings together and I used to say, "I've got to get home and study." Instead we'd go to Bilkers to have a corned beef sandwich almost every night. He loved to eat. We'd go to Bilkers to have a corned beef sandwich and I used to say, "I have to study" and he would say, "what good's it going to do when you graduate?" And one day Dr. Englander who taught at the College and walked to work, and used to walk from the college over through Burnett Woods to Avondale and Dr. Englander, who was one of the professors, asked me, "Why aren't you doing the kind of work you used to do?" I got a scholarship the previous year and he said, "Better watch out." And I told Abba he's going to get me kicked out of college. You see, the things I have to say about Abba are rather on the personal side.

MLR: That's what I'm looking for.

JS: I'll give you some idea. He used to go to Huntington, West Virginia for a bi-weekly and a hundred dollars in expense. On Saturday night about six o'clock he would come back to Cincinnati and he'd call me up and I'd meet him downtown and we'd go to the best restaurant in town. He would pay for everything and then

go to see a movie. After he'd invite me to eat again, and after about a week all his money was gone and, always with a sigh, he would have to wait for me to get out of class to pay the nickel fare home! Money really meant nothing to Abba, but that happened week after week and sometimes I'd be isolated at Mrs. Reichman's place, a boarding house, and sometimes I wouldn't hear from Abba until I was sitting at the table and he'd call me and I'd get up from the table and catch a streetcar and go down to meet Abba at a restaurant.

MLR: Did he have much of a sense of humor? Was he a very serious person?

JS: I'll tell you a later story. When we used to come to Los Angeles he would spend as much time with me as he could. This is skipping over a long, long period. This was long before I married Audrey. She and I were going together, but she got married in the meantime to somebody else and Abba called. He was speaking at the Ambassador Hotel.

MLR: This might have been the forties, perhaps? 1940's, 50's?

JS: Yes, I think it would have been around the time of Pearl Harbor.

He was speaking to a group of Zionists on Saturday night and I was busy that night, so we planned to spend Sunday together, so I said then I'll pick you up at the hotel and we'll spend the day together. So I picked up Audrey and I went down and picked up Abba and I took him up to Arrowhead Springs Hotel.

MLR: At Lake Arrowhead.

JS: And there was sort of a spa there I knew he loved and we went down to the bath and had lunch. I said, "What would you like today?" "Well," he said, "I'd like to go over to the island, Wrigley's Island."

MLR: Catalina?

JS: Catalina, so we went down there and the boat had gone. I said, well, I've got an idea. Near the Pomona, beyond Ontario, near Los Angeles, was a ranch, called Porter's Ranch, like a little bit of an inn, six bedrooms, and they raised all their own food, chickens and ducks and so forth. So I said I think we'll enjoy going to this ranch for dinner. A good dinner. And Sunday night we

were going back to Pomona and there's a street fair there in Pomona and Abba sees the street fair and insists on going on the merry-go-round! He had the time of his life.

He met Irving Stone's sister in Spain, no, his sister-in-law and he and Virginia and she and her husband got to be very good friends and went around. And Abba said that in our own home was one place he felt he could be himself. And in Cincinnati my sister was going to college and my mother moved temporarily in Cincinnati.

Abba would come and he was a different person entirely than a formal person. He had one thing that I didn't mind. It didn't apply to me, but if he didn't like you his eyes could turn to steel gray and I once saw him go up to a person and shake hands with him, whom he didn't like, it was a different side of him and it always happened with somebody that differed with him politically, not intellectually. We went to Palestine together.

MLR: When would this have been?

JS: This was right at the end of the war, 1919. That's on this trip I was telling you about. And we went across the Mediterranean on a P & O troop ship and there were lots of Zionists on the ship and I couldn't understand eating the trefa that came off the table. I'd been raised in a non-kosher home. I couldn't understand it because when I got to Israel, into Palestine, when I got to Palestine with him I found that these Zionists weren't interested in religion at all. We stayed at Degania, and it was on a Friday night, and they were so interested in having Abba.

MLR: Were you a rabbi by this time?

JS: No, I had five more years of college.

MLR: Five more years? Then you were just beginning college.

JS: College was nine years.

MLR: Well, you had maybe finished the university?

JS: I hadn't finished the university. I was still in the university.

MLR: How did you happen to go?

JS: How did I happen to be a rabbi?

MLR: No, how'd you happen to go to Palestine?

JS: I think I told you before the interview. What happened was I got out of the army, , and came back to Cincinnati where my sister was in college. I get a telephone call in the morning. How would you like to go to Russia and Palestine? I'd love it. I get on a train and meet Abba in Washington. There was a very funny incident, it has nothing to do with Abba, so we had to go and see Newton D. Baker who was originally from Cleveland and who knew Abba and had asked him to make this trip.

MLR: No, you didn't tell me this before.

JS: We'll start all over again.

JS: I mean I understand, you know.

JS: What had happened was that Newton D. Baker had asked Abba to go to Russia. It was right at the time when the Joint Distribution Committee was having some problems. I get back the day before and at about eight o'clock in the morning my sister comes up to my wife and me and said Abba was on the telephone: "How would you like to go to Russia?" I didn't have the time to get the money and go to New York. So I packed up the trunk and I make the B & O to, we're to meet in Newton D. Baker's office for passports, semi-diplomatic passports. When we get in there Abba's waiting there for me and we go in to see Baker and Baker says, "Jack, what are you doing here?" And Abba doesn't know that I knew Newton D. Baker. How did I know him? They lived four doors away from us and I used to get 25¢ for sweeping the snow off his place, so he knew me from the time I was a kid. Now, when we got to Paris, no, when we got to end of the meeting, Baker said, "You cannot go to Russia because the Jewish Distribution guy just got killed," he said, "but I'd like you to go to Palestine." So he gets the passports right then and there and I went to New York, I was able to get some money by telegram and almost missed the boat as the gangplank for passengers went up and I landed on my tuchus.

And Abba says, "you sonofabitch, I'm sorry I ever asked you."

Now that's the way we started the trip and went to Palestine and had a hell of a time getting in to Israel because of the problems they were having in Egypt. A trainload of Englishmen had been killed by the Arabs coming in and there were bodies on the train. So Abba and I went to Palestine and the British government gave Abba an Arab boy and a Ford and we rode through Palestine and Abba saw all the Zionists and leaders of the community and we ended up at Deganla on a Friday night. And they went horseback riding on Saturday which I had expected wrongly that I would find them really a religious community and I found them mostly like Cincinnati. Now, the food was terrible and Abba and I decided that we had been invited to eat at a ranch for lunch and we went up to Safed. We got up to Safed, I don't know whether this is interesting, and nobody would take us in the hotel because it was Shabbas. Abba was never allowed to go to Safed anymore. Abba never went back to Safed. His name was anathema because we drove in on Shabbas and we finally got into a private home. We came in through Egypt and had taken the train into Tel Aviv. That's the journey.

MLR: Now, when do you go to Cleveland as a rabbi?

JS: I go to Cleveland as assistant rabbi to Wolsey.

MLR: Mid-twenties? 1925?

JS: 1922, I go to Cleveland. Now, at that time Wolsey and Silver, now Wolsey was responsible for me going into the rabbinate. Wolsey and Silver, they weren't enemies, but they weren't really close friends. My friendship with Abba was an amelioration between the two because we would get together. I didn't have a cutaway for my first service in Cleveland and I had one of Abba's cut down. And the worst thing that happened to me, the first shabbas I was to speak as assistant rabbi. . . I have no idea what I said. Yes, he had a sense of humor. We went over on La Savoia on a ship to England, a small first-class freighter, and coming back we came back on a sister ship We'd been up rather late, I hadn't slept very well, and I got to sleep about five o'clock in the morning and

while we were in Egypt I bought some jewelry, candy, almonds, and the first thing I knew Abba was pelting me to wake me up and I found myself all covered up with candy. He had a sense of humor. He was fun to be with. He was fun to be with; his attitude except for one instance never changed toward me, as a pal rather than a fellow scholar. I'm really not as stupid as I am sounding, but there was a big difference intellectually between us.

MLR: Between most people and Abba.

JS: The peculiar thing about Abba was he never wrote as well as his sermons. His sermons were much more poetic and much more beautiful than. . . I remember one sermon he wrote that he had the line, "It is only after the flush of youth is given away to the wanness and sallowness of age when the fires of ambition are turned into the ashes of senile indifference, when the eyes grow dull, when the blood runs cold, and the spirit of restlessness departs from life, and in its place comes that weary langorous peace which is the first breath of death.

MLR: How do you remember that?

JS: I have a peculiar propensity, I haven't too good a memory, but if a passage strikes me. For instance, many many years ago I went to see a black play, and there were lines in it which I found I could quote, part of the play, maybe that's why I am in profession I really got into, but now the only readable book, if you want to know the truth, of Abba's, was Where Judaism Differed.

MLR: It's the most popular book.

JS: That's what I'm saying. Now his sermons were popular. I went to hear him at Carnegie Hall and he was the best forensic speaker that I've ever known. I went to hear him at Carnegie Hall.

MLR: When would that ahve been, approximately?

JS: About 1937, maybe 1940, 1941.

MLR: How do you explain it? Was it his delivery, his voice, his content?

JS: For instance, he started talking about the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis. He had content. There was the difference between him and Stephen Wise.

I must tell you a funny incident. When I was in Evansville Stephen Wise came to town, it was an NEA convention and he spoke at my temple. And I met him at the train and took him to dinner and hosted him at a reception. And Wise turned to me and he said, I understand, I know you're a great friend of Abba's so I can't say anything against him, but if you weren't a friend of his I would say this, and he went into this diatribe against Abba. Yes, he had a sense of humor but he was a man with a mission. Now, we lived out in Cleveland in the suburb of Gates Mills and I was going to New York about two, three times a year. And we had gotten one of these new automatic grass cutters, two double blades, and I had to try it, of course, and while going uphill my foot caught in the blade and tore my shoe and Abba came out. And I had just produced a play in New York, a stage play and I got on the train and Are you familiar with Cleveland?

MLR: Yes.

JS: And I got on the train and who should be there but Abba and we each had a compartment. He was going to New York. . . . And we spent most of the night talking. And I had said to Abba that I understood his concern for Israel but that I felt that he hadn't done much for Reform Judaism. And it was possible for him more than any other person in the city to do something for Reform Judaism. And we got into an argument. I said, what do you want out of life, and he thought, and while he was thinking I said you want to be president of Israel and he said "Yes." He once spoke of Moses standing on the top of the mountain overlooking the Promised Land and he had said that in all of his years of sorrow he had never seen the Promised Land and now he was old and God said you will never see the Promised Land. And Abba was Moses.

MLR: Well, how do you explain his

JS: My view may be very much prejudiced because I really knew the concentration and devotion that went into his rabbinate. I knew him.

MLR: But it strikes me that the logic of his life would have led him to move to Israel when Israel became a State and then if he had done that perhaps given

some major diplomatic position.

JS: I can't explain. I think you're right. I can't explain except it may be this. It may be that he knew two things: one, that he had to convert America to Israel and knew that money had to come from America to Israel. He once talked to me about giving up the rabbinate and lecturing because he was in great demand and I disagreed with him, you have to have a base. If you go out and lecture and you're a rabbi of nowhere you have no base. You have one of the outstanding pulpits of the United States and you ought to remain there. I don't know. It may have been the competitive thing, it may have been that he didn't want to leave the whole thing to Stephen Wise.

MLR: Well, Wise was pretty old and, I mean by 1948.

JS: I'm talking about earlier.

MLR: I mean that in 1948 after he had accomplished, you know, his goal of statehood, and here Israel was now a state, he had accomplished most of his goals. True, he still needed to raise money in the United States, but here's a man, now that you tell me if he might have wanted to be president all he had to do was to move to Israel.

JS: Let me tell you, I thought before if I should ever tell you that he wanted to be president, I'm repeating his words, yes, he did want to be president. Who could tell? Suppose I wanted to move to Israel permanently. There may be the matter of flesh pots. There are all these things because I'm like a flesh pot. I got to tell you a wonderful story about Abba. When he came to New York I used to see a lot of him when he wasn't busy and he called me one day and I said where you going for lunch and he said Lindy's;

Lindy's, do you know of Lindy's? So we went to Lindy's and he had some split pea soup with hot dogs in it and some pot roast and potato pancakes and a big piece of cheesecake. The reason I remember the menu so well is because of the cheesecake. So I said, "what are you doing for dinner?" and he had no plans so I said, come back to my place,

the St. Moritz. I had an apartment there,

and we'll have a drink and go to dinner. So Abba came back. I was a bachelor and I knew all the restaurants. . . (inaudible).

MLR: I want to ask you a little bit more about Wolsey and Silver and Cleveland when you were there. Di you have much contact, rabbinical contact, with Abba, that you recall while you were with Wolsey?

JS: What happened was this. You see, Wolsey was, all my life, Rabbi Wolsey. He confirmed me, so that I found myself gravitating much more towards Abba than I did towards Wolsey and Abba at that time was close friends with the rabbi of the conservative congregation, Goldman, who was a brilliant man. Did you know him?

MLR: Solomon Goldman. They had a falling out eventually.

JS: Later on, but at this time they're very close friends because we used to meet on Rosh Hashanah, the new year that I was there, after the services and Goldman and Abba and I to talk about our sermons. I could've killed him. I was so angry with myself. He and I had been in Haif and he, with the mosquito netting, he wakened me to show me the sunrise on Mt. Carmel. I had a hell of a time thinking about what to preach on Rosh Hashanah. I'm nervous all the time I'm in Cleveland, because Wolsey behind me and Abba near me.

Anyway, Goldman and Abba and I met after Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, at our meeting we had hamburgers and coffee and Goldman said that Silver delivered the most wonderful sermon. On Rosh Hashanah evening about waking a friend to see the sunrise on Mt. Carmel. The reverse was true. I had to wake him up in order to see it. Now, the relationship between them was respect for each other. The relationship between him and Brickner was a different story entirely. He, like I, like me, I disliked Brickner. In fact, one of the real sad things in my life is the fact that I got the job for Brickner. I knew him at college and

and I told Wolsey about it, but Brickner, you see . Are you interested in the Brickner relationship at all?

MLR: Very much.

JS: I don't know, maybe you liked Brickner.

MLR: I never met him.

JS: What I'm telling you is my viewpoint. When Barney came in, and I don't think he ever forgave me because at this time I liked him, when Barney came in I sat down with him because I'd been assistant rabbi of Wolsey's temple and grew up in the congregation and I thought I could give him some good advice. And I said to him, don't get competitive with Abba Silver. Now, you've got something he hasn't got and he has something you haven't got. You just give the best Sunday School in the world and Abba doesn't know anything about it. Don't go in competition as a speaker. Keep your Shabbos services.

The first think you know Barney started Sunday services and Abba killed him. Naturally, Brickner was a shriner. They didn't like each other and I must say this in the effect I'm prejudiced, but I believe that not liking each other was due mainly to Brickner. See, Abba didn't fear any competition. There was no competition between him and Wolsey because Wolsey was the kind of rabbi that ran a good school, and preached a quiet sermon, and visited the bereaved and was home all the time, so there was the difference.

MLR: What do you think happened between Silver and Goldman?

JS: That I never knew. That came after Abba. I liked Goldman very much at that time. I think I've told you the fact that we three used to get together.

MLR: That's interesting. Now, after you left Wolsey is that when you went to Evansville?

JS: Yes.

JS: Silver did something naughty.

He came twice, once, I think, at my installation, and the second time we had a forum and I had a series, a Catholic priest, a Protestant minister, a rabbi and a humanist, a guy by the name of Proctor, I think, was the humanist, the outstanding one. And they each spoke briefly, it was a forum. I am not sure right now whether we had a Protestant, but I left Abba to the last and Abba got up and he said the following: "It used to be when a Christian lost his faith in God he either sold insurance or something else. Now, when a Christian minister loses his faith in God he comes to you. I was sorry; I felt badly for the humanist. Evansville was crazy about him. An incident, a very personal incident. I ran out to Palestine.

In Egypt and I go in the post office and send a cable to my mother to cable me some money cause I've got to go and Abba comes in and looks over my shoulder and sees the telegram and cable and becomes very angry with me. He said, what would your mother think. The temple then was down on 55th St. and Scovill Ave. and Abba paid my way all the way. And at home I had two hundred dollars with Liberty Bonds so I went down to pay Abba back and he became sore again and I finally just laid the bonds on the table and walked out and it was in no way, no part of the compensation for the money we spent. He gave me a wonderful set of Talmud when I graduated that now resides in the library at the college in Los Angeles. Any other questions? I've rambled a lot.

JLR: No, you've covered a lot of interesting things. One thing that struck me when you were in Cleveland. Did you have a sense that since the services were on Sunday morning at the temple did you have a sense, first of all, that non-Jews, and secondly that maybe Conservative and Orthodox Jews, that is, non-Reform Jews, Silver had a very large appeal, didn't he? Would someone like yourself, for example, go over on Sunday morning and hear Silver sometimes or did you have the Religious School?

JS: I would have gone anywhere to hear Abba. Now, I had trouble reading him. I

had trouble reading him. Somebody said loyalty is a precious jewel (inaudible). This was with me and Abba. I read his book. As I told you there was only one readable book for the public.

MLR: Well, did you or Wolsey ever go over to hear Silver lecture on Sunday morning?

JS: I did. I heard Silver a number of times. Of course, I had Sunday School.

So it was difficult, but I snuck away a couple of times to hear Abba. I went to hear Abba whenever I had a chance. He had something to say.

MLR: Yes.

JS: He had content. His sermons were constructed a little bit along the traditional line. They had that beginning, middle, and an end.

MLR: Why do you think he didn't, you mentioned earlier that he didn't, you didn't feel that he did enough for the College.

JS: He did nothing.

MLR: Okay. Why do you think this was the case? Was he mad at people? He just had other interests and priorities?

JS: I am surprised at the question. He had one interest.

MLR: Israel.

JS: I told you, he was a man with a mission. I once said to Franz Werfel, he was a man with a mission. "Those are the kind of men," he said, "I have trouble with."

MLR: But you see, I ask this because Silver led the movement in Ohio for unemployment insurance in the early 30's. Silver was deeply involved in Cleveland politics. Silver was involved in a thousand things and there was time for whatever he wanted.

JS: That had to do with his temple. Insofar as I am concerned, I never heard him say one unhappy word about his experience at college. You know, he had a big problem though.

MLR: What's that?

JS: He had a problem in graduating, graduating university.

MLR: No, I don't know. At the University of Cincinnati?

JS: He couldn't get, what's the thing of rocks and soil on?

MLR: Geology?

JS: Wonderful story! Wonderful story! So he had to go to the University of Chicago during the summer to make up geology so he could pass.

MLR: I didn't know that.

JS: So a lot of us students went to the University of Chicago in the summer for postgraduate work. I walked into the Commons, I'm two days late, and who should be behind the ice cream counter but Abba, working in the Commons. Now we have five or six college guys line up with our trays and take free ice cream. He was tired the next day! The other story of him, the picture that I see constantly. There was a big flood in Dayton, Ohio, a big big flood, and the National Cash Register was in terrible trouble because of the Sherman anti-trust law and a group of us in Cincinnati got together a food train to take up to Dayton and we went up on a freight train to Dayton. We get in to National Cash Register and you couldn't wear your own clothes. I can still see the horses dragging things out. Now in the basement of National Cash they had a hall that must have been a quarter of a mile long and I see a fantastic figure walking by. It was Abba in a Boy Scout uniform! You could have died laughing. . . I don't know why. He was interested in his temple and those things may have come out of his interest in Cleveland and his viewpoint, but maybe he thought the College didn't need him. I'm not making any excuse but I was angry with him.

MLR: You know, in 1944, you know Rabbi Kramer, Bill Kramer, don't you?

JS: Yes.

MLR: In 1944 Silver hired Bill Kramer as his assistant and Kramer grew up in Cleveland.

JS: I didn't know that.

MLR: At Brickner's and then graduated from JIR. It struck me as somewhat surprising that Silver hired a Brickner person from JIR as his assistant given his troubles with lies. I never really figured that out.

MLR: I can't figure it out now. First of all, they hired Kramer. Well, it was a

young Kramer. What do you think from Silver's point of view, what do you think led him to his antagonism towards Wise? Do you think it was just two giants there wasn't room for.

JS: I don't believe Wise was a great speaker; sometime I'll tell you about him. I went to hear Wise, before the beginning of the war, before we ran into the First World War. He spoke at the Grand Theatre. He had Joint Distribution or something and he said, "It was my pleasure some years ago to visit the land of my ancestors," and he said, "when I leaned over to touch the sacred waters of the Jordan I heard a voice behind me say Jiid, Jiid. He was calling me a Jew in a derogatory manner." Wise said, "I turned to him and I said, 'My ancestors bathed in the Jordan long before your ancestors ever took a bath.'" Now, he was a great speaker. He didn't have the mind, I don't think, I didn't know him. He was great for a young rabbi. When he spoke from your pulpit, this was everybody's pulpit, the rabbi of that congregation was the man he would have liked to succeed him! Two weeks afterwards I lived in an aura, in Evansville.

MLR: That's interesting.

JS: Let me ask you some questions now. How have you found Abba? You've interviewed many people, have you?

MLR: No. I would ask you perhaps better questions but I've only interviewed three people. I'm just beginning to work on this.

JS: They were on a different sphere.

Yes.

JS: Different relationships.

MLR: No, the wonderful thing about this interview is that everything you've told me I can't find in any sources. There are no documents in the archives that tell me any of the things that you've told me. These are personal -

JS: You see, this is what I thought about would interest you. This was a relation of two very very good friends and Abba is very much alive in my heart today. To show you, the College gets out these photographs, these posters. The only poster

I have in my room is Abba's.

MLR: From the American Jewish Archives?

JS: Yes. I only have one and he made a big impression on my life as one of the guys that I thought the most of.

MLR: Yes. What years were you at the College?

JS: I went to college, I think, in 1914, no, it must have been 1912. I had just turned 15.

MLR: You were there for about eight or nine years?

JS: I was there ten years, but a year and a half (which made a big difference in my life) about a year and a quarter in the army, and I was in charge of religious and social entertainment at the Jewish Welfare Board from Pittsburgh to Denver. So I lived in upper berths 25 days out of the month.

MLR: Did you know Sol Freehof at HUC?

JS: He was a professor, he taught me for awhile. Sure, I knew Sol very much.

MLR: Because he was a student at that time.

JS: Yes, but they had senior students as teachers. I think I had only one course with Sol. I knew Sol very well. I was never close to Sol, never close to Sol, I don't think Abba was close to Sol.

MLR: I don't think so either.

JS: As I said to you before, now there were other guys there that I pal'd with, especially after Abba graduated, but before then most of the time with Abba. I had a brother who was a mining engineer who told Abba dirty stories. Abba loved it. He presided at his funeral, too; he officiated at my brother's funeral and he liked Harry. Harry was a totally different kind of guy. Harry played football at Case and he was that kind of a guy and Abba was very fond of him as well as my mother and father. Let me ask you a question. What happened to your predecessor that was supposed to write the ?

MLR: He died.

JS: What happened with

MLR: Who knows what happened?

JS: When the time came for dinner she (Virginia) wasn't feeling well. We made the date and she wasn't feeling well so Dan came instead. First of all, I had a couple too many drinks, I think, because I guess I was worried about how I would feel towards his son and I had felt, thought he wrote me that it was a lovely evening, I hadn't felt it was a satisfactory evening in getting to know him or him getting to know me at all. So I really don't know Danny at all. (Machine turned off so he could tell something about Virginia).

