At a certain point, he sits behind the table as a matter of where he was. I am on the other side of the table sitting as well. He is in front of me. And then like with hatred, frustration after I gave him all the material. Then he says so what can I do. So what can I do what I am not doing? I do everything.
I did everything
what is possible,

so what they want me to do?

What can I do?

So then I also have
anger that time.

Then I gave it
away, close my eyes.

Jews are dying.

There will be no Jews.

What is use having
Jewish leaders?

Let the Jews go to the
most important offices,
Allied offices.

Let them demand.

If they are refused, let them go out.

Let them stay outside.

Let them refuse drinks.

Let them refuse food.

Let them die.

Let them die slow death.

Let humanity see it.

Perhaps it will move humanity.

And then he jumps.

Madness, madness, madness, they are mad.
They are mad.

The whole world is mad.

The madness, madness.

They are crazy.

They don't understand anything.

They will not let me die.

They will send two policemen.

They will arrest me.

They will take me to an asylum.

They will feed me artificially.

This is madness, madness.

They are mad.

Everybody's mad.

So I have to do something.
But I don't know what.

So what can I do?

I have to do it, but I don't know what.

So what to do?

Pacing.

Madness, madness.

This is a mad world.

I have to do.

I don't know what to do.

So what do I do?

I was sitting here.

Just there.
Then he sat down.

Then he began-- became somehow more rational as if more friendly.

Yes, he is then-- he did begin to ask me questions.

How am I doing?

Is it very difficult?

Personal questions.

He knew about my previous missions.

Is it difficult on me.

Rather more friendly.

Then I left.

Did you think that --
That he was in a--

already in complete desperation.

No, this is the point.

For a moment, I did not have any doubt.

He is not mad.

He is totally normal.

I did not detect any kind of what today we call the--

call psychiatry calls --

He was a leader.

Only he was lost in helplessness.

Helplessness?

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media. It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.
Helplessness.

91 00:04:30,820 --> 00:04:37,180
And apparently with my now report, this showed up.

92 00:04:37,180 --> 00:04:45,100
He looked to me almost hateful towards everybody--

93 00:04:45,100 --> 00:04:50,260
the Polish government,
the Allies, the world.

94 00:04:50,260 --> 00:04:57,370
It was this total helplessness,
which he couldn't take.

95 00:04:57,370 --> 00:05:01,030
He couldn't control himself.

96 00:05:01,030 --> 00:05:02,560
Then, of course, I knew.

97 00:05:02,560 --> 00:05:06,890
Everybody knew about Zygielbojm
He was a prominent leader.

98 00:05:06,890 --> 00:05:10,780
He was a member of
the council et cetera.

99 00:05:10,780 --> 00:05:14,320
He was a genuine leader doing his best.

100 00:05:14,320 --> 00:05:18,850
Only in that particular conversation,

101 00:05:18,850 --> 00:05:24,520
somehow we didn't establish common grounds.
He was the only man I reported.

It was a long conversation?

Yes.

It must have been long.

As a matter of fact, I was embarrassed.

He was keeping me then.

He said that-- he said I know everything and he was keeping you.

After his break so then again he said and then started to ask me personal questions, sympathetic.
And then questions you know about Poland, about how Bund leader looked, how Zionists--

they look undernourished, those human questions.

And then the conversation was long.

What I don't mention by the way in my book--

and it may sound cynical.

Remember at that time, I was a machine.

In the second part of my meeting,

I was thinking only about one thing--

if he keeps me longer, I am going
to be late for my next appointment.

At that time, all my life consisted from one contact to another, from one man to another--

eating, sleeping, reporting, if possible coming on time to the meeting.

All people I was reporting were very important people.

And I was an insignificant little man.

My mission was important.

So I kept myself under control.

And this perhaps, it shows that at that time I was in a way morally corrupted because with my previous record, I took it so to say for granted.
Whomever I saw, everybody was showing me respect or admiration.

Everybody was complimenting me.

Second poem, whatever I said.

A few minutes ago, it was like he didn't want to show it.

He would-- he was suspicious.

And do you think that the demands you ask from him--

the demands for the Jews in Poland--

have had influence on his suicide,

which he committed six months later as a matter of fact.

No.
Exactly six months.

He committed suicide on the May 11, 1943.

This was just a few days after the Warsaw ghetto totally destroyed as a result of the genuine Jewish declaration of war against Germany.

Then only a few days later, he committed suicide.

He left a letter.

I have, of course, the text of his letter.

The letter addressed to the president of the Polish Republic.

In this letter he reproached the Polish government, the Allied governments--
Do you think that as a request you made to him from the Jews in Poland are the direct influence on his suicide, which he committed exactly six months later?

I don't know.
I prefer to think not.

00:11:15,000 --> 00:11:17,310
What can I tell you?

00:11:17,310 --> 00:11:18,120
But I think yes--

00:11:18,120 --> 00:11:22,900
It is not a very comfortable idea to live with--

00:11:22,900 --> 00:11:26,370
as you mentioned and I mentioned in my book-- oh, yes,

00:11:26,370 --> 00:11:29,740
I think about it.

00:11:29,740 --> 00:11:35,010
But I defended myself as much as I can.

00:11:35,010 --> 00:11:39,830
But I will tell you about Zygielbojm

00:11:39,830 --> 00:11:46,100
Of course, I cannot escape it that often I have to think

00:11:46,100 --> 00:11:54,320
about what happened to the Jews during the Second World War.

00:11:54,320 --> 00:11:59,300
And it may be a result of still self-discipline and still

00:11:59,300 --> 00:12:03,620
emotional self-defense.
In my memories, even when I teach my classes and I have to touch the war situation in Eastern Europe, I don't go back to my memories of the Jewish ghetto, or of Belzec.

I don't speak about it. You avoid it? I avoid it.

When I teach, when I speak, when I discuss, when I think myself as you can imagine for a year, I had nightmares, and I disciplined myself.
The Jewish problem during the Second World War in my mind is the death of Zygielbojm, death of the Zygielbojm.

This is what shows, this total helplessness,

indifference of the world, indifference of the world,

and the Jews perishing.

And that Jews perished, and you have a Jewish leader.

His name is Zygielbojm.

And he says I am a leader, Jewish leader.

There are no more Jews.

I go with them.

They don't need leaders.
The death of a Zygielbojm for me shows more than anything else Jewish tragedy of the Second World War.

About him I speak.

You forced me into this interview about the ghetto and Belzec.

I don't go there.

When I have free will, I do go to Zygielbojm.

I didn't have one single class in 20 years of teaching the course governments and politics of Eastern Europe.

When I come to the war situation,
I did not tell my students there was Zygielbojm.

Well--

You remember his last letter?

Oh, yes.

The letter was friendly as a matter of fact,

written in a rather matter of fact way.

No violent recriminations, very measured style.

It was addressed to the president of the Polish Republic but also to the Allied governments.
and the public opinion of the world stating what I said, that Jews perished.

You will go with him--

And then he hopes that perhaps his death will arouse

the consciousness of the world.

Oh, I know his letter.

Then he finished the letter in a very humane way.

Goodbye, friends.

I wish you success.
Goodbye.

Signed Szmul Zygielbojm.

And this was after the end of the--

A few days after the end of the ghetto, the Jewish war against the Third Reich.

Well.