

BOBINE N° 286

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BOBINE 286 suite INTERVIEW DU DOCTEUR LANDAU

NEW YORK 143

Qu : Mr Landau, I would like to know when did you meet Rabbin Weismandel for, for the first time ? And do you recall vividly your first meeting with him ?

Re : Of course, because I remember quite well when he came with a transport in April 44

Qu : 45

Re : 45, april 45, he came as a transport to Switzerland by Mr Kastler and he came to Toronto because he had friends in Toronto.

Qu : Just to Toronto ?

Re : Toronto, excuse me, he came to Montreux in Switzerland where I lived. I mentioned Toronto because I live now in Toronto. And he met the first time in apartment of one member of our committee Mr Ugo Daunebaum which is mentioned quite often in his letters and his cables..... Mr Ugo Daunebaum, he was very much upset that he did not do enough, he said it was possible to do quite a lot, more than we did, he was even so enraged that he hit me, he was hitting, he really hit me with his fist he was running after me, I was running around the table, he was running after me until he catch up with me and hit me with his fist and say "why did you do this, why did you not do more, you could have done much more".

Qu : Can you describe precisely the first moments of the meeting ?

Re : The first moment of the meeting, I think I cannot remember exactly ...

Qu : Were you, were you surprised by ...

Re : I was not surprised, I knew that he was coming, I heard about it and he was quite a famous person in this time already, so I was

...

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Re : Quite curious to meet him and he may...

Qu : Excuse me, did you ever see before a picture of him ?

Re : No, I never saw a picture of him, no, but I was told he is quite a famous man and we knew about him and we, because, in during the whole years before, we got several letters, quite a few letters, we got some cables when we know that he was leading in rescue work, together with some other members of his committee, like Mrs Giss Fleischman and we were curious to meet him, of course, we were glad to see him, that he was safe.

Qu : Yes.

Re : So, when, he, when I met him the first time, I think Mr _____ met him before I met him, I was very much impressed. He was in very bad sit...very bad mood. I thought he would be a little bit more relaxed now he is out of danger of life, but he was not.

Qu : He was not relaxed at all ?

Re : He was not relaxed at all, he was always thinking what could have been done, what he did not do himself, he said, he, himself, could have done more. But it was impossible, he did not have enough money. The whole question was money, money, money. I mean, he heard that we could have had more money from the States, but he believed he was more enraged.

Qu : This was in 1945, when everything was...It was very...

Re : For him, it was like a catastrophe, he knew he could do something and he didn't do, for him... for him, it's like his own life,

Qu : Yes,

Re : And he'll thought himself that he jumped, he jumped, I know, you know that he jumped from the deportation train and I remember quite well how he explained that he looked up a board in a car and he told his wife also to jump but it seems she was afraid or something. I don't know why she did not jump. Then he thought he

Re : should not have left his wife and children in the train, he should have come with them to death but on another side, he said I go thinking that I could do quite more when I jumped and try to do some rescue work than go to the death, to the gas-chamber.

Qu : This is the reason why he jumped, why he escaped ?

Re : That's what he told me. I don't think it's written somewhere in his book, I can't remember exactly...

Qu : He said ...

Re : He said he jumped because he could more useful for jewish people or for the world when he saved his life and try to do some more rescue work.

Qu : But in the same time, he felt guilty...

Re : He felt guilty till he left his wife and children alone...

Qu : Yes, what do you think, you, about this ?

Re : Of course, I think he has the right to jump because we know that when you are in danger of your life, you don't look for others, you have to look for yourself first.

Qu : Who is "we" ?

Re : The human being. I think that everybody would do the same thing. If you had to choose either to go in the gas-chamber together with your family or to save your own life or not be able to save the life of your family, you will try to save your life.

Qu : Yes, but there are people who can make, or who made, as a matter of fact, a different choice.

Re : But, I don't think we can judge if we are not in the situation. I don't know myself how I would act.

Qu : Yes, well, you said that he hit you.

Re : He hit me, he hit me with his fist...

Qu : Really or was it...

Re : No, no, really, he hit me on my back with his fist...

...

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Qu : And what did he say when he ...

Re : He said : Why didn't you do more, you could have saved us. Why did not you do more ?

Qu : And he hitted everybody on the...

Re : No, I was alone with him.

Qu : You were alone with him...

Re : I was alone.

Qu : He was in which state, in which condition ?

Re : He was not a healthy man at this time, but his mind was clear, his mind was clear, 100 % clear.

Qu : His mind was clear...

Re : Clear, yes, but he was much depressed, he was depressed but his mind was clear.

Qu : How did the depression showed itself ?

Re : The depression that he was always thinking what could he have done, what he did not do and could have done and why did I leave my family and why did I jumped that is the depression and also, I don't know if I should say it or not. Once, he was living in the same hotel as I and my family lived, we lived door to door, even my wife told me once : are you married with Mr Weissmandel or married with me ?

Qu : Why ?

Re : Because I spent so much time with him.

Qu : Why did you spend so much time with him ?

Re : Because he was so very interesting person, it was very interesting to listen to him and we...

Qu : And what was...

Re : And he explained all the possibilities he had, when he told me about the treatment

Wisliceny

representative of Judenrat, in Slovaquia

...

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Re : And I was listening to him and so I spent most of my time and the same with my free time...

Qu : This was the principal content, main content of your...

Re : Always discussing what could have been done and what was not done, and one day, in the morning, I came to his room, and he was lying in a coma...

Qu : He was in the coma ?

Re : In the coma, it seems that he took too many sleeping pills..

Qu : What was it ? It was an attempt of suicide ?

Re : He suffered sleepless. He could not sleep during the night, so Dr. Daunebaum, who was pharmacist, gave him some sleeping pills and he took them regularly and he said it helped and this day, it seems he took too many sleeping pills. I don't think he did it by purpose, it must have been either not thinking, I don't know whatever ;

Qu : What, he took the whole ?

Re : He took the whole bottle, it must have been about 20 pills.

Qu : And he was in the coma ?

Re : He was in a real coma. We called in the doctor and the doctor sent him right to the hospital, pumped out his stomach and saved, I think it will be done, he will die within 24 hours...

Qu : They said he will die ?

Re : He will die 100 %.

Qu : And what happened ?

Re : We called another doctor from a bigger city because Montreux is a small city. So we called a doctor from Lausanne and he was of the same opinion, he also came in and said : I don't think he can live more longer than 24 hours. Meantime all Switzerland was up. Weismandel was a famous person dying so one of the gentlemen and I

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Re : think Mr _____ said he has one of the biggest professors, specialist heart specialist, a certain Professor, Professor Leufler to come to Switzerland, to Montreux, he had traveled the whole night.

Qu : He came from where ?

Re : From Zurich to Montreux. He traveled the whole night, came in hospital, took off his coat, to the sick person, Weismandel and said : who dares to call me to a dead person ? Took his coat, came home and sent us a bill for 12 hundred swiss francs, which we paid of course, and at one o'clock, no, it was half past twelve, I think, the nurse said, look, now, the foam is coming out of his mouth, another half hour, and he is gone.

Qu : The foam is...

Re : The foam from the mouth, so about two, three o'clock, we were discussing we should not call his brother, he had a brother in London, we should call him to come over, he lifted his head and said : I don't need my brother, don't call him, and went to sleep.

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Re : Don't call my brother, don't call him, I don't need him, and he went back to sleep and after a few hours he waked again and said a few words and a few days later he could leave the hospital and came back to the hotel.

Qu : Did you discuss with him...

Re : We did not talk about this. Mr Donebaum talked to him and he said he did not know that he took so many sleeping pills. He was thinking he took only one or two. But I don't know, maybe in his sub-conscious, he wanted to commit suicide, but I don't think as an orthodox jew, specially him, who was very orthodox, he would never done a single thing people would have know about his doing.

Qu : Because, can you explain this, for an orthodox jew...

Re : It is the biggest crime a man can commit, to take his own life. The life that God has given you, you have no right to take it away from other people and not from yourself.

Qu : This is a law ?

Re : A jewish law, and him, as a rabbin, and an orthodox jew, he would not do anything against the law.

Qu : Yes, but in spite of the fact that maybe it was not a conscious attempt of...

Re : That's what I am saying, it could be a sub-conscious, but if he was conscious when he took his sleeping pills, I am sure, a 100 % sure, that he did not want to commit suicide.

Qu : It shows how much disturbed...

Re : He was, he was disturbed in these times.

Qu : And he was disturbed ...

Re : But he was not unconscious, he knew what he was doing. It's why I don't understand how he could have done.

Qu : And he was disturbed in his behaviour ?

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Re : In his behaviour, yes, he walked around, talking to himself,

Qu : In Montreux ?

Re : In Montreux, yes, not always, but sometimes.

Qu : How did he do this ?

Re : He walked in the streets, talking.

Qu : And what were the symptoms of this...

Re : People saw him walking and moving his lips. I think what he was talking to himself was : what did I do, why did I jump or why did not I do more, why did not I saved more people, I could have saved more people, if I would have this possibilities...

Qu : Yes, you think that this question...

Re : But, I, Excuse me, go ahead.

Qu : You think that this question of rescue was ...

Re : It was his main moto, it was his main topic, the whole time he was in Switzerland, this was, was it. Of course, he took part later in our discussions how to help the refugees, d.p, displaced persons in Germany, and he gave me good advice, he was clear but his main topic was on this rescue.

Qu : What could have been done...

Re : What could have been done and what has not been done.

Qu : Yes...

Re : And in fact, I was of the same opinion because I remember myself I heard latest today, that was a few years later, that world jewry should have a tribunal on everybody who was able to do something should Din that's a hebrew expression, he should, he proove for everything that he could have done and did not do, he should be judged for

Qu : You think that the world jewry was guilty...

Re : world jewry was guilty because, of course, outside it's easy but in these years 42, 43, it seems th t there was a possibility

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Re : To save more people with money, because there were corrupt people under the German and the proof is Mr Wisliceny, and deportation was stopped for 2 years and so there was quite a possibility to save jews if the money would have been available.

Qu : Well, now, can you explain precisely what was the bargaining of Weismandel with the nazzis, when did it start and what did he achieved and what not.

Re : Yes, he started when I remember he started his dealings with Wisliceny in the year 41 or 42.

Qu : 42

Re : 41, 42, I think 42 and he promised him in this time an amount of 50 thousand dollars for this German would stop deportation for about 2 years.

Qu : For the Jews of Czechoslovakia...

Re : For the jews of Czechoslovakia and he gave him an advance payment of 25 thousand dollars and promised him the balance within a certain time. I think it was about 6, 7 weeks and the deportation stopped. After 7 weeks the money was not available and Wisliceny started to deport jews again from Slovakia to Dachau, the committees, the rescue committees in Bratislava asked Budapest to help them and they got the 25 thousand dollars and gave it to him, Wisliceny told him then, you see, your people, you have to be persecuted before you do something. Why did not you bring the 25 000 dollars right away ? It would have saved quite a few people and then the deportation stopped for 3 years.

Qu : But did you, did Weismandel really believed in this deals, did he believed very deeply...

Re : In the years 42-43, till maybe 44, he believed in it. The best proof is its letters which he wrote quite frequently to Switzerland.

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Qu : Yes, because the letters are extremely strong.

Re : The letters are not only strong, they give the whole heart, if you are allowed to read a few of these letters.

Qu : Yes, I have.

Re : I have a few translations to you in English, the letters are written in Hebrew but we translated some in English if I now read you some extract, for instance a letter which he wrote in 43. He writes bearing already a new wave of deportation.

Qu : Which he wrote to who ?

Re : He wrote it to, the letter was addressed to some person in Switzerland and he writes an end, we will come to it to whom the letter should be shown.

Qu : And you got this letter ?

Re : We got this letter, in Switzerland, for instance, he starts one letter : "we beg of you with tears running from our eyes, you have but one obligation : to raise money and money and money in large quantities

what should be done and what not, you have everything in your hands. There are many lifes to save and it is a pity for the one which are already lost there are many ways to save but there is only one thing missing that we cannot get hold of and that is the money. So, please, do what ever you can any more if you had the power to in this letter how good would it be then we would put them on to go, tell them, cry to them about the soul of old people who were stocked with a sword, shot tell them about the souls of hundred of thousand of the jews.

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Re : Children, the pure children murdered in the camps, children buried alive, one thousand in one grave, tell them about the souls of the thousands that were suffocated by smoke in the death houses cry about the pure souls of about all you know that have the possibility to give money. And so on and so on.

Qu : It is a very...

Re : If I read this letter, I get myself tears in the eyes because I remember that in this time we were mightless, we sent also letters transmitted later on letters to America say : try to do something but they did not do enough. They sent us money and we sent the money away to Slovakia but they see in other letters that there were only drops in the sea.

Qu : In the sea.

Re : In the sea.

Qu : Yes, but Weismandel was always asking for gigantic sums...

Re : Yes, he had a plan to save the whole jews of all Europe, occupied land, you heard about, I don't know if you heard about Europa plan

Qu : Europa plan, it was a completely mad idea, no ?

Re : It was a mad idea but it was, we don't know, maybe it would have succeeded, we don't know. Later on we did some deals with the Germans, in 45, and got out a few, about 1.200 jews. We promised only money, we did not give them the money, we promised only money. Of course, in this time, it was a little bit different in 45 because it was not a matter of money, it was the end of the war.

Qu : It was the end of the war.

Re : And the germans were looking for some to get a good price but we don't know, maybe yes, maybe no, we don't know. We cannot judge now and Weismandel himself in 44 he always, he writes the

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Re : are two possibilities.

Qu : Yes, but this we will come later on.

Re : Yes.

Qu : But when you in Switzerland, when you received this letter, this desperate cables,

Re : Yes, we were shocked.

Qu : The letters of Weismandel.

Re : We were shocked.

Qu : You were shocked ?

Re : We were shocked and believe me if he writes, he did not deal with the Germans, he dealt with the Germans maybe it's right maybe he can have and he sent letters to Mr Steinboch and sent letters, we had a polish legation to New York and also we had a consul general, no a delegation of United States in Berne who sent the letters because the war refugee board was not yet established.

QU : established.

Re : It was just the beginning of the rescue work and I remember the name, I think it was Consul Vultz, he was very cooperative, he took all the cables and sent them to...

Qu : But I would like to know what did you believed exactly...

RE : In this time, we believed that there is a possibility to Weismandel.

Qu : You believed about the fact...

Re : Yes, we believed that when he writes that he has the possibility to save souls with money, we believed 100 %.

Qu : This, you believed.

Re : Yes, 100 %

Qu : And of course, you believed about what he said about the killing about...

Re : Sure, we knew from other sources too.

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Qu : Yes, you were completely aware of what...

Re : Of what was going on.

Qu : Of the genocide of the jews.

Re : We were quite aware, in fact, we were the first one to transmit the story of the killings to the United States..

Qu : Yes, but you believed like him that money...

Re : Money could save people.

Qu : Money could save.

Re : Yes, also when he asked, the biggest letter he asked for money to save jews from Poland who came to bring them by smugglers out from Poland into Slovakia and from Slovakia later on Hungary, and he succeeded to save quite a few hundred people, but he did not have enough money to hire more smugglers.

Qu : Yes, this was in the years 42-43.

Re : 43.

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LANDAU

(Suite)

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C.L. I am convinced you believed in the reports of Weissmandel, but were you as sure as he was - *were you so sure*
I mean at the time, in 1942, 1943 - about the real possibilities of rescue through money?

L. In '42 and mid-'43 we still were 100% sure there was a possibility. Of course we understood it would not be possible to save all the Jews in the occupied countries because they had already started to kill quite a lot of people in Poland and so on; and at this time we didn't know that Hungary would also be totally destroyed, but we were sure that when Weissmandel *wrote* ~~wrote~~ that he had some possibility to save the Jews (or some of them), that he would do it.

C.L. And the amount of money he was asking...?

L. At this time we thought maybe 100, 200 dollars per person. But when we got the other letters where he writes that he needs millions and millions of dollars, we began to get a little bit sceptical about whether it would be possible to raise the money.

C.L. To raise the money?

L. That he could still do it, we were quite sure. That was our opinion. We didn't know, but it was our opinion that he wouldn't have asked if he had not seen the possibility. Later on, in '44, when he started to write quite different letters: that there were two ways...

C.L. Because it seems there were really two periods in his...

L. In his own opinion. At the beginning I think he was 100% sure that what he wanted, he could succeed in.

C.L. I have the feeling that during the first period he was acting...

L. He was acting in the old Talmudic way, that you have to bribe the Gentiles if you want to save Jewish lives. You have to buy them, and you have to bribe them. This was, in the Middle Ages and in olden times, always the case. If you bribed the Gentile he would save you; if you didn't bribe him you were lost. It was the only way to fight him: to bribe him.

C.L. This is the reason why money was so important for the Jews.

L. For him, sure.

C.L. And for the Jews.

L. For the Jews too. That is also why the Jews had

to have money. First of all they were persecuted so much that they didn't even succeed in amassing property and things like that. They had to have liquid money to save themselves. Furthermore, they knew that with money they could help themselves.

C.L. And Weissmandel...

L. Weissmandel was thinking in this way. I don't think in the beginning he had the intention to fight in the way he later on wanted us to act.

C.L. During the first period he acted absolutely as a non-violent....

L. Non-violent 100%.

C.L. He refused violence?

L. He refused violence. He never mentioned it.

C.L. But what is interesting, there is another letter of him...

L. There is a letter there where he writes both ways. He gives us the possibility... You can see that he is fighting within himself - Which way is the correct way? Shall he try the old way of the intermédiaire, to bribe people, or would it be better to fight them with terror? He himself thought...

C.L. With terror?

L. With terror. I remember he told me once he had amassed some dynamite already. When he was in hiding he bought dynamite and he wanted to cut off the tracks where the deportation trains came from

Hungary to Poland. But I can't remember why he didn't continue with this.

C.L. There were even two members of his Yeshiva.

L. Yes, one of his pupils wanted to sacrifice himself, and said "I have to die anyway; let me do it". But it was never done.

(ensemble)

C.L. Can you elaborate a little more about the fact that Weissmandel was a reincarnation of the prophet?

L. Of course, if you want to hear something...

L. He was a real incarnation... The very interesting thing is that he himself didn't want to make the decision. He wanted us, or the Jews in America, to make the decision which way he should act; if he should act in the way he started his dealings with the Germans, or if he should use the way of terror.

C.L. Can you summarise these two ways?

L. I can read you a few sentences of this letter.

It is I think written in '44, some time in '44...

C.L. The end of May '44.

L. He writes, for instance...

C.L. Read it slowly please.

L. "There are two ways to work: one: both assumptions are possible(?), that in spite of the terrible killings and the horrible deceit the German offer is real..."

C.L. This means the German offer to negotiate...

L. To negotiate with him.

"...On the other side, we have no expressions that can explain to you how much we believe that, though there are certainly more than enough reasons not to believe them, we have to conduct our action and intention on the grounds that the intention is real. We have to end the negotiations in the best way, in their eyes, that ^(what) happened in the summer of '42 should in no circumstances happen again." This means we should not let them down and pay the amounts asked. This was assumption (a).

C.L. One minute. We must try to be clear. He means that in '42 they couldn't go on with their dealings because they had no money.

L. No money, and he is afraid that if he starts negotiations again and doesn't come up with the money it would be even worse. It should not happen again.

C.L. This means he wants to go on in the traditional way. But as a matter of fact he doesn't believe the Germans, he has the feeling that he must act as if

L. ... as if he wants to do so. But he says in this letter that he still believes the Germans mean it.

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L. It is very interesting. If you look at the letters

we got from Rabbi Weissmandel, he changed his own opinion. In the beginning, as I mentioned before, he was always against terror, against violence. Everything had to be done by dealing with the Germans. But later on, when he saw that he didn't know exactly if he would succeed in these dealings, or if the dealings alone would help, he started to change his mind. He gives us two possibilities:..

C.L. Yes, but this is a letter which was written...(?)

L. Much later. This letter which we got from him, I think it was in May (I have marked it down somewhere...) it was written at the end of May 1944, when the deportations from Hungary had already started and he saw every day the trains passing by with his own eyes and hundreds of thousands of Jews perished - then it came to his mind that dealings alone don't help. He has to go the other way, to start bombing trains or tearing up the tracks of the cars and not rely only on dealings. He writes in his letter: "There are two ways..." he himself gives us two ways; one way ('assumption (a)', he calls it), that we should try further to deal with the Germans - maybe they mean it, maybe you can believe them. And on the other side, maybe they do this only to bring us peace of mind that *we* the Jews in Slovakia or Hungary think the Germans want to deal with them so it would be easier for them to deceive them and deport them.

I can talk from my own experience because I was myself for quite a while under German rule. I was a member of the Judenrat in Belgium until, in 1942, we got the order from the Germans to collect all the names of all the Jews for certain purposes. We didn't think it was for deportation, and of course we followed them, their regulations. We collected all the names and gave them all the lists, and later on they came to everybody in the house... the only thing that was still good in this time was that they didn't take us right out from our homes and houses - they invited us to appear before a certain camp, and from this camp later on we (?) were deported. When I got this letter, although I was a member of the Judenrat and could have been saved, I preferred to leave the country and I went irregularly to Switzerland.

C.L. When you got which letter?

L. A letter from the Germans in Belgium (telling) people to come to the camp in Malines. I knew what was going on, I didn't believe they would send us to work camps - I felt it would be the end of us. So I decided, with my wife, to pack up and go irregularly to Switzerland.

C.L. And you stopped being a member of the Judenrat?

L. Sure, I left it. And in fact I was told later on that in fact I was the first member of the Judenrat

and when they heard I had left the country everybody went to my parents-in-law for the name or the address of the smuggler who brought us to Switzerland.

C.L. Do you think it was wrong as a general policy from the side of the Judenrat - it happened everywhere, as a matter of fact, to agree to give the names of the Jews to the Germans?

L. The Judenrat should not have cooperated, but it did, unfortunately. In fact I remember a case when I arrived in Switzerland: we were sent by the Swiss to a prison for illegal entry into the country, so a man comes to me and says: "Are you not Mr Landau?"

I said "Yes".

"Were you in the Judenrat in Belgium?"

"Yes". He takes my two hands and shakes hands...

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L. He takes my two hands and says "Mr Landau, I have to thank you. You saved my life."

I asked him "How can you say this? I don't know you."

"You don't remember? I came to you in the Judenrat and asked you 'What shall I do?' And you told me 'Sell your factory and go to Switzerland'. I went

home, and the same day I sold my factory and I came irregularly to Switzerland, so don't I have to thank you for saving my life?"

It was not my intention, I knew as much as he knew, but I gave him just advice because I felt that if the Jews in Belgium stayed they would perish. That is only to tell you what the dealing was.

C.L. But you think it would have been better not to comply with the orders of the Germans.

L. Of course. At this time I was thinking that it was not right to cooperate. All the members of the Judenrat, especially the President and so on, acted in good faith, but they didn't have enough wisdom to see what was going on and what would happen.

C.L. And what would have happened if this policy of non-cooperation had been realised?

L. They would have been deported or replaced by other people who would maybe have complied. We don't know, but what would have saved a lot of people, because the Germans didn't know all the addresses of the Jews in Belgium and quite a few of those people who didn't register saved their lives. They were hidden by Gentiles and came out alive.

C.L. Do you think - because this is an accusation that is often given - that the members of the Judenrat in many cases complied because they intended to save their own lives - that they knew that if they

didn't comply they would have been the first ones?

L. That could be. Also I think they didn't realise what they were doing. But if you are the head of the Judenrat and take responsibility for the whole of Jewry in your city or your country, you have to be more clever. And unfortunately, besides some exceptions, like the president of the community in Lodz, when he was forced to give a certain amount of children every day for the concentration camps, he took his life.

C.L. No.

L. Oh, yes.

C.L. No, you made a mistake. It was not Litzmanstadt(?), it was Warsaw.

L. Warsaw, excuse me.

C.L. Czerniakow, not Runkowski.

L. So we had better go back to what we said about Weissmandel. If you read in his letters, you see he changed his mind. He saw that the old way, the Talmudic way, the historical way to try to bribe was not good any more. When he saw the trains from Hungary rolling and rolling, and he knew - he got messages from Auschwitz - that they were killed there, then he decided to start with the other way.

C.L. This was after he met the two escapees from Auschwitz, Rudolf Verba and Movavicz(?).

L. He writes in his letters that he leaves it up to

the Jews of America to decide which way he should take - if he should take the old way, which he calls 'assumption(a)', or if he should start with violence, 'assumption(b)'. In the other way he himself gives orders; we got cables from him where he gives instructions to bomb the tracks...

C.L. What were exactly the two assumptions?

L. May I read it to you aloud?

C.L. If you like, but slowly and clearly.

This means that there were two hypotheses, (a) and (b).

L. Yes. He calls it 'assumption (a)' and 'assumption (b)'.

Assumption (a) - I think I read it already to you - that "In spite of the terrible killings" and so on. Then he starts with assumption (b): "It is possible and probable, that all is a lie, an attempt to disguise and mislead. They negotiate in order to arouse our confidence and believe in them in order to diminish the resistance of the Jews. They negotiate in order to delay any moral resistance, such as radio and papers. If there are negotiations the Jews would determine the public opinion and probably crush any resistance. Though we have to base our behaviour on the inside on regarding the money on assumption (a), theoretically and practically we have to accept assumption (b)..."

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- L. Allow me to read the letter with assumption (a) from Weissmandel, if you are interested.
- "And therefore assumption (a) is possible, that in spite of the terrible killings and the horrible deceit, the Germans' offer is real. Some heads, those who make decisions, and possibly those who conceive Himmler's ideas, or at least influence him, believe that they can put the burden of the past on Hitler and Himmler and that the present and future they can ride by themselves and by this buy their right for the next world". This means they get a good press and after the war they will go free. "A." he says (Weissmandel), "one has to give immediately and in real, not only in words, possibly more money and less goods. B. One has to work with both ways. C. We have no expressions to explain to you how much we believe that though there are certainly more than enough reasons not to believe them, we have to conduct our action and intention by the ground that their intention is real, and we have to end the negotiations in the best way in their eyes."
- C.L. This is very interesting, because he says there are enough reasons not to believe them...
- L. Not to believe them, but in the other way we have to continue.

C.L. We have to act as if...

L. ...as if we ...(?).

C.L. As if they meant it.

L. Yes. And what happened in the summer of '42 should under no circumstances happen again. That means it (as?) shouldn't happen the same thing/in Slovakia with the 25 000 dollars, which we have talked about. And now we come to assumption (b):

"It is possible, and probable, that all is a lie, an attempt to disguise and mislead. They negotiate in order to arouse our confidence and believe in them in order to diminish the resistance of the Jews. They negotiate in order to delay any moral resistance, such as radio and papers. If there are negotiations, then the Jews would determine the public opinion and probably crush any resistance

C.L. He means precisely that the Germans negotiate with the Jews...

L. ..(?)..

C.L. in order to diminish their resistance and in order to lead them more easily to Auschwitz.

L. Yes, that is what I said before. He wants the Jews to believe that they really mean it, that their offer is a genuine one, but they themselves want the Jews to calm down and not have any resistance, it would be easier for them to deport them and kill them

in Auschwitz. And then he gives all the possibilities of the way of violence.

C.L. What does he say?

L. "...And though we have to base our behaviour in the inside on regarding the money on assumption (a), theoretically and practically we have to accept assumption (b). For this purpose we demand strongly:

A. The destruction of all the ways leading from Hungary to Poland and to Germany, especially the routes (so-and-so) .

B. The destruction has to be close to the departure points to prevent the use of other routes."

(...(?)... the destruction further away, it is much easier to get to Auschwitz. But if you destroy the tracks right from the beginning in Hungary, it would take longer.)

C.L. From the place of origin where the Jews were gathered?

L. Where the Jews were gathered, yes.

"C. The destruction has to be in order all the time. You should not make...(?). You have to do it always.

D. One has to take into consideration that these routes are heavily used by transport from all directions." (I didn't understand completely what he means by this...)

C.L. He means there are military transports?

L. Then it would be even better to destroy them.

C.L. Exactly.

L. "E. In the moral situation of the inner front, the (?) can't afford in the interior of the country to the eyes of the public to lose by bloodshed 13 000 souls daily. It is possible only by the one unseen, clever way of Auschwitz and in no other way." He knew the Germans would never dare to kill people inside Hungary or inside Austria or inside Czechoslovakia - the only way to hide the fact of the destruction of the Jews was in Auschwitz.

C.L. To bring them...

L. They have to bring them to Auschwitz. That means if you took away the possibility of bringing them to Auschwitz, they would be saved. He wanted to avoid that we would say to him, "Ok, we bomb the rails to Auschwitz. Who guarantees that the Jews will not be killed where they are?" He knew the Germans wouldn't dare to do this. And then the last point he wants, the destruction of the way out of the country, is there for the prevention of the killing itself. That's what we discussed. And now he writes - it's very heartbreaking - "And now we ask, how can you eat, sleep? How can you live? Won't you be responsible if you do not move heaven and earth in order to bring us the help which is possible by our allies, and in the shortest time. Remember that they lead 13 000 of

your brothers and your sisters, men and babies, women and old people are lost. Aren't you afraid of the judgement in this world and the next? If you say you have done everything, we shall say it is not true. For God's sake, do now and do quickly. This way is useful in the present situation of the war, the transportation situation that has become difficult for them. This way is more efficient, quicker and easier. This way is possible, but it has to be started immediately." You see, he changed his mind completely. Although he says in the beginning...

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(muet)

LANDAU 150

L. If you will allow me, I will continue this letter, which is very interesting. He says "Furthermore, one has to warn the heads of the countries in the hand of the evil, and their people, about the punishment they deserve. One has to reach the Pope, that he will scream loudly to heaven and earth about this murder."

C.L. The Pope?

L. The Pope, yes. ... "On the other hand it is necessary

that the heads of the countries and the radio will say what they did with us, that they killed in murder-houses in Belzec, Sobybor and Auschwitz, up till now, six times a thousand thousand Jews of Europe and Russia...."

C.L. Why does he say "six times a thousand thousand"?

L. I think it is only an expression. He didn't have a figure at this time; six thousand thousand Jews is six million, and at this time they had not yet killed six million. But I think he was just using an expression. In Hebrew it is translated as six times a thousand thousand.

C.L. At this time, in '44, it was really very near.

L. Near to it, yes, but not yet completely.

He continues, "My brothers, I am writing this letter in the name of all the parties in Hungary as they have no way to send their letters. I also write the letter in the name of all the parties in our country." He wants to express that what he writes is not his own opinion, but he writes in the name of the whole committee, which was composed of the heads of the different parties - the left and the right, the non-observant and the observant, orthodox Jews.

And then he finishes: "A terrible and holy responsibility has been placed on you. Let you be happy if you carry it out, and woe to you if not. The

Lord, be he blessed, has given you the privilege of being messengers of Mitzvah for the remnants who are killed, murdered and burned daily for Kidush Hashem, which means 'sanctification of his name', as a plea of the layman from the market. M.W.V."

He signed his letters "M.W.V." - ? ? Weissmandel. DOV

C.L. What does it mean, 'a plea of the market'?

L. That is the prophet Jeremiah. When he said his prophecies, he said he was a layman in the market. The market is the States? - he pleads, not as a leader but as a layman in the street.

C.L. What did you think when you got this letter? Because he asked you "How can you live, how can you eat?" How did you react to this?

L. Our heart was broken, but what could we do? The only thing we could do and did was send letters to America and added our own wishes. If you will allow, I can read some letters which Mr Sternbuch, when he transmitted these messages to the United States, which he himself added.

C.L. Yes, read some excerpts. But first of all, can you explain what he means with the 'sanctification of the name', the 'Kidush Hachem'? Can you elaborate a bit on this?

L. You know that when a Jew is killed...

C.L. I know, but the others don't know. Repeat it again.

L. The Jewish way... If you are being killed because you are a Jew, that means you are killed for the 'sanctification of the Lord'. You give your life for the sanctification of God. You don't give your life for you yourself, you give your life because you were a Jew and you sanctify the name of God...

C.L. It has something to do with the refusal to be converted, no?

L. Not any more today.

C.L. But at the beginning, originally.

L. Originally, yes. Because there is only one way. If somebody says to you "Either you will be killed or you convert", you are not allowed to convert. You have to give your life for the holiness of God's name.

C.L. That is Kidush Hachem?

L. This is the meaning of Kidush Hachem.

C.L. He repeats the same here.

L. Then he says, as I mentioned before: "this letter should be read by Nathan" (he means Nathan Schwalb, who was representative of the Hachomer here in Switzerland), "Hugo", (he means Hugo Donenbaum, a member of our committee and representative of the Slovaks and Jews), "" (translated Sternbuch - ' is Stern and Buch is ')

C.L. Because he had coded words?

- L. He had coded words, yes. And Silberschein, the representative of the Polish Jews in Geneva, and Abbas, and last, but not least he wrote Sally Meyer and everybody else whom they thought fit. In every letter we got he write always "Give to those people." He was under the impression that those people would be able to do something. Unfortunately we were mightless (=powerless?).
- C.L. It's very hard to picture this. It must have been a very difficult personal experience to live in Switzerland, in Montreux and to get these letters coming from the 'Nacht und Nebel'.
- L. When I talk with my wife we still say we can't understand today how it was possible; we danced, there were weddings, bar mitzvahs, we went to the cinemas. And on the other side of our continent, in Europe, people were killed daily, thousands and thousands of Jews. And the same thing here in America.
- C.L. The life was going on, daily life went on.
- L. Not only did daily life go on, but it went on in the usual way. I am sure that quite a lot of people had sleepless nights, especially those who had relatives there. But life went on.
- C.L. But how did those people react to whom the letters were sent? Did they give their full time, did all of them devote themselves completely to this task

of rescue? Were they at the level of the demands of Weissmandel? This is the main question.

L. I don't think there was anyone at the same level as Weissmandel. I know from experience that Mr Sternbuch didn't save any time, and he was working day and night, and his wife Mrs Sternbuch did whatever she could too. There were no days and no nights, there was no Sabbath. If the telephone rang on the Sabbath we took the telephone too - an orthodox Jew doesn't answer the telephone. They worked and worked.

C.L. But is it really meaningful if a religious Jew breaks the Sabbath in order to...

L. If it is a danger of life you are allowed to break the law of Sabbath. I myself remember a case: it was the bar mitzvah of a son of Mr Sternbuch, and there came a telephone call that two Jews from Belgium to Switzerland were refused, sent back to the border- Germany or France or wherever they came from. There was no bar mitzvah, no Sabbath any more, but telephone calls and more calls until they found a way to save those two boys. That proves they were working all day. I can't say about other organisations.

C.L. For instance?

L. Once we had some dealings with a train from Bergen-Belsen, a Kastner(?) transport, and I

called Mr Lichtheim, who was at the time the representative of the Jewish agency in Geneva. It was already 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening, so I called him at his home...

C.L. Sabbath was over?

L. This was not on Sabbath. So he said "What do you want? Don't disturb me after working hours. Call me tomorrow at the office". What can you do? Not everybody acted the same way as the Sternbuchs. I must say they were not 100% organised, but they worked with their full hearts for the full time.

C.L. The Sternbuchs?

L. The Sternbuchs.

C.L. And Sternbuch conveyed Weissmandel's messages and tried to ...(?).

L. ..(?).. On the contrary he made it even stronger. I will read you one of the cables he sent to New York...

Bobine 291

NEW YORK 151

LANDAU 152

(muet)

L. May I read you a few of the cables Mr Sternbuch sent to New York?

2nd June 1944: "15 000 Jews daily are deported over this route to Poland since 15th May. The

people are in despair that nothing has been done up to the present. Do not miss another hour in this matter! This is one means of rescue. Do intervene! All this is strictly confidential."

C.L. That was a cable.

L. That was a cable that was declassified by the State Department in '72. The cable was sent to the American ~~d~~legation in Berne on June 2nd 1944.

Now, June 3rd 1944. (What he heard from Hungary.)

"We are dependent on you entirely. Only you could wholly and partly save us. Everything is in your hands. Do not conceal wrong and do not rest. I beg all people appropriate to this to act quickly as long as there is still time".

Another cable here, in August '44:

"Our people in Hungary and Slovakia are in contact with Gestapo agents who must continually be bribed.

They warn that
If their requests are not fulfilled, the rest of the Jews are lost without fail and the responsibility for their existence rests on us."

C.L. Already in August 400,000 Jews had been killed.

L. And still cried for help... No voice, and no reply.

I can't say no reply because the Vaad Hahatzala did whatever it could, but it didn't have the sources to collect enough money.

C.L. What is striking about these messages is the speed with which they were transmitted. All this is

very accurate, first, and the communications were

...

L. Yes, they were all cooperative. The American Consulate cooperated, the Polish legation cooperated and later on, when the War Refugee Board was established, also Mr Maclelland was quite cooperative.

C.L. This means they knew daily...

L. They had other sources too, but they were in daily contact.

C.L. They knew daily what was going on in the area?

L. Yes.

C.L. There is this contrast between the speed of the information and the fact that nothing was done. Everybody knew...

L. That you have to ask the Jews of America. You can't ask me, I was in Switzerland.

C.L. You think really one has to ask the Jews in America?

L. The money was in America, the Jews in Switzerland had no money.

C.L. Why didn't they give? What do you think is the reason?

L. They didn't believe it. On one side they said it was against the law of the country - they didn't allow money to be sent to occupied countries - and on the other side they didn't believe that with money you could save people. Later on, when they saw the sight(?), when the first train came from

Hungary with 1600 people (?) Bergen-Belsen, then it was a little easier to collect money, but by this time money had no value any more.

C.L. It was too late?

L. The Germans didn't accept money any more.

On the other side, in May '44 Weissmandel writes - I think to Nathan Schwalber - "Our brothers! Have you gone mad? Don't you know in what hell we live? Who ^{do} ^{keep} ~~are~~ you keeping that money for? Why do you wait for us to send you a messenger from our hell to beg? All our begging is not effective, even that of the poor man at the door. After some requests you throw us dimes. Crazy murderers! Who is giving charity? You, from your high stands? Or we, ^{us} [^] who give blood and sweat from the depths? Who permits you to demand from me a report and budget, as if it concerned bargaining over clothes and articles, before you give us 1% of a thousandth of what we need?" You see he gives his full heart in his requests, but it was not accepted in the same way as it was written.

C.L. This means they answered him in a bureaucratic way?

L. He didn't know that the big organisations worked like a big company - on a budget, and we had to organise it and go to meetings and another meeting and another, whereas we from the Vaad Hahatzala

(as I said before, the Vaad hahatzala wasn't very well organised) but it worked from its heart. They didn't have a budget and they didn't have an organisation - they worked as Jews should work.

C.L. And the others probably wanted accounts, how the money had been spent...

L. They asked, "How did you spend the money?" Can you imagine, thousands and thousands of Jews are perishing every day, and the organisation asks for a report: "How did you spend the money, what did you take it for?" Today even Americans don't ask their own people how they spend their money.

C.L. This was really the tragedy, no?

L. A real tragedy that nobody understood what was going on. Maybe we can't blame them. Maybe they really didn't know what was going on.

C.L. They knew.

L. They knew, but if you are not in it and you don't see it, you don't believe it.

C.L. What is the meaning of knowing?

L. They had knowledge of it, but they didn't understand it. It didn't go deep into their minds. "Jews were killed? Ok, they are killed. Everywhere people are killed". But they didn't understand what it meant, that Hitler was out to kill complete the Jews of Europe.

C.L. What did you mean when you said they didn't act the way a Jew should act?

L. We know in olden times people gave everything, away to take out ' ', to release prisoners. They gave away their last penny.

C.L. In olden times?

L. In olden times. They were even forced to. If they didn't want to, the head of the community had the right to tax the people how much to give for the release of prisoners.

C.L. Was there, according to you, a strong difference between the way the religious Jews decided to act and the way the big organisations, like the World Jewish Congress or the American Jewish Committee or the American Jewish Congress behaved?

L. I think there was a difference.

C.L. What was it?

L. The difference that the Vaad Hahatzala worked in another way - more speedy and less bureaucratic. But unfortunately they didn't have enough resources to answer the requests of Jewry in Europe.

C.L. The money was not in the hands of the Vaad Hahatzala?

L. Later on they got more money and sent more money, but it was too late.

C.L. But maybe there is something else too, no? Because as far as we know the people of Vaad hahatzala were ready to use any kind of channels, even to go against the law.

L. Yes. You know what Rabbi Silbermann said: "We, as

religious Jews, have to help other people. We don't look at the law, we do what we have to do." And in fact they did it - they sent money illegally to Switzerland at the beginning, before Morgenthau gave permission to transfer money to Switzerland.

C.L. Morgenthau was the treasurer of...

L. Of the United States. He was informed of what was going on.

C.L. They were really ready to go against the law? Can you explain this?

L. For instance, when we sent our first cable to America to ask for money, in some specific cases they sent us money via the Polish Legation.

C.L. This was forbidden?

L. It was forbidden. It was not allowed to transfer any money from America to Switzerland, and further on to occupied countries. But we didn't mind, and also we only got about half of the money that was paid in the States.

C.L. Why?

L. Because on the black market the dollar was only worth half. For each dollar the official rate was 4 Swiss francs and 20 cents, and we got only 2.19 or 2.18 for each dollar.

C.L. So they bought money on the black market?

L. On the black market.

C.L. I would like you to read this letter of Reb Silver

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LANDAU 154

L. About the illegality of our work, I would like to read a letter which Rabbi Silver writes in one of his books about the rescue work.

He writes: "I remember once, during one of those days of severe trying for the work of rescue, visiting a well-known philanthropist and asking for a considerable sum of money. He asked me the following question: 'Please tell me, Rabbi: with all due respect to our Rabbis it is difficult for me to understand why in the matter of saving Jews in Europe there is no-one who can do anything - that none of our famous help organisations and institutions and none of our political leaders, only a handful of orthodox Rabbis? Forgive me for my frankness, but will some old-fashioned Rabbi, inept, succeed in such an undertaking?'"

C.L. 'Inept', he says?

L. 'Inept'....."succeed in such an undertaking?' I answered him clearly and distinctly: 'When it is a matter of rescuing Jewish lives, we, the Rabbis, are forbidden to be inept. The precept of saving lives is very dear to us, and true fulfilment of this precept is only by self-sacrifice. By command of our holy Torah, we are prepared to violate

many laws vis-à-vis the authorities in order to save lives. We are ready to pay ransom for Jews and deliver them from concentration camps with the help of forged passports. For this purpose we do not hesitate to deal with counterfeiters and passport thieves. We are ready to smuggle Jewish children over the border and engage expert smugglers for this purpose, those whose profession it is. We are ready to smuggle money illegally into enemy territories in order to bribe as many as necessary of the killers of the Jewish people, those dregs of humanity. We are even ready to send special emissaries to plead with the chief murderers, those ruthless criminals, and try to appease them at any cost."

You see, that's what the other organisations didn't understand. They didn't know that at a time where you have to save lives, you have to do everything and you can't even look at the laws of the land, which otherwise they keep quite well. To save lives, nothing counts- only saving lives. Rabbi Silver brings it out very nicely. He himself, when the Vaad Hahatzala was founded and they collected money, he was the first one to give. He was not a rich man, but what did he do? He borrowed money on his life insurance and gave it to them.

C.L. So for these people the rescue was really the main purpose.

L. The rescue was the main purpose. Save lives.
Nothing else was more important.

C.L. Priority number 1.

L. ..(?).

C.L. And now, can you tell me about the beginning of the Vaad Hahatzala, this religious organisation? When and why was it created? What was the purpose at the beginning?

L. The purpose at the beginning of the Vaad Hahatzala was to save the Yeshivottes in Eastern Europe - the Yeshivottes of the Polish, Lithuanian, Hungarian countries, which were the lifeline, if I may call it that, the lifeline of Judaism.

C.L. Lifeline?

L. The lifeline of Judaism. Without the Yeshivas, without any Torah, there couldn't be any Judaism and those Rabbis - not only the Rabbis, but all the other orthodox organisations like Maguda Israel?, Mizrachi, Yan Israel?... they were all organised together in the Vaad Hahatzala to save the Yeshivas and bring them out of the countries in danger.

C.L. Why do you call them the lifeline of...?

L. Because without Torah there is no Judaism. And Torah is studied in the Yeshivas. So we see that to keep Judaism alive we have to keep the Yeshivas working. That was the main purpose of the founding of the Vaad Hahatzala. Later on came the work to

rescue everybody.

C.L. But at the beginning it was specifically...

L. Specifically an orthodox organisation.

C.L. To save orthodox Jews?

L. Not orthodox Jews. At this time it was only to save the Yeshivas. They didn't know yet that there was a possibility to save others as well. In fact Rabbi Silver sent his own emissary to Lithuania, a certain Mr Schmidt who was editor of A jewish paper in Cincinatti. He went to Lithuania, and Mr Schmidt told me in 1944 or '45 that if Rabbi Silver had told him, "Jump from the George Washington bridge!", he would have done.

C.L. He would?

L. Yes. He believed in Rabbi Silver like this. He said "If Rabbi Silver tells me to jump, he knows what he is saying and I would jump".

C.L. And as a matter of fact, did they succeed in...

L. He tried to do something, and finally they succeeded in getting visas to Shanghai. Most of the Yeshivas went intact via Russia to Shanghai.

C.L. This means the Yeshivas of Poland and Lithuania?

L. Mostly of Lithuania. In Poland it was too late already. They succeeded in coming to Shanghai, and they continued their work there. They were not only sitting and studying, they even printed Hebrew books.

C.L. There was a real ghetto?

L. It was in the ghetto.

C.L. There was a ghetto?

L. There was a ghetto in Shanghai.

C.L. During the whole war?

L. In the beginning there was no ghetto. In the beginning they could live outside the ghetto, and then later on the Japanese started the ghettos, but their lives were saved. They were not killed there.

C.L. And they went on studying Torah in Shanghai?

L. Even if they had nothing to eat they were studying. As it was not possible to send money from America to Shanghai since it was occupied by the Japanese military, the American Vaad Hahatzala sent the money to us and we transferred it to Shanghai.

C.L. So you were to one who transmitted...

L. ...(?).. It came to Sternbuch and we transferred it. That was the cooperation between the Vaad Hahatzala in America and our organisation, which was called 'Hijefs', 'Hilfsverein für Jüdische Flüchtlinge in Shanghai' - it means 'Rescue Organisation for (Jewish) Refugees in Shanghai'.

C.L. This was the name?

L. That was the name of our organisation in Switzerland. And so the cooperation between Switzerland and the United States started.

C.L. In his book Rabbi Silver talks about two different

things: he talks about the rescue of the Torah...

L. That was the beginning.

C.L. ...and afterwards about the rescue of the nation.

L. That was later on. When they saw in America that the whole of Jewry was in danger, they tried to save not only the orthodox Jews but whoever they could. We tried our best - we never made an exception. Whether they were orthodox Jews or not, we worked in the same way as Weissmandel worked with Gizi Fleischmann. You can't imagine two more different people than Weissmandel and Gizi Fleischmann, but in the rescue work there was no difference they worked together.

C.L. Gizi Fleischmann was a woman.

L. First she was a woman, and she was a leftist. She was a representative of the Hachomer Israel, a Zionist, yes. Rabbi Weissmandel was a Rabbi, and they worked together. They signed the letters together, they were sitting together, because in time of danger for life it doesn't make any difference.

C.L. It's difficult to understand this division between the Torah and the nation. If there are no Jews any more there is no Judaism too.

L. I say it the other way round. If there is no Torah there is no Judaism.

C.L. Even if there are no Jews any more?

L. If there are no Jews any more the Torah doesn't

exist. It would never happen that there are no Jews. That will never happen, because the Lord promised us that he will never destroy Israel completely.

C.L. He did?

L. He promised not to destroy it.

C.L. He promised?

L. He promised.

C.L. When?

L. He told Abraham, he told Isaac and he told Jacob, "Your descendants will multiply and multiply". If the Jews were persecuted in one country, they always found refuge in another country. At the time of the persecution of the Jews in Spain they were accepted in Holland, they were accepted in Poland. When the Jews were persecuted in Germany they fled to the East.

C.L. And this is the deep meaning of the Diaspora?

L. Yes. We never doubt that Israel will exist.

C.L. But for you the Torah comes first?

L.(?).....

C.L. No, it's what you said.

L. The Torah is the basis of the nation. Without the Torah there is no nation, and if the Torah hadn't existed there would be no more Jews today.

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LANDAU 155

C.L. Were the letters of Rabbi Weissmandel written in clear language, completely understandable?

L. The letters were usually quite clear, with some exceptions. But the cables were not so clear. He used a code, but it was his own code which was not known to us. We had to work on it to understand what he meant.

C.L. This means he concealed?

L. He concealed, sure. For instance, he couldn't cable us 'Bomb this city' or 'bomb this bridge' or 'bomb this train', so he concealed it in some words. We had no idea what it meant, and sometimes it was easy to decipher it in half an hour or an hour. But I remember a case once, it must have been in May or June (I think May), 1944. We got a cable on a Friday morning addressed to his friend Ascher in Villebain(?), and he brought it to Mr Hugo Donenbaum, who was a member of our committee. I was sitting with Mr Donenbaum for quite a while - 3 or 4 hours - and we couldn't decipher it. In the late afternoon Mr Donenbaum came back to me in the office and said "I think we have it now". We understood what it meant, he gave us names of two cities and two bridges which

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should have been bombed. He cabled us that if these two bridges were bombed the deportations would be stopped for at least 6 months, because it would take six months to repair the bridges. In the meantime - it was on a Friday - the Sabbath arrived and as you know an orthodox Jew wouldn't travel on Sabbath. But in this case it was 'danger of Life' so Mr Sternbuch took the train to Berne, Switzerland (the capital of Switzerland) and called another member of our committee, Dr Kuhl, the secretary of the Polish Consulate there, and they both went to the military attachés of the United States, Russia and England. All three promised to transmit this request right away to their Governments. The Russians never replied, the Americans replied that it was not their 'rayon of operation...'

C.L. This was the military attaché?

L. No, he got the reply from New York. He transmitted it to New York, and New York replied they were sorry they couldn't help because it was not in their range of operations. And the English replied "We are leading the war from a strategic and not a humanitarian point of view".

C.L. "A strategic..."

L. "A strategic and not a humanitarian point of view"
I sent this cable to quite a few newspapers and

they were all shocked when they heard it, after the war. During the war, of course, you couldn't do anything. The content of the cable we sent also to New York and they tried the same thing. They got the Americans to send a reply - that they couldn't do anything because it was out of the range of their operations.

C.L. What kind of code did you use?

L. We used names... I have a similar cable here, which I can decode a little bit. For instance, he writes here:

"Yula" (it was the name of a friend of his from Hungary, so we understood 'Yula' means Hungary)..

"Yula exports to Michel Wagner fix abg^oschlossen", which meant (Yula was Hungary and 'export' meant crossing the border, and Michel Wagner was (?)

and Mr Wagner was a friend of his in Slovakia) so we understood that this meant the crossing of the border from Hungary to Slovakia was 'fix

abg²schlossen', which means he has the possibility to save people. "Tägliche Kapazität zehn Tonnen..."

We didn't understand completely, it could have

meant those ways. I can't remember, I think I

asked Rabbi Weissmandel afterwards and I can't

remember what he said. We understood that the

Germans were sending from Hungary to Slovakia

10 000 people daily. Another gentleman on our

committee understood it in another way - that it

would be possible to save ten people daily. I still think it meant that ten thousand people daily were deported. He used names of people we knew were living in this country, so we decoded it.

C.L. How did he call Eichmann, for instance?

L. He never mentioned Eichmann in a cable, only in the letters, he said 'Eich' . E-I-C-H, for Eichmann. He mentioned Himmler as either 'Himmel' or 'Him'. For aeroplane he used birds. For bombers. He also wrote 'Schaffhausen', because by mistake the English bombed Schaffhausen, a city in Switzerland. So when he wrote 'Schaffhausen' we understood he meant to bomb this city or this bridge. It was not easy, but we understood. But without any success.

C.L. Some of these cables are really heartbreaking. There is the famous letter from Warsaw in 1942 which was sent to Elias Sternbuch.

L. After the war Rabbi Weissmandel told me that one of the cables... a Minister of the Slovakian Government - he was bribed - sent a cable to...

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C.L. I read, in the Kastner report I think, that when Weissmandel was in hiding in Bratislava - it was

already in '45, after the war was over - before Kastner took him to Switzerland...

L. From January to April.

C.L. ...Yes. He was still, in spite of the fact that he knew his wife and children had been sent to Auschwitz and he knew the meaning of Auschwitz, he was still hoping to see them again.

L. That is quite understandable, because we Jews live always in hope. We always think of a miracle, and the best proof is that some children survived, even after Auschwitz and all the camps. I read an article by a Polish priest written in the beginning of '46 or the end of '45. He writes: "If you ask me why the Jews never showed any resistance and were led like sheep to the gas chambers, I can explain it; I think it is because the Jew is a believer. He always believes in miracles and he always thinks that even at the last minute the good Lord will help him and save him". Maybe that was the reason why Rabbi Weissmandel was still hoping that maybe his wife and children would be saved.

C.L. Do you think it is true, that this is one of the reasons why the Jews entered the mass graves without protesting?

L. I think that is one of the reasons. They still thought, "Maybe something will happen, a miracle

will come and we will be saved". And they had no weapons; how could they resist? That's understandable. But I think the main reason was that they still didn't believe they were going to be killed - God would do a miracle and save them.

C.L. He didn't do it.

L. That we can't understand. We have the hope, and it was the same thing in the Middle Ages and it was always like that. The Jews had hope. They believed in miracles and still believe in miracles. If you look even at the war today in Israel, in '48 and '76 - they tell about a lot of miracles. Even non-religious people believe in a lot of miracles.

C.L. Is there a basic difference, according to you, between the Holocaust and the persecutions of the Jews in other centuries?

L. There is quite a big difference, because with the Holocaust the goal was to destroy the Jews in the whole world, whereas in the Middle Ages it was always a certain country or a certain part of a country, and they were not interested in destroying the Jews in other countries.

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L. Of course we were used to the codes, because as

you know, before the war the persecution of the Jews started in 1933 already, in Germany. Everything was open - there was already a little bit of censorship, people knew that some of the letters were opened, but everybody wrote quite openly what was going on and what happened.

C.L. And the persecution was public.

L. Everybody knew about it. But in '39, when the war started, it was like a curtain around Germany and the occupied countries. People could still write letters but they were afraid to write the truth. So everybody wrote letters in a certain code. I remember myself, when I got a letter - my mother was in the ghetto in Cracow and she wrote us a letter to let us know that my father was deported to Belzec.

C.L. Your father was...

L. My father was in the ghetto in Cracow, and in '42 he was deported to Belzec.

C.L. And was killed?

L. And was killed, unfortunately. And my mother wrote "unfortunately your father can't write, he is not here any more." So we understood. We didn't know, of course, that he went to Belzec, but we understood that he was sent away. I have here a letter sent to Mr Sternbuch, Mr Elias Sternbuch, the father of Ytzhak Sternbuch who

was also a member of our committee. If I may read it to you... it is written in German. Can I read it in German?

C.L. Yes. But it comes from where?

L. It comes from Warsaw, on the day the deportations from Warsaw to Treblinka started. She is an acquaintance of Mr Sternbuch, and she writes to him: "Ich habe mit Herrn Jäger gesprochen..." Jäger is hunter, in English. That means that the Jews were hunted and deported. "...Er hat mir gesagt, dass er alle Mitglieder der Familie Ahainu, mit Ausnahme von eins und zwei von Warschau, auf seinen Landsitz Gräber einladen wird". That means the family 'Ahainu' - that is Hebrew for 'our brother', which means all the Jews - he invites them to his country site 'Gräber' - 'Gräber' is graves, so Mr Sternbuch understood right away that the people from Warsaw were deported and killed. "... Ich bin allein hier. Ich fühle mich einsam." "I am here alone, I feel very lonely..." ".....(that is not so important here - Mr Sternbuch sent some... they told him that the citrus fruits which we orthodox Jews use on Sukoth holidays Mr Sternbuch sent some for them to Warsaw, and in September they still hadn't arrived.) She writes: "Ich fühle mich sehr schwach -"(I am very weak).. "vor einer Woche habe ich mit den (?) gesprochen. (?) ruft mich häufig an. Onkel Gersch aber ist

in Warschau" - (Gerusch means deportation, a Hebrew word. She wants to let Mr Sternbuch know that all the people from the ghetto in Warsaw have been deported.)

C.L. Onkel Gerusch?

L. Onkel Gerusch. "Er ist ein sehr fähiger Arbeiter, sein Freund Miso" (=dead) "arbeitet mit ihm zusammen". That means his friend Death...

C.L. Er ist ein sehr fähiger...

L. 'Er ist ein sehr fähiger Arbeiter' - that means he is a very capable worker. The Germans' deportations are going very smoothly, they know what to do. "Sein Freund Miso arbeitet mit ihm zusammen..." - that means his friend Miso was deportation not to the working camp, but they knew they were sent...

C.L. Miso means death?

L. Death in Hebrew. The deportations are leading to death. Not to the working camp. His friend Death works with him. "Bitte betet für mich" - "Please pray for me".

You can find quite a few of such letters. So we were used to the codes and could read the letters.

C.L. Can I read from them? It's very hard...

L. When I got those letters from my mother I was sick for weeks and weeks. First I got them in Belgium, and later on when I came to Switzerland I still got them.

C.L. So they succeeded in writing from the ghetto..

L. Until '42.

C.L. And she died too?

L. She was also deported. I tried to save her; we sent passports from our committee, passports from South American countries to people we knew. Or when people asked us to send passports we bought passports from Paraguay or Chile - different South American countries, and later on some of them were really saved. They were brought into internment camps in France...

C.L. (?)

L. ... also in Germany. For instance the two brothers of Mrs Sternbuch, whom Mr Musy, as proof that he could do something, brought out from an internment camp and brought them to Switzerland. When we sent out the passports we didn't ask if the people were orthodox or not...

C.L. Did you buy a lot of passports?

L. Oh yes, hundreds and hundreds. I still have ...

C.L. And was it easy to...

L. We had to pay for them. The Paraguay passports were very cheap because Mr Mantello was the secretary of the Paraguayan...

C.L. The passports for San Salvador?

L. San Salvador, yes. He was a secretary in the Consulate.

C.L. This was George Mantello. But his real name was Mandel, he was a Jew.

L. Mandel, yes. He called himself Mantello. The passports from Paraguay - one of the employees of the Legation of Paraguay in Berne, he was a friend of Mr Sternbuch. Of course we had to pay for it - 50 to 100 dollars a passport. But still it helped some of the people who were saved.

C.L. And it was possible to send the passports into the ghetto?

L. Yes. Some arrived, some didn't arrive. Some people were shot when they got the passports - the Germans said "You have connections with the enemy" and killed them. Some were sent to internment camps. Unfortunately, later on they didn't recognise them any more - the parents of Mrs Sternbuch, for instance, also had Paraguayan passports...

C.L. But it didn't help?

L. It didn't help. In the beginning they were interned and recognised until -they say, I don't know if it's true - one of the people who worked in the camp denounced them and said the passports were not real.

C.L. In Vittel?

L. In Vittel. There is a whole chapter about Vittel; I could talk and talk for hours about Vittel...

C.L. Part of the Vittel transports were afterwards sent

to Auschwitz.

L. Yes, most of them were sent to Auschwitz.

C.L. How long did they stay?

L. Until 1944. I still had correspondence with my uncle, , and I wrote to him every month.

C.L. And he was saved?

L. No, he perished.

C.L. In Auschwitz?

L. In Auschwitz.

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L. I believed that the opinion of Weissmandel, that with negotiations you could save lives, was correct. The proof of it are the negotiations of our committee with Musy and Himmler. Mr Musy was an ex-President of Switzerland, a rightist, maybe an anti-semite but we used him to save lives. When Musy went to Berlin and spoke with Himmler and started negotiations he succeeded, and in the beginning of February 1945 1 200 Jews from Theresienstadt arrived in Switzerland. Of course they were saved, and the negotiations which Musy had with us and with Himmler should have led to another transport every week of 1 200 people. But for a reason of some absurdness(?) which I don't want to mention here, the action was stopped and only

those 1 200 Jews were really saved. The other ones couldn't come to Switzerland.

C.L. Yes, but this was at the very end.

L. It was at the very end, but still they were killing people. In fact all the concentration camps had orders from Himmler to kill all the inhabitants, and Musy was working with his connections in Germany and succeeded in arranging that all the guards in the camps would be considered as prisoners of war against the promise of the Germans not to kill the inhabitants of the camps. He came with this request to us, he transmitted it to Mr Maclelland, who was the representative of the War Refugee Board. He sent a cable to Washington and Washington cabled back that we could give this promise. So it was still a work of rescue with negotiations.

C.L. At the time it is clear - there is even a letter from Himmler to Musy, where Himmler wanted to save...

L. We don't look for what reason. We are looking: Do you save people or don't you save people? for whatever reason it is. I could have promised him the other world if he had let the Jews free.

C.L. And you think that without (?) there would have been...

L. At least another three or four trains would have

come to Switzerland. Of course, not all of those 5 000 people would have been killed, but they would have been saved. That is sure.

C.L. And you didn't pay? You just promised the money?

L. We never paid a penny. We had some money we got from the Vaad Hahatzala in America, via Mr Maclelland, and it was deposited in the name of Mr Musy in a Swiss bank. He showed the receipt to Himmler and for this we got the release of the Jews.

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