

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

DR. GERTRUDE HALLO

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Fred Stamm

Date: February 11, 1981

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GH - Dr. Gertrude Hallo<sup>1</sup> [interviewee]

FS - Fred Stamm [interviewer]

Date: February 11, 1981<sup>2</sup>

*Tape one, side one:*

FS: Start in the beginning.

GH: I gave you these two pictures because I think they will both interest your audience. One is one of the few pictures of the grown man [Franz Rosenzweig] before he fell sick, because he had only very few years of healthy adult life. When he came out of the war, that was in 1918, and in 1921 latest, his illness began.

FS: What kind of illness did he have?

GH: What they call now Lou Gehrig's disease.<sup>3</sup>

FS: Was it a blood disease?

GH: No, it's a brain disease. It's a deterioration of all the, not a brain disease, it's a little like multiple sclerosis, only much worse. You may have seen in the [*Jewish Exponent*] last week a report on the Einstein memorial service in Princeton, where a physicist who continues Einstein's work brought a paper which was obviously one of the most important papers of the conference, but he could not give it himself because he had to have it read. He has the same disease. I cut it out. That may give you an idea. And I think the best thing is if I now don't talk too much now about my memories of him.

FS: The voice you hear now is the voice of Dr. Gertrude Hallo, a very dear friend, who was a contemporary of Franz Rosenzweig. The voice you will hear now again is Gertrude Hallo's voice and her own experiences with Rosenzweig.

GH: My husband<sup>4</sup> and I were rather close to him for quite a number of years. Franz Rosenzweig was the only child of a well-to-do rather assimilated Jewish family of the upper middle class population of the town of Kassel. He was an extremely gifted child and young man, brilliant in many ways. He--interrupt it for a moment--in 1979 will bring the 50th *yahrzeit* of a man who must be counted among the great personalities in modern Jewry--Franz Rosenzweig. I consider it my duty and privilege to say a few words in his memory because both my late husband and I knew him personally and belonged to the circle of his friends. The name Franz Rosenzweig is well known to Jewish and Christian philosophers and students of religion because of his important writings and of his influence on generations of young people during his lifetime in Germany and posthumously in America. He deserves to be commemorated by every Jew who is concerned about the

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<sup>1</sup>née Rubensohn.

<sup>2</sup>Collateral Material available through the Gratz College Tuttleman Library: English translation (done in Nov. 1985) by Dr. Hallo of an article by her husband Dr. Rudolf Hallo "The Pasalter" dedicated to Franz Rosenzweig.

<sup>3</sup>Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a progressive central-nervous-system disorder.

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Rudolph Hallo.

survival of Judaism in the world of today, and because of his personality and his unique life.

Franz Rosenzweig was born in 1886 as the only child of an upper-middle-class family of great wealth, intense cultural interests, a strong social consciousness, and an unquestioned identification with the Jewish community. He was intellectually brilliant, artistically and musically gifted, and had a strong-willed, captivating personality.

Beginning with adolescence, he was made restless by a lack of inner directiveness. He switched at the university from subject to subject, medicine, science, philosophy, history. His brilliant intellect mastered all these studies, but they did not satisfy his inner searching. So he tried to turn to religion. The liberal form of Judaism in his parents' home and the local synagogue left him frustrated, as the superficial Jewish instruction had done in school. Under the influence of close friends who had embraced Christianity with the fervor which was really much similar to that of the Jewish followers of Jesus in Jesus' lifetime. After endless discussions with them, Franz Rosenzweig came really close to converting himself, but something subconscious kept him back. Maybe it was the heritage of his forebears which had been very actively Jewish. This held him back. He wanted to know real Judaism before deciding to leave it. For this purpose, he spent the whole *Yom Kippur* [Day of Atonement] from *Kol Nidrei* [means all vows] to *Ne'ila* [means closing]<sup>5</sup> in 1913 in a small Orthodox *shul* in the east end of Berlin.

This first look into a completely Jewish world shook him to the core of his being. He realized that he did not have to embrace an alien creed in order to satisfy his yearning, that he had been about to abandon what he had not known to be his very own. Conversion, he told his mother, is no longer necessary and, therefore, no longer possible.

As a natural and indispensable consequence, he resolved to put himself under the Law and to devote his life to a two-fold goal. He would himself learn in the traditional Jewish way of *Lernen*, and he would work for a better Jewish education of children and adults.

With the energy and impatience which was really characteristic of him altogether, he started immediately in both directions. Not even the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 could deter him from his scruples.

Though Rosenzweig spent practically the entire four years of the war at the front, as a male nurse in Belgium first and then mainly as an anti-aircraft gunner in the high mountains of the Balkans, even though he did that, neither the rigors and monotony of army life nor fear of death could deter him from studying, thinking, and writing. On the contrary, it seems as if the regular daily routine of his military duties, the invigorating mountain air, and the absence of all distractions had strengthened him in mind and body to such a degree that without the help of reference books, teachers, or congenial discussions, he produced in these years the first draft of his writings on the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, his plans for Jewish education and for teacher training, and above all what he called the

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<sup>5</sup>*Kol Nidrei* to *Ne'ila* - From beginning to end of prayers for Day of Atonement.

germ cell of his main work, the *Star of Redemption*, the latter on army postcards which he sent for safekeeping to his mother. "What a correspondence that fellow has!" said the other soldiers.

Contacts with Sephardi Jews in Macedonia and with Polish Jews in Warsaw made deep and lasting impressions on him, as shown in his letters.

In many ways the war years can be looked upon as the years which concluded Rosenzweig's education and his preparation for the life and the responsibility of the adult man. Immediately after Rosenzweig's discharge from the army, this life started in the most promising way. It is as if everything was coming his way. He put the finishing touches on the *Star [of Redemption]*, this hard-to-read book on philosophy and theology, Judaism and Christianity, the individual and the community, life and death. It uses a new method of thinking and a language all his own. It found a publisher immediately.

Almost simultaneously, Rosenzweig's doctoral thesis on the role of the philosopher in a militaristic state was accepted, and his professor invited him to start on an academic career. But he declined this most flattering offer because it would interfere with his decision to lead an entirely Jewish life. "I cannot serve two masters," he said in a letter to his professor.

Instead, he accepted enthusiastically an offer from the Frankfurt Jewish Community to become the director of their adult education program, promising him the freedom to remodel it according to his own ideas and ideals, and a liberal enough budget to engage competent teachers. He used both to create the Institute of Free Jewish Learning, for which he had tried to interest the Jewish leadership in many printed pamphlets and personal letters for years. He modeled it loosely as a modern form of the medieval *bet hamidrash*, in which the teachers did not lecture and the students did not passively listen but where all learned with and from one another.

This *Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus* became an immediate success in Frankfurt and was imitated in most Jewish communities in pre-Hitler Germany. Its influence and even the name can still be traced in Jewish education in Israel and the Diaspora including America.

And last not least, Rosenzweig married. He married a girl who he could have found, as he wrote to my husband, but did not marry, years earlier, and who was glad to provide the kosher household and share life according to the *halachic* commandments which he wanted and felt he could lead without giving up his theoretic adherence to Jewish liberalism.

Thus, everything seemed to fall into place and to lead him in the direction to which the last words of the *Star* had guided him--into life. Rosenzweig looked forward to many active years in which his theories would pass the test of realization to life of continued Jewish learning under the best authorities, and of increased service to the Jewish community, and, best of all, to a life of marital and domestic happiness enhanced by the prospect of fatherhood. He did not want to write any more books until, as an old man, he would feel justified to compile a kind of modern *Shulkhan Arukh*, which would dissolve

the apparent discrepancy between *halakhah* and life in the modern world, as well as that of his personal attempt to combine Orthodox practice with liberal thought. But that was not to be.

After only two short years, Rosenzweig began to notice increasing difficulties in speaking, walking, swallowing, and even breathing and writing. These symptoms were soon diagnosed as the beginning of the same crippling disease which killed Lou Gehrig. Medical science had no cure. The difficulties made in the beginning such rapid progress that he was not expected to live for more than months. It became, however, clear very soon that he would have a probably long period of increasing physical disability ahead of him, which, however, did not then and would never impair his mind.

Rosenzweig accepted this fate without despair and without self-pity. He and his devoted wife concentrated their energy and their mental ability on designing and providing all the technical means and gadgets and the help they might need, and all their spiritual strength on the task not to let the difficulties, as Rosenzweig called his disabilities, get the better of them, and to create as normal a childhood as possible for their son, who was born about one-half year after the outbreak of the disease. It is not possible to tell here now how they did it and what it cost them in sorrow and pain and heartache. They succeeded, and these last eight years of Rosenzweig's life became in a sense his most important ones, truly a verification of the Jewish life which he had postulated in his writings.

This attracted a number of young people, many of them university students, in search of their own Jewish identity. They came year after year every Shabbat morning to the Rosenzweigs' modest attic apartment and held services in the book-lined living room in which Rosenzweig spent all his days, kept tied to a highbacked arm chair. He participated almost to the last year of his life.

There was always a *minyan* but, of course, the membership of the group changed constantly. Some of the members are today quite well known, as for instance Abraham Heschel, Erich Fromm, Ernst Simon, Nahum Glatzer. On weekdays there was an almost constant stream of visitors, many of whom were not close friends and relatives, and who did not just want to perform the *mitzvah* of visiting the sick, but who came to discuss philosophical and theological problems. Among them were probably as many believing Christians as Jews. Some of these visitors were or became quite famous, as Martin Buber, with whom he started a new translation of the Bible into German; Leo Baeck, the foremost German rabbi, who conferred on Rosenzweig the title of *Morenu*, our teacher; Hanna Rovina, the star actress of the Hebrew theater, *Habima*.

His disabilities, of course, caused Rosenzweig to return to the writing of books, which he had foresworn in the first exuberance of influencing people in direct personal contact. And again, as in the war years, his stubborn energy refused to take adverse circumstances into account, neither his own disabilities nor the exhaustion of his ailing wife, without whose support he would have been a helpless cripple.

In this way he managed not only to maintain an enormous correspondence but he also wrote and published a long line of books, articles, and reviews of importance. He concentrated on translating from Hebrew into German, because he wanted to reach especially the assimilated Jews who knew no or little Hebrew. The above mentioned translation of the Bible was undertaken to replace the popular translation by Martin Luther, which was widely used by Jews, with one which did more justice to the Hebrew language and the fundamental Jewish character of the Bible. Rosenzweig worked on it until his last year, and finished the translation of Isaiah. He translated further 60 hymns of the Spanish-Jewish poet Yehuda Halevy and published them with an epilogue in copious notes.

Among the many essays and articles which he wrote, in addition, perhaps the most important is the preface to the collective Jewish writings of Hermann Cohen, who had been Rosenzweig's teacher at the Jewish Institute of Instruction in Berlin. It is so important because it deals in depth with the problems which were so important for German Jews and perhaps are so important again for American Jews today, namely, the question whether--namely the relationship between philosophy and religion and that between Judaism and the Western culture.

Rosenzweig's main concern however, especially in the beginning of his illness, was whether his beloved *Lehrhaus* might die, or worse, might revert to the old unessential courses. He tried to save it by appointing his younger friend and disciple, my husband, as his substitute to run the institute under his close supervision, firm control, and according to his very definite directives.

That worked out very well for almost two years, and the *Lehrhaus* flourished and grew as it had done under Rosenzweig's own directorship. But gradually fundamental differences on the question of how to live and how to teach came to the fore, and attempts to discuss them freely and so to resolve them became so frustrating and painful that my husband felt it his duty to hand in his resignation, and that it was accepted. It is to the everlasting credit of both men that they respected each other's standpoint, and remained friends until the end of their lives, which came so tragically early to both.

Rosenzweig died on December 9, 1929, two weeks before his 43rd birthday. The paralysis had reached the vital organs, and a cold leading to pneumonia ended his life. But his work did not die with him. The *Lehrhaus* survived in Frankfurt and other major Jewish communities in Germany, even into the first years of the Hitler era, and became the model for a number of similar institutes in America, England, and Israel.

Rosenzweig's most important writings, even the difficult *Star*, were translated into Hebrew and English and thoroughly studied by Jewish and Christian scholars and students. The *Star*, for instance, became a textbook for the Judaic studies of major American universities. There is no doubt that Rosenzweig has had influence on the ecumenical attempts at understanding between the two religions.

In the '50's and '60's, a veritable flood of books, essays, and articles swamped the book market, making a casual remark of Rosenzweig's, that he did not expect to be known

until fifty years after his death, almost into a prophetic prediction. Quite a few of these publications did not try any serious analysis of his system or did not enter into dialogue about his thesis. They concentrated on the man, romanticizing him as *ba'al t'shuvah* and pitying him as a martyr. Nothing could have been less appropriate than this kind of hero worship for Rosenzweig, who berated relatives and friends with bitter sarcasm for similar attempts. He was no saint and no do-gooder.

Basically, however, it is absolutely correct to focus the interest on the man and his life, and not on his philosophical system and his theological teachings. For this I see two reasons: Rosenzweig verifies with his actions his ideas, brings them to life, and makes them visible for everybody, whether one understands his theories or not. He really does what perhaps Exodus 24:7 means, when the Israelites say after Moses has read the Ten Commandments to them, *na'aseh v'nishmah*, namely, "We will do what the Lord commands and then through doing, we will understand." And perhaps more to the point, it seems that all integration and assimilation into Western culture confronts American Jews with Jewish identity problems, which are very similar to those which alienated so many educated German Jews in Rosenzweig's time and brought even him to the very brink.



*Tape one, side two:*

[Long pause before tape starts.]

FS: You will now hear my friend Gertrude Hallo giving her life's experience on the Jewish scene in Germany in the 1920's and the personal relationship between Mrs. Hallo, her husband, and Franz Rosenzweig. The next voice you hear is Gertrude Hallo.

GH: In order to give a true picture of what happened to Jews, and especially young Jews, in the 1920's, I have to go further back. I must make something clear, which may not be easy for Americans today to see clearly, that except for the Zionist movement, Zionism was really far from our consciousness. For us, the problem was our personal fight for Jewish identity, especially in view of the growing racist and anti-Jewish movements which preceded the Hitler years.

FS: Were you ever part of the Zionist movement, Gertrude?

GH: No, no. I was--I even began really strongly, like many Jews in Germany, in a kind of hostile attitude towards the Zionism, for two reasons. We could not accept the fact, could not understand the fact that we were not considered as the Germans in the way we felt to be. We felt what is different between Germans in general and German Jews was religion, and this we could and did talk out with German friends who were as much and as little Christian as we were Jewish, if this can explain it.

But even more so, what held us back, when embracing Zionism, was that it came to us as, not so much a Jewish movement, but as a British movement. The Balfour Declaration was given by what was at that time, not in the '20's but before, at the bitter end of the First World War, the bitter *Feind*, bitter enemy of Germany. And the first thing I, for instance, knew about the Balfour Declaration and Zionism was a flood of leaflets strewn by airplanes into German cities: "Jews of Germany, join the Zionist movement and get your own homeland. You are no longer welcome in Germany," in English language and in as a war propaganda.

FS: In the early '20's were you aware of the fact that you were excluded from the various *völkisch* [national] movements like the *Pfadfinder* and other youth organizations?

GH: To a certain degree, yes, but not in the way that we were excluded, but that young Jews wanted to be among themselves. And all this did not start in the '20's. In the '20's this was a finished development. When the whole youth movement in the modern sense started in England, but it came to Germany before the First World War in the form of *Wandervögel* [wandering birds - a youth group] and in the form of--I don't remember the other names. They were not so important. It was a movement back to nature, back to the enjoyment of nature, of hiking, and the simple life, in opposition to the comfortable bourgeois life of the parents.

FS: Do you remember any of the leaders of the Jewish youth movements?

GH: I certainly do, and I'll come to that. But I must tell you that even the Zionist Jewish movement started out of the German youth movement, the *Wandervögel Bewegung* [movement]. And there was in 1913 a big meeting of all the youth groups with all the paraphernalia of being against the civilized bourgeois meeting. In this...

FS: Excuse me. Being against, can you explain that. I do not quite understand it. This big convention, it was against what? I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand.

GH: It was--the convention was not in the, not against, what was against--this was the feeling of the young people was that they were caught in the lifestyle of their parents, which they rejected in the way in which so many of today's youth reject the comfortable bourgeois life of their parents, Jewish and non-Jews alike, and which drives today so many young people into the cults, drove the young people in Germany, in the time of about 1905 or 6 or about that time, up to the beginning of the First World War, and it culminated in this big movement or this big convention, *pour neissen* [phonetic]. Anybody who has gone through the youth movement here probably has heard this being true.

And in this big convention the beginning Jewish groups were involved, too. It began as a special Jewish youth movement within the German youth movement and gradually, partly due to the experiences of the First World War and the beginning racist undertone of the German movement, then came the split. And there were two different groups among the Jewish youth movement. One was the Zionist movement, the Blue/White, *Blau-Weiss*. They adopted the *Mogen-David* and they adopted the blue and white colors and to meet all their needs. They were the first ones to really feel that their religion was not the only thing which divided or which separated the Jewish youth movement from the general German movements. And then there was the German-oriented group, the Comrades, they called themselves, *die Kameraden*.

FS: Was this a Jewish or a German movement?

GH: It is a movement of the non-Zionist Jewish youth in Germany.

FS: Were they accepted by their Christian counterparts as Germans?

GH: That I couldn't tell you. They certainly were not accepted by the beginning racist German movement.

FS: Was the racist movement strong as long back as you remember? Was the racist movement strong in 1913 already?

GH: Not that I know of. There was a racist movement, not so much among the youth but among the grown-ups, as way back as the beginning 19th century. It started with an Englishman.

FS: Chamberlain.<sup>6</sup>

GH: Yes, Chamberlain.

FS: Let's not go back to that. Let's continue on.

GH: So this had gone on and on, and it found its first general acceptance and it first came into public knowledge with Wagner.

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<sup>6</sup>Houston Stewart Chamberlain 1855-1927.

FS: Are you referring to Richard Wagner?

GH: Yes. That was the beginning of the racist Teutonic movement.

FS: And which decade do you think this racist Teutonic movement started? Where did it have its origin?

GH: It became dangerous after the end of the First World War. And there were many, many causes to help it along--the defeat in the war, the poverty, the inflation, the destruction of the economic basis for everything. And as usual, who can you blame? The Jews. And that was the nightstick which they held over us.

FS: When do you think you or your husband, when did you hear of Hitler first?

GH: Well, we all heard of Hitler first when he published his *Mein Kampf*.

FS: Then you didn't know, you didn't pay any importance to the fact that Hitler's march took place in Munich? [Hitler's effort in 1923 to overthrow the government.]

GH: Oh yes, oh yes. And we who were at the universities, we got to feel it first.

FS: Where did you attend the university?

GH: In Göttingen and in Munich. And of course, you could not be in Munich without noticing what was going on. But still, we did not take it seriously enough.

FS: Do you remember anything about the so-called Soviet Republic of Bavaria?

GH: Certainly. I even was on the Theresienwiese when it was proclaimed, from sheer curiosity. But then I got afraid before they started the march through the city. And it is true that this movement, which raised the anger and the hate of not only the racists, but of all anti-communist parts of the population, in which it raised all the fears that there were Jews in leading positions.

FS: Many Jews?

GH: Quite a few, not so many, but leading ones and the ones who were the vocal ones. I still see Eisner, Kurt Eisner, standing under the big statue of the Bavaria on the Theresienwiese in Munich, and inside the thousands and thousands of people. I knew relatively little of all this. I was involved during the last years in the university in the student movements, especially under the leadership of Max Weber, the really founder of the, of sociology, and who wrote very interesting and very important books on the sociology of religion, especially the Jewish religion, which he considered a pariah religion and all this would be too far. But when the real political movement started, around 1920, I had just married, had one child after the other. We were glad to know where our next meal would come from and so onto participate in any political actions.

FS: Excuse me. Can you tell me before you go too far now, could you tell me everything you know about the Free Corps [*Frei Korps*] and the destruction of the labor movement in Bavaria? Do you remember any of that? What did the Free Corps, what did they consist of? Who paid them? Who financed this group? Who organized it? Who led it? Do you remember any of these things?

GH: I remember a little of it and this conquest of Munich, for instance.

FS: Conquest by whom?

GH: By the Free Corps, in which the leaders of the *Räterepublik*, that means the German Soviet Republic of Bavaria, were killed, near the Landau an der Isar. A brother of my mother-in-law was the physician of this corps, so little was it at that time specifically anti-Jewish. The leaders knew it and meant it, but it was not really known in the public. It was the fight against the Communist conquest of Germany, which never went further than Munich. And I was in Berlin, where I had my first job, when the *Kapp Putsch* took place. [1920]

FS: I was just going to ask you to tell me all you know about *Kapp Putsch*.

GH: I lived through all these things. And now that you ask me, memories that I had completely forgotten come back to me.

FS: Tell me, did the leader of the *Kapp Putsch* finally wind up as a very harmless individual, a refugee in Sweden? What do you remember about the *Kapp Putsch*?

GH: What I remember is, first, that he putsched up the labor movement.

FS: Who is he?

GH: Kapp.<sup>7</sup>

FS: So you remember his first name?

GH: No.

FS: It doesn't matter.

GH: No, I don't remember but I can easily look it up if it's of interest for you. And he then concentrated in the spring of 1920 on Berlin. The first success he had was a general strike of all workers, like we have them here. The whole city came to a standstill.

FS: This was a strike against Kapp?

GH: No, no, for him.

FS: Oh, for Kapp.

GH: Yes, against the incredible and incredibly bad economic, social, political situation in Germany. It was the time when the inflation grew and grew. It's unbelievable for me just today that inflation can grow and grow, as it does in America now, and not only the *Schieber* [racketeers] and the scoundrels could live comfortably. We all were used to be so poor that very little else had room in our heads and in our lives.

FS: Gertrude, in the books I've studied about this period, there seems to be a consensus that the inflation was really very much desired by the big German industrial interests, because they were able to borrow money to finance their various undertakings and they knew very well that they didn't have to pay this money back because by the time the debentures became due, the debt was nonexistent. So, many of the authors seem to agree on the fact that inflation was in the interests of big industry, big business. Do you feel the same thing?

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<sup>7</sup>Wolfgang Kapp, 1858-1922, reactionary Prussian politician who tried to overthrow the Weimar Republic and establish a rightist dictatorship. A strike called by Germany's Socialist parties and refusal by civil servants to follow Kapp's orders led to the collapse of the corps. Kapp fled to Sweden, returned to stand trial, died in Leipzig. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

GH: Is that so different from what we have now?

FS: That's the question I was going to ask you. Is the inflation being helped along in America by big American industry, would you say?

GH: I think so. But it does not hit so hard, because thanks to the American credit system, everybody who has an American credit card or credit card of any kind, profits in his little way for his consumer status as the big conglomerates do it on a big scale. And that was not known in Germany of that time, and nobody would give credit for consumers.

FS: In those days.

GH: No. You had to pay cash.

FS: Let's go back to the *Kapp Putsch*.

GH: Yes.

FS: Was this a military *Putsch*?

GH: Yes.

FS: Were there any of the well known military figures of World War I involved? Was Ludendorff involved in this?

GH: Yes, very strongly. I think Ludendorff whether he was involved in the *Kapp Putsch* especially I don't know, because the *Kapp Putsch* was concentrated much more in northern Germany and Ludendorff lived in Bavaria. But he was definitely strongly involved and probably the military consultant of the Nazi movements in its early days.

FS: When you read first about the Nazi movement, at that time, were there any of the figures who later accompanied Hitler in his rise to power and his conquest of Europe, were any of those figures like Goering, Goebbels, were they part of the scene at that time?

GH: Yes, yes, yes both of them. Then another man by the name of Rosenberg.

FS: Alfred Rosenberg?

GH: Yes, the intellect. He collected Jewish cult and cultural subjects for his museum of the Jews. Quite a few of the property of the former Jewish congregations were saved this way.

FA: That was in Strassburg during the Second World War?

GH: In Strassburg and in Frankfurt or near Frankfurt. I don't remember where it was.

FS: When Hitler's putsch in Munich in 1923 failed, did the then existing Jewish leaders feel that the danger of this man had passed? Did you hear that?

GH: Yes, much too much, because far too few, and that includes me too, too many failed to really see the seriousness of the situation. And that is something which haunts me, because I have the feeling that the American Jews repeat much of this blindness and ostrich-like attitude. Too many still think it cannot happen here.

FS: To which extent do you fault the Jews for the rise of Hitler? Do you feel that the Jews were too visible by being in the professions, doctors, lawyers, or by being wholesalers of farm produce? Where do you think was our biggest contribution to our destruction?

GH: I used to think that it was what you just said. I have begun to think that I was mistaken in thinking so. Regardless of what we did, we were blamed, as always. If you keep too much to yourself, you are blamed by those who hate you, and there are many. And if you try to be as everybody else, you still stick out like a sore thumb. Whatever we do, [Telephone rings] we do wrong.

*Tape two, side one:*

GH: ...participated in as it appears in my memory. An eye-witness testimony is not always the best one. Many things I either have forgotten, many things I do not know because I was not actively enough involved in it, and many things appear to me now different from what I thought of them then.

FS: Now, let's go over the Jewish participation in German art and culture.

GH: Which was tremendous.

FS: Was it an additive to German culture or was it a detriment to German culture or was it a detriment to Jews to have participated in such a grand style? Just roam all over the place and tell us everything you know.

GH: Well, it is too big a bite for one person. But certainly it was much higher percentage-wise than the percentage of Jews in the German population. This had several reasons. One, of course, was that so many of the Jews were living in the metropolitan areas where the theaters were...

FS: In the cities, too?

GH: Mostly Berlin, to a large extent Berlin. In other cities, too.

FS: Such as?

GH: Such as Munich and a few cities of a medium size--Frankfurt. Frankfurt and Berlin were the most Jewish of the big cities.

FS: Breslau?

GH: I don't know whether there were many artists and writers of more than local fame. I don't know of any. But at sometime or the other, I think everyone was in Berlin, at sometime or the other of his or her own life. And this started long before the First World War. Names like Mahler in music, Liebermann in art, Kaiser and Werfel and Wassermann. It's a long, long list of names and they to a very large degree, really dominated the style.

FS: Did the Germans as a whole, the people you knew within your social caste, did they applaud the fact that Jews participated in art or was it resented by them?

GH: It was different in many ways from case to case. Of course, my personal experience was with people who did not resent the Jews. With the others, I had no contact. And when I was still in school, my best friends, other than the Jewish girls, were daughters of pastors and professors and high school teachers.

FS: Gentiles?

GH: Gentiles. And I still have contact with them as far as they are still alive. They sought me out.

FS: Did they seek you out as an individual, or did they seek you out because you were the only Jew who measured up to their level? Did they resent the Jews as a whole? What do you remember about them?

GH: Those who resented the Jews, they were hostile to me in class. It did not dawn on me, and this is pre-war time I'm talking about now, I was not aware of the basis

for it. I thought they didn't like me, and so I kept to myself until later on, when one of the girls with whom I became good friends, mostly after school, the Catholic daughter of a public school teacher, and then she told me, "They didn't mind you. They were anti-Semites. You were too naive to notice it." But to live with *rishes* [meanness, menace, antisemitism] was an everyday experience and you did not waste your time thinking about it. And the very peculiar experience in this, my personal experience, is that many of the former schoolmates--we were then all long in college or were married and had children or were in professions--they came to me then and sought me out and said, "If we only had known where antisemitism can lead, we might have fought it earlier when there was still time."

FS: When you were of marriageable age, was intermarriage a problem?

GH: It was no, I don't know. It happened, but I don't think it was so general a problem. It became later on.

FS: By later on you're referring to which period?

GH: The late Twenties. It was a real problem earlier, in the first time after the Emancipation, and especially of Jewish girls marrying outside of their own faith. In playing a role at this, I don't know whether you have--that was in the beginning of the 19th century--and there were tragic ones. Some of them, those young men and women converted for religious reasons, others for social reasons, and it was invariably the end of the Jewish part. The Jewish part converted immediately and sometimes with a feeling of self-hate. But I don't think that it was in my lifetime to such a degree that the Jewish community felt threatened by it.

FS: Can we digress from that and go specifically to your association, your and your husband's association and personal relations with Franz Rosenzweig?

GH: Yes. It started out, the relationship between my husband and Franz Rosenzweig, before I knew either one of them, because as a young schoolboy my later husband went through the same religious yearning and the dissatisfaction with his Jewishness which came out of sheer ignorance of what Judaism really entailed.

FS: What year are we talking about now? Just put us in a time frame.

GH: That was around 1910, no, a little later. It was in the beginning years of the war. And Franz Rosenzweig helped him on his way back into Judaism with the same means which he had found for himself by taking him into services in real Yiddish *shuls*.

FS: Orthodox?

GH: Orthodox.

FS: This was in Berlin?

GH: In Berlin. I don't even know whether this was or whether he took Rudi into a *shul* in Berlin or someplace else. I knew both of them. I knew of Franz Rosenzweig, and my later husband was younger than I am. He was a boyfriend of my sister. And he started to come to me too, with his problems. And on this basis I met Franz Rosenzweig at the



wedding of a good friend of mine to Franz Rosenzweig's cousin. And we spent the whole evening discussing the problems of Rudi Hallo. [Laughter]

FS: He was at that time not your husband?

GH: He wasn't even my fiancé. And I could never think of him in this way. This came pretty shortly after this, and started completely on this basis because in a way we were not so different. I went through the same problems myself, of a more or less un-Jewish upbringing, a parental home without any religion, and not belonging anywhere. And that was something I could not stand. When I was 12, 13 years old, I couldn't wait until I would be 14, when you had the religious possibility to decide which religion you wanted.

FS: Who gave you that possibility, your parents?

GH: No, the law. There was no division between the church and state. You had to belong to a church, and the synagogue was a church in this sense, which was in many ways very easy for the Jewish congregations. The contributions were taxes and were collected by the state in percentage of your state income tax. And the rabbis were hired civil servants and paid by the state out of these taxes.

FS: So at age 14 you could choose...

GH: You could decide; you could choose. And when I was about 12, I felt as soon as I have the right to, I will be baptized. And I knew my father would object, but not because I didn't choose to be Jewish, but because I chose to become, in an official way, a member of a religious community. He had lost his belief in a personal God and everything at a pretty young age, and that was the end for him. He never thought of leaving Judaism and he was very active all his life, first in the social and welfare work of the congregation, and then in his fight against antisemitism. It was his conviction that religion in any organized form was a self-deception.

FS: Let's go back to Franz Rosenzweig.

IS: We'll be here all night long.

GH: What time is it? Oh, no we won't.

FS: Now we were going to talk about your personal relationship, you and your husband's with the Rosenzweigs.

GH: The relationship between Franz Rosenzweig and Rudi was an inherited relationship. Their mothers were close friends and Franz Rosenzweig was so much older than both my husband and I were, that the friendship was always like big brother and little boy in those years. And we got engaged at the same time and then we were treated as engaged couple, very often with adults in the Rosenzweig's household. And among the letters which have been collected and published are many to my husband. If you are interested, I can loan you the volume of letters and you can find these out. And it is worthwhile for you to get an idea of the man Rosenzweig to read through these letters. Do you still read German?

FS: Yes, of course.

GH: Because they have not been translated; only a few of them have been translated. You can read all of that. And then when his illness came, I was very often in...

FS: This is Rosenzweig's illness?

GH: Yes, Rosenzweig's illness. I was very often in Frankfurt to help out, to help out in the household, especially when his wife, with whom I became close friends and still am close friends--she is still alive--when she expected the baby, and had to take it a little easier. And I learned to take dictation from him, which was really very difficult. His illness has been described so often that it's--I don't know how much you should enter into that. But it was a very, very difficult time. How it was possible to live the life he lived without any physical abilities left except for breathing, hardly swallowing. He could in the end only move a little bit of the little finger of his left hand. And there was a typewriter in Germany called *Erika* where you did not hit the keys, but where you moved a stylus, and then there was a transmission which then moved the keys and, I don't remember exactly. He had constructed somehow a strengthening of this transmission so that this small movement of his left finger made the stylus move the key of this letter, which always meant the first letter of the word. And the person to whom he dictated had to guess what it meant. And when you guessed the right word, then he nodded. That he could do. And when it was wrong, he shook his head with such a furious expression that you knew what he meant. And in this way with the help of his wife--she was really in the end the only one who could follow him--he wrote all these books. Incredible. Of course, they were well off, so they had all the help in the household for his care. That meant money could buy, but it couldn't buy too much.

FS: Was he of a working family?

GH: Yes. Very much so. So I was in the household very often and was very often, most of the time, in this *minyan* and helped prepare it, which was a tremendous job every Friday afternoon to turn this room which was a sick room, the living room, the dining room, the schoolroom, all in one, to turn it into a chapel. And it was so Orthodox that you had to put a curtain at the back of the room for the women.

FS: What kind of relations did you have with Rosenzweig's children? Did they know you as a friend?

GH: There was only this one boy, because after that, the boy was conceived when the illness must have already been in him. But, fortunately, he was a perfectly normal child. I still have a relationship with him and with his wife. But his wife is a non-Jewish German woman who came after the First World War<sup>8</sup> with a so-called *Sühneaktion* to Israel.

FS: What is *Sühneaktion*?

GH: That was a movement and is still probably. I don't know whether it still exists among the young Germans, the generation which was born in the early or late '20's, feeling the guilt of what the Nazis did and felt called upon to atone for it. *Sühne* is

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<sup>8</sup>Dr. Hallo undoubtedly means Second World War.

atonement. And it was called the *Sühneaktion*. They came to Israel in groups, went into the *kibbutzim* to do the dirtiest and heaviest work. And I think that this girl joined the *Sühneaktion* mainly under the influence of Rosenzweig's books which she had read.

FS: When you say this girl, whom are you referring to specifically?

GH: The wife of Franz Rosenzweig's son. And she converted to Judaism and married him in his second marriage. He had been married before to a Dutch Jewish girl who was--he was in a *kibbutz* as a child with Youth *Aliyah* and he married another Jewish girl from Holland who had gone before or during the conquest of Holland by the Nazis, escaped, and gone to Israel with the Youth *Aliyah*, too. They were in the same *kibbutz* and married, but their marriage was rather unhappy. Later on, he married this German girl, who converted and is a very, very strong Zionist and working for peace with the Arabs.

FS: Do you remember any comments by Franz Rosenzweig in respect to Hitler or his movement?

GH: No, I don't remember any. It was very much out of his sphere. Don't forget, he died in 1929, four years before the Nazis came into power. He knew about them and he was quite concerned about what would become of Jews and Germans living together. But he saw it all under the aspect of religion, history, culture, which could in all our minds exist Jewishly as well as Christian.

FS: Now what do you remember from your husband's comments, fears, and experiences during the rise of the Hitler regime? Or your own, for that matter.

GH: My own, because that was not a matter of the, the difference between men and women or boys and girls. We feared it, and I will never forget when we, too, saw the Brownshirts marching in Hamburg, where my husband had gone for a lecture in the Warburg Institute which he had to give, and where he fell sick with virus pneumonia and died there.

FS: When was this?

GH: It was in January, 1933. He died on the 21st of January, and on the 23rd, the day when he was buried, Hitler became *Reichskanzler*.

FS: Tell me, as the 1920's came to an end and the *Zentralpartei*, which is the party of the German Catholics, provided Germany with...

GH: It's *Zentrumspartei*...

FS: *Zentrumspartei* provided Germany with ineffective chancellors, von Papen, Brüning--what do you remember about these people?

GH: Only Erzberger was *Zentrumspartei*. The others were not.

FS: Brüning was *Zentrumspartei*.

GH: He was Catholic but I don't think he was *Zentrumspartei*, but I may be mistaken about this.

FS: What do you remember about these crucial years which really, in my opinion, initiated the age of Hitler?

GH: Yes, it did.

FS: What do you remember about these years?

GH: I remember mostly the helplessness against the enemies outside and inside. With all the differences, their struggle and their frustrating struggle is quite similar in many ways to Carter and his inability to get a firm hold on the foreign and domestic policies of America.

FS: By helplessness, you speak not of government...

*Tape two, side two:*

FS: You are giving me the information which I read in [unclear] experiences. Through your own experiences, if your experiences are covered in every history book. [Tape off, then on] I will live another 40 years. I am not a youngster. I am 60 years old. But in 30 years the entire German Jewish community in Philadelphia will only be a memory.

GH: Yes.

FS: Will only be a memory. And you're really one of the very few who still have the knowledge of putting personal experience of this period into the hands of these future students. And therefore I would ask you to try to remember. Because von Papen and General von Schleicher preceded Hitler to the chancellery. And I believe this period - I believe von Papen was chancellor for two years and General von Schleicher was chancellor for one month. And this period in Jewish history is of such utmost importance that your judgment and your memories also are of utmost importance. So try to remember what you remember about this period.

GH: What I remember is our frustration with the lack of ability and efficiency in the government. We saw all these movements like the Kapp Putsch, like the growing inflation, like the inability to get at last and at least rid of the reparation payments which added so much to the inflation and the economic distress of Germany. Nothing worked. The money got worth less and less and less. And the *Schieber*, the swindlers, those who had gotten rich in the war through swindle and everything, they got more and more out of it. So we shared the criticism.

FS: But I'm trying to get into the twilight of Hitlerism. Can you step forward a little bit and go to 1930?

GH: Yes. I had started to tell you, first of all the shock when Hitler really made a kind of private army. And these uniformed Brownshirts with their terrible *swastika* armbands marched through the streets to the tunes of the *Hitlerlied*: "*Wenn das Judenblut voun Messer springt.*" [*spritzt*]

FS: When the blood of the Jews runs off the sharp knives...

GH: Yes. And no police, no *Reichswehr*, that means army, nobody even lifted a finger. Just fear and fear and fear, and the wish that the bad dream might pass away.

FS: This was the Jewish attitude, hoping would just disappear?

GH: Yes, really strongly. And those, like all the people I knew more closely, knew and felt it will not just disappear.

FS: Was there any Jewish leadership, any, prominent Jews, who spoke out and pointed out the danger of this movement? Do you remember any prominent Jews, who were leading German Jews, who were trying to direct the Jews to disband it?

GH: Not in general, but the moment we were excluded from the general life, all of the German Jewry, at least in the big cities and those interested in spiritual and cultural

life, got together, formed their own organizations, provided their own education for adults and for children, had excellent lectures and classes and everything.

FS: You're referring to the actual Hitler time, Hitler period now?

GH: Yes. It's because then the doomsday had come. And it is not true that the German Jews just went to be slaughtered like sheep. They had no choice but being slaughtered, but as upright men and women and knowing for what they were suffering. The ones who were completely lost, and among whom there were so many suicides, were those who still lived in the daydream that they were not meant because they were such good Germans.

FS: Here's a question. I've never been able to get an answer. I remember--at this time I was 13 or 14, I remember in what's now the German Democratic Republic, I believe it was in Dessau or Leipzig, there was a Jewish group which was affiliated or thought to be affiliated with Hitler and the leader of this group was Naumann. What do you remember about Naumann?<sup>9</sup>

GH: *Ach, wir sind unsere eigene Schande.*

FS: Can you translate that?

GH: "We are our own disgrace," with a big sign over his chest marching in a Hitler rally. That was a small but very vocal splinter group despised by everybody.

FS: And they actively collaborated with Hitler?

GH: They would have if they had been allowed to.

FS: There's a school of thought today that Hitler actually overestimated the need of antisemitism in order to capture the German government. That he would have captured the German government without being an official antisemitic party, and that he could have used the Jews in revitalizing German industry after he took over in 1933. I read that in a recent book, only the author's name escapes me.

GH: Do you refer to the half-fiction book, *The City Without Jews*?

PS: No. But have you ever heard this discussed?

GH: Yes, yes, of course. But to my feeling and my judgment is sheer nonsense.

FS: You feel that the success of the entire movement was built upon antisemitism?

GH: Not only on antisemitism but of this misty glorification of the *Herrenvolk*, of the Teutonic psyche, and what have you. There, with logic and practical ideas he could not have conquered the masses. His whole charisma depended on such a slogan. And what was better than to have a scapegoat in the beginning, and then all the idealistic people followed him, too. And when they recognized what this all meant, when the concentration camps and all that began, it was too late. I can always only refer to the present time. That's why I am so fearful of the complacency with which all of America, and led by the American Civil Liberties Union, thinks it cannot happen here and defends the constitutional rights of

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<sup>9</sup>Max Naumann, founder of the extremist *Verband Nationaldeutscher Juden* in 1921, vehemently anti-Zionist and anti-East European Jewry. He sought in vain for a *modus vivendi* with the Nazi regime in 1933.

the Nazis, of people who do not make any secret, but boast of misusing the constitutional rights in order to destroy it.

FS: I think we should at this point call it an evening. After we have digested all these masses of information you have given to our brains and our tape recorder...

GH: And cut out a lot.

FS: ...perhaps we someday could...

GH: Certainly.

FS: ...speak about it again.

GH: But don't make it my lecture. I haven't been asked to give a lecture. You...

FS: Thank you very much, Gertrude, for this wonderful evening, for being such a gracious hostess, and for letting my wonderful wife and myself pick your brain. Good night.

GH: You're very welcome to everything. Thank you very much.