

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	25

Interviewee Surname:	Handler
Forename:	Arieh
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	27 May 1915
Interviewee POB:	Brno, Austria

Date of Interview:	9 July 2003
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	4 hours and 53 minutes

REFUGEE VOICES: THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE

INTERVIEW: 25

NAME: ARIEH HANDLER

DATE: 9 JULY 2003

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 31 seconds

BL: Can you please tell me something about your family background ?

AH: Yes. First of all I was born on the 27th of May 1915. I am the son of Ephraim and Helena Händler, who had three sons and one daughter. I am the youngest of the four.

BL: Where were you born?

AH: I was born in Brünn which is today called Brno in the so-called German part of the former Czechoslovakia, we called it Bohemia, I was born there almost by chance, because my father was then a junior officer in the army in 1915 and my mother, like a good Jewish woman tried to be as far as possible always near him and he was at that time stationed in Brünn, Brno, and that's how I was born, but soon afterwards, my parents in particular at the end of the war they went to Germany, first to a place in the Centre of Germany, today called East Germany, Halberstadt, where there was quite an orthodox, little Orthodox community, Jewish community, and my father, who received his training in the Medi... [?] in that town, where there was a very important firm, which theoretically still exists, Hirsch-Kopper, now in America, and from there my parents, with their children, their four children, moved to a place, just about 80 kilometres away from that little town called Halberstadt to Magdeburg, which is also not a very big town, 350,000 people, 2500 Jews, the community which was famous as a Liberal Jewish community. There were one or two famous Zionists in that town, not my parents, but famous men: Professor Ruppin, who was an agriculturalist, and he was sent by the World Zionist Movement, already in 1905 to Palestine and he was the one who opened in Jaffa when Tel Aviv didn't exist yet, the so-called the first Palestine Office, and he came from that town, why do I mention it? Because until his death almost, he died of course in Israel, Israel was already then established. But he still didn't know much Hebrew. Even there he usually spoke in German. Why do I mention it? Because the background of the town was a small little community of Orthodox Jews where my father was for a time the chairman of the little community, but the large community of which the little one was a part, was completely Liberal, and they were good Jews, but had a complete clear Liberal Reform outlook, and knew much, knew a lot about their Judaism; not like today in this country, Liberal Reform Jews don't know much about their Jewish myths. They were Liberal Jews, they knew what it

was all about. And in that atmosphere I grew up as a little boy. I went to a *Gymnasium*, later it was a monastery school, in fact it's the only building, together with the famous Dom, which survived the war.

Tape 1: 4 minutes 52 seconds

The rest of the town was completely... , I visited several times, I was invited by the non-Jewish community to go there, I spoke to the non-Jewish community there, long after the war. And the group of Germans, not Jews, who are very very much connected with.. they love Israel, and they are in this part of Eastern Germany, in Rostock, Kemnitz, Erfurt, small little non-Jewish groups, religious people who are very much devoted to Israel, and they invited me from ten years ago to speak in all these little towns, on Israel, and everything connected with our situation in Israel.

That is the background where I come from, and I finished my schooling almost exactly when Hitler came to power in 1933. I was then already very active, as very young boy almost, very active in the Religious Zionist Youth movement, that's what is called today in this country Bnei Akiva, was called then Brit Hanoa, which means just Youth movement. And, or in 1933, I was really comparatively young as you can imagine I was born in 1915, I knew that in order for the Jewish people to survive after all that's what I feared would come, Hitler was just, came just to power, I... my colleagues, my friends, we had a very nice little group, both religious and non-religious Zionist Youths, I had relatives who were non-religious, also in that town, and one of them went, in fact to Palestine already in 1932, before Hitler came to power, he and many others feared that the Nazis will be a force, a tremendous force, and our job was, my job was, even as a very very young man, to tell parents 'enable your children to get training in agriculture or any profession so that they should be able to live outside Germany, that was in 1933, when Hitler just came to power. And I remember there was nearby a friend of mine, Harry Schwab, and he always remembers, for many years he was a top official at Marks and Spencer's, when he was a young boy he remembers he had an uncle in Hamburg, which is an important town in Germany.

Tape 1: 8 minutes 47 seconds

And there, he always mentions this when he meets people, he is almost my age, his uncle, who lived in Hamburg, asked him also to visit Hamburg, and at that time, I was by chance also in Hamburg, addressing some 100 parents, telling them to give their, that was in 1933, we knew what is going to happen in Germany, at least we felt it, but these parents did not want to believe it. And his uncle at that time, his name was Elon, he was later one of the owners of the Elon Bank in Israel, but when I addressed a meeting of parents in 1933 in Hamburg, and I told them: 'Enable your children, when they finish school, to get training, in agriculture, or as locksmith, whatever, so that they should be able to leave Germany in good time, and to go if possible to Palestine. There was no Israel at that time. And his uncle, he always remembers, got up 'What are you, little boy, telling us what to do with our children, we'll stay here, and we'll survive everything!' And this same man, four years later, when the Nazis began to take all Jews, and he was a banker in Hamburg, and he was pleading to get a visa to go to Palestine, and only through the fact that one of his sons, was already in my movement, the religious Halutz movement, we were able to get him a certificate, certificate means visa, to get to Palestine in good time. If he would have remained half a year longer, he would have been killed like all the rest, been sent to Auschwitz, like all the rest.

Tape 1: 10 minutes 54 seconds

BL: When did you first become interested in Zionism?

AH: We, or in 19... I don't know if I mentioned this to you before, I was in the middle of my, school studies, but Magdeburg was such what you called 'treifene Kehila', a very non-Orthodox community, so that my parents wanted me in the middle of my studies to go to a larger Jewish community in Frankfurt, which was a big orthodox... it was a liberal community but there was a strong Orthodox community and a Yeshivah, and they wanted me to learn, in spite of my general studies, in my Gymnasium, and there, in Frankfurt particularly, I got in contact with people who were good Zionists already at that time, in 1931-32, and that's how I became very interested in Palestine. I remember as a young boy I went to a meeting where Chaim Weizman came, spoke, where, another great Zionist, the leader of the Right-Wing Revisionists, today it's called Likud, a famous man, Zeev Jabotinsky, was the leader of Revisionist movement who almost left the Zionist movement because it was not strong enough for him. And that's where I got my impetus, as a... I must confess, even my parents, at the time they did not even consider going to Palestine, but they identified with the Zionist Movement, and that's obviously how I also got into it, and I became, when I returned from Frankfurt to finish my schooling in 1932-33, I became very active in the Zionist Youth Movement, together with my friends and my relatives, cousins, as I mentioned before, one of them went already to Palestine in 1932.

Tape 1: 13 minutes 28 seconds

BL: What about your brothers and sisters? Were they involved in anything?

AH: They were involved, my sister was quite involved, one of my older brothers, my younger brother who then came to London was a good Jew but he was not interested in Palestine. He wanted to study, became a doctor, but the atmosphere was a very Jewish Zionist atmosphere and as a very young man I was still at school, we managed to start in this little town Magdeburg, it was a very little town, and also the community was very little, we managed to establish a little Jewish afternoon school where people learnt Hebrew, where they studied everything connected with Eretz Israel, with Palestine, so it was quite a, how shall I put it, a strong Zionist little community.

Tape 1: 14 minutes 42 seconds

BL: Did you have any experiences let's say in Magdeburg with non-Jewish Germans?

AH: Oh yes, don't forget, I went to a non-Jewish school.

BL: Yes.

AH: I was very friendly with my, that's the interesting part, they later all became Nazis. But when we were in school they had a very good relationship with us, they knew we were religious Jews, we had to go on Saturday to school but I was allowed not to write on Shabbat, but there was no question the German Authorities particularly the school authorities insisted that we go, there was no Jewish school there, it was a small town, so the atmosphere was very, I would say not only Jewish, but very Zionist. Why do I stress this? Because when in 1933 when Hitler came to power, somehow we were ready for it. And soon afterwards, when

Hitler came to power, still in 1933 I was sent to Hamburg, which was a much larger Jewish community, and I lived there in what we called a Beit Halutz, for young boys and girls, in fact we were mixed both religious and non-religious, we were together, later these things were separated, the religious and non-religious, but in my time we were together, and at that time already, that is often forgotten, in 1933, there were Shlichim, missionaries, leaders of Youth Movements in 1932 and 1933, to influence us, to go to Palestine. That was actually before Hitler came to power. And then of course when Hitler came to power the Zionist movement became, was very very strong, and I then began, I didn't go anymore to University, I went to the Rabbinic Seminary in Berlin, but I gave all my time, until 38, to work for let's say for Zionism, that is to train young people, to go to Israel.

Tape 1: 17 minutes 41 seconds

And one of my jobs, it was the most satisfying job, a most difficult job, I was the person who was sent, and I must say, with the permission of the German Authorities, the Gestapo, I was sent from Berlin, regularly to Paris, to Brussels, to Amsterdam, to Stockholm, to Copenhagen, to London. In fact when I consider today, I was a young boy then, how I did it, and they didn't give us much money to do this. But I went into these places to persuade farmers, particularly farmers, in all these places, London was a special situation, but I refer to these other countries, Western countries, we persuaded farmers to say that they are prepared to take a boy or a girl from Germany to work with them on their farm in order to save them. And at that time I must say the Nazis allowed us to do this. And I mention it with a certain bitterness. If more parents and more institutions in Germany, Jewish institutions, would have listened to us, we were young boys and girls, we told them things will go bad, from bad to worse in Germany, but many of the institutions, many of the leading Jews, people with money, people with knowledge, they said 'Look, it will pass, another two or three years and the Nazis will have gone, and it will be the same old Germany'.

Tape 1: 19 minutes 51 seconds

BL: How come you were so sure about it?

AH: Because they were living under good circumstances at the beginning and they were convinced that that will come back again, and that these Hitler people, that will be just, it will be a passing time...

BL: Yes but how come that you felt this?

AH: Ah that we felt...? Look, we were already at that time, I can show you pictures, members of the Zionist Youth Movement. As I said, in this little town, Magdeburg, I was the little leader of the... You can say 'Why did we think so?' Look we studied a little bit of Jewish History, we studied German History, we knew that there is something in the Germans which will not make them into our friends, even if they were always, there were Jewish communities, let's say the town where I come from Magdeburg, I didn't even realise it, I only learnt it in the last 10-15 years, we had already a Jewish community in this little Magdeburg, in the year 910. 910. So you would rightly ask, from where did we take the knowledge? There is no answer to it. We saw our Jewish, our Goyishe, our non-Jewish friends. We saw what they did on the 1st of April 1933. I don't know if you remember, when they went to, when they stormed all Jewish shops, and were, broke the windows of these Jewish shops and demanded that we should all have, and they had done that for a long time, that we should say that we are

Jews. We did not believe that this will be just a passing event. And there was something else. Already as young people, and there were elders, who also thought like that, like this man Mr Ruppin, who went in 1905 to Yaffa to establish a Zionist Office there. There was a strong Zionist Movement, forget that it was religious or not religious, that was completely irrelevant, there was a strong Zionist movement, within German Jewry. We had 600,000 Jews in Germany. The Zionists were a minority, that's true. But it was a strong minority. We knew exactly what we wanted, we knew that the only solution for the Jews in Europe, particularly, we didn't think of America, we didn't think of other countries, but Europe we thought the continent, we felt that it was high time that we should have a Jewish state. When we said so openly people laughed about us. No-one wanted to believe it. And of course unfortunately we were right.

Tape 1: 23 minutes 19 seconds

In my own life, I come back to myself here a little bit, from the beginning of 1933 almost until war broke out, I had to devote my life completely to this to persuade parents and their children to give up the idea that they will be able to live in Germany. And I must say we succeeded in this respect. Unfortunately many were killed, and were taken to Auschwitz, and to other camps, too many. But those who saw it in good time, we managed to get out.

Tape 1: 24 minutes 16 seconds

When you hear today the word Kindertransport, a silly old term. What really happened is that what we did is we spoke to young people, we spoke to their parents, and we said there is no hope for you here in this country. People were annoyed with us when we said it, but there were many who accepted it. And I remember already in 1937, 36, when I was in charge of my own activities in Berlin, parents came with their children and they said 'Look, try to get us a visa or certificate for Palestine, or for some other country'. And that's the time when we established, and maybe I forgot to mention this, for instance Italy, in Italy we knew that there were already fascists in Italy, but we managed between 1933 and 38, 39 even, to establish Hachsharah Centres, it means agricultural training centres, in Italy, in various parts of Italy. I remember I travelled to Florence, where we had a very, very big centre for our people, and one near Milan, and thank God all these boys and girls, who were trained in all those places outside Germany, they all survived. We managed to get them all to Palestine, legally and illegally we managed to do that, and this of course gave us tremendous satisfaction. Because when war broke out, we had already carried some of those young boys and girls out of Germany. The problem was what do we do with those who are not yet out. And that's when we again, during the war, we worked very hard in countries like Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Holland we worked, but it was, we knew it was too late, because the Germans soon entered these places including France, but our activities gave strength also to the parents. And in the end, when we managed to get children out, that is often forgotten, we managed also to get later parents out. Alright those we had to try to get visas to Palestine, and of course I myself when I visited England before the war broke out. I was a young man, I always tell the story. One of the first people I visited, was the Chief Rabbi, then Chief Rabbi of this country, Rabbi Doctor Joseph Hertz, the famous Hertz. And I remember when I visited, I was a young boy, for me this man, when I visited him in Hamilton Terrace, for half a year I lived later exactly opposite him in Hamilton Terrace. He lived in 105, and we lived for a time in 106, Hamilton Terrace.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 22 seconds

But when I came to him, I walked up these stairs, there was no lift, and when I tried to get his help, he said 'Look young man, he said to me, and for me he was really the representative of God on Earth, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire...

BL: Which year, when did you meet him?

AH: In, I met him for the first time in 1936, when I came here just on a visit. I must tell you the story. He said 'Look young man, I'm the joint President of the Anti-German Anti-Nazi League, the world over, and they won't like to hear that you visited me. It was true, later I suffered for it a little bit, and I can't help you very much at the moment, because look what kind of honorary offices I've got. His president at that time, the President of the United Synagogue, was Sir Robert Waley-Cohen, who was at that time, managing director of the Shell Oil Company, and he was, in the beginning of the war, and later, he was the advisor of Lord Woolton, Minister of Food, and he was the President of the United Synagogue. He was a great Anti-Zionist. And he said to me, the Chief Rabbi: 'When I wrote a letter to the Times, demanding of the British Government, demanding to give visas to Jews from Germany, to go to Palestine, I attacked the British Government. I got a telephone call from Sir Robert Waley-Cohen who was my President, that's what he told me, and I as a young man had to listen to that, a young boy almost. He said when he said this to me, you know what I did, young man? I put the receiver down, and now for the last year I have not answered him and he's my President and I didn't answer him. But I tell you what I am going to do for you. I can't help you at the moment with visas, because it's difficult to get visas to come to England. But I do something for you young people. My first volume of my book, the translation, and my commentary on the Bible, has just come from the Oxford Press, I send you 1000 copies. You know when he told me this I thought I'd die, because I couldn't report to the Nazis that I visited him. Because he was famous for his Anti-Nazi..., as I said Joint President of the Anti-Nazi League the world over. And when I came back I always had to report. And eight copies, everyone whom I had seen, I had to deliver this to the Gestapo. And when I came back to Berlin, I gave my report about my visit to London but I didn't mention that I visited him. Suddenly I get a call from the Gestapo, in Berlin, when I was in my office. They would never say Mr Händler, or Herr Händler they said 'Händler! Come over straight to us, to the office of the Gestapo.' And I knew that this meant something bad, because if they call me like that, it means that they want something of me.

Tape 1: 32 minutes 19 seconds

So I came, and they said: 'You gave a report on your visit to London? Yes. And I had to give it in eight copies. Eight copies. Every person whom I had seen. And they said: '-But you visited this terrible man. The Chief Rabbi of the British Empire'. So I said I didn't mention it because it was such an unimportant visit'. '-Yes but he sent you 1000 copies of his terrible book which of course we'd already destroyed'. Because at that time, I don't know if I mentioned to you, we had of course already in Germany these so-called Hachsharah Centres, where these boys and girls were trained, in agricultural development and of course also in Jewish subjects. And the Chief Rabbi had thought that I would be able to give it to them so that they should learn the Bible, the Torah, but of course I would never have sent it to them, but they kept it and straightaway, they destroyed all of them. Nothing happened with about 50 copies, I've got one, we had 50 copies were left. Why do I mention it to you? That was still a time when we were able to get people out. But it was under the most difficult circumstances. But then, I come back to myself, soon, soon afterwards, I was then, I went to various other countries, including I had to go to Palestine, that was my second visit, and that was in 38 the

second visit when I had to return in November, it was exactly the 11th of November I should have returned, in 38, and I was about to return because I had my parents there, and my brother, and my sister she was already then, she was already on her way to Palestine with her husband. And then Henrietta Szold, this famous Henrietta Szold she was the American President of Hadassah. She went to Palestine and became the head of Youth Aliya Activities, she called me into a little room in the Hotel Eden, this hotel still exists, whenever I pass it in Jerusalem, I remember that she said 'Look Arieh you are not going back, I am going to give you a letter to Chaim Weizman, and to some other leading Jews in England, you are not going back to Germany, you go back to London, and from London you continue your rescue activities'.

Tape 1: 35 minutes 35 seconds

I didn't want to hear it first, I said what will happen to my parents, and my brothers, but obviously I had to listen, and then in 1938 went to London and continued my activities from there.

BL: I just want to go back to your first visit in England. Who else did you see, and how, what reception did you receive?

AH: First of all, I must say, I saw first of all as I said the Chief Rabbi, and members, in Great Russel Street, who were active members of the Zionist Movement, Dr Weizman, and his secretary Joe Linton, who later became ambassador in Australia. Then I met various people who were connected with the Jewish, what was it called at the time, the Central British Fund. At that time the organisation which looked after those, because people came from Germany. If someone had £2000 or £3000 if he could prove that he got it, many of the Jews who today live in Golders Green, I mean these are all the children... If had, if you could prove that you had two or three or five thousand pounds, even sometimes less thousand pounds, the British allowed then certain people to come to this country. My job was of course to meet personally some of the leading Jews at the time, who were active in the Central British Fund, there were Mrs Sieff, the, and Mrs Lasky, the sister of Mrs Sieff, and Mrs Sieff was the sister of Lord Marks, at that time he was not yet Lord, he was Simon Marks, of Marks & Spencer, at that time it was called Marks and Sieff, and Sieff was the brother-in-law of Lord Marks. Now I saw some of these people, they were Zionists, they they preferred that we should be able to get visas for people to go to Palestine, not to come first to this country, but of course people came to this country, and the Marks and Spencer family, Marks and Sieff, Marks, Sieff, Lasky, one family, they were very very active in anything connected with Jewish life, particularly direction Palestine-Israel, later Israel. They were friends of Chaim Weitzman, and those people I visited, you must say that I was a very young man, obviously once they heard what I am doing, everybody wanted to help me, but most of them said to me 'look young man, we'll do all we can, but we can't do very much at all, it depends on what the government wants. At that time these were times when people could already feared that there might be war, and I don't have to stress this, at that time, unfortunately I felt it as a young man, I was always politically minded, as a young person, the country was divided, the country generally, not the Jews, but the country, they were many, I felt it, well I felt it as a young man, I felt it when I was here for more than about ten days, yes, maximum ten days, we feared that many of the British said the Germans are going to do something quite good, they are going to finish off Communism in Russia and all that, and we feared that. And leading Jews feared that. And they were right. I don't need to tell you that when the famous Hess, the second man after Adolf Hitler flew to this country, to Scotland, I remember the time very well, many of us

feared that almost half the country would be, would say oh they're doing a good job these Nazis, they will finish off Communism. And we as active young Jews, we feared that. And that is why we told our people in Germany don't rely on anything. The only solution is to go to Palestine.

Tape 1: 41 minutes 10 seconds

And when we were told 'Yes but first then also the British are running it...' We said 'Yes but then we will be able to run our own, we didn't speak then of a State, we didn't know then that it would be a State, but we said, if Jews will be at least together then we will be able to defend ourselves, as we did, in Palestine.

BL: But when you came here, was your aim to get people visas to go to Palestine, or did you also want to come to...

AH: No. Good question. My job was to, my job was to get visas for young people to come to England for the time being. Because it was not in my, I was not the person who could do much about the bigger issues. Later on people like Weitzman and Marks and Sieff, and there, they decided to get visas for Palestine. My job was simply to tell, to help us getting visas for young people to come first of all to this country, and we would then later take them to Palestine, if we can. I must say we were successful. We, as you know, places that we established, that was the one part of my most important work which I did when I came in 1938 and even before. We had, we persuaded Lord Balfour to give us his Estate, in Whittingehame in Scotland, there is a Whittingehame also somewhere in Sussex, but that was a big farm, where both religious and non-religious boys and girls were placed. In fact Henny's sister, who is still alive thank God, who was one of the ones who founded Kibbutz Lavi. She is still there. We had 200 boys and girls, both religious and non-religious in W Scotland. And we had another Castle, where we got married, I'll show you a picture of it, Gwrych Castle in North Wales, we managed to get 200 boys and girls, I mean that was the work which we did. They called it the Kindertransport, Narrischkeiten [Yiddisch for silliness], it was never called.... We simply got visas for people. And that's where we had trouble, or I had trouble, with the community. I mean this you don't hear today, when you read the AJR things. There were people, the same young man I mentioned to you before, was Harry Schwab, who was a leading official at Marks and Spencer until re retired, he's still thank God alive, lives very near here...[Inaudible]

Tape 1: 44 minutes 45 seconds

When we managed to get these children to London, there was, today it is called, first it was called Woburn, now we had another place, Bloomsbury House, and all the refugees, all the refugee activities were conducted from there, the Central British Fund and so on. And I had to plead with them, I said to them it's not good enough that you send them to all sorts of non-Jewish places, they get lost. So they said to me, ? Anna Schwab. She said, she was an Orthodox woman, a member of the St John's Wood Synagogue. She said 'Look, young man, first of all you have to save the people, and you have no time to think of taking them to Jewish places, they have to come and then we place them into all sorts of places. And they were placed in not-Jewish places, not in Hachsharot, and I wanted them to be in Hachsharot, not only I, also the non-religious Halutz movements, people, Hechalutz, Habonim, we wanted them to remain together. And we kept those together as much as possible. But the remainder, those who were sent into non-Jewish homes, very nice of those British people who took them

on. But do you know out of the 10,000, when you speak of Kindertransport, 10,000 were so... that's why I didn't go to one Kindertransport function. Out of the 10,000 Kindertransport people a maximum of 3000 or 4000 remained in the Jewish fold. And these were mainly those whom we managed to bring, I say 'we', I mean Hechalutz, Bachad, the non-religious Zionists, and the religious Zionists. It didn't matter. We placed them into a Jewish surrounding, and they remained in the Jewish surrounding, either here in this country, most of them today in Israel. But when you read all these papers, even the AJR papers, it's all very nice, and it's forgotten, that the majority are forgotten, they are not anymore with us.

Tape 1: 47 minutes 15 seconds

BL: You also said before that you were meeting farmers. Did you meet farmers ?

AH: Yes we met farmers, but here there was a problem. The farmers in this country could not... Usually when war broke out it was easy. Because farmers were very happy if we were able to give them hands, people who could work, because their boys and girls were sent to the army. And I still remember I had a letter, I got it from the, what was his name? Lansbury, he was the Minister of Agriculture, he was a Labour man, and that was a special letter, because what did we do? When we took these children, I was also where, in those Hachsharot, or even those who were in private homes, through Bnei Akiva and Habonim, it was done by us together, Bachad, we had these harvesting camps. There was a time during the war, every year, we had at least some 3000 young boys and girls, Jewish boys and girls, who helped farmers with their harvesting, and that was highly appreciated by the government during the war, because the non-Jewish boys and girls were in the army. And of course we had one problem, that for a time the so-called German young boys they were interned, but later, slowly slowly we managed to get them out and put them into these various farms. But, I'm mentioning it, the stories has not yet been told. Some Jewish people in this country were good people, they meant well, but they forgot that if you really want people to remain Jews then you really have to keep them in a Jewish surrounding, you can't just let them go everywhere. And so we lost a lot of people.

Tape 1: 49 minutes 35 seconds

BL: What happened to the farmers before the war?

AH: They were interested, but they always said, here we had a problem. They said 'Look, you've got to get the government to give us permission to do it, because it was a question of the visa. You see in Denmark, Holland, before the war, it was a bit easier, we got a letter from the farmer, that 'I'm prepared to take a young boy', and we gave him the name, so-and-so, provided you give him a visa'. And we took these letters to the Ministry there in Denmark and in Holland, Belgium was difficult, France was also difficult, and then we got a visa, and we were able to bring the person over. Here it was not so, it was, ... against that I must say, the government gave 10,000 visas for the Kinder, and that was in lieu of that, and also they were prepared to give visas to families who were able to prove that they had 2000 or 3000 pounds, which was a the time quite a lot of money, so I would put it like this: We did what we could in England but it was a bit difficult. England was always a different world, and we had difficulties. Where we succeeded in this country, was later on, when we, those who were here already, when we started these big Hachsharah centres, the Guido farm [?], Thaxted and then these places like the Gwrych castle, Rosset...we had an enormous number of places.

Tape 1: 51 minutes 42 seconds

It was a difficult... I remember during the Blitz I had to travel by train or by car, to either Wales or Scotland, to keep in touch with the boys and girls, and I must say that it was for me the most satisfying activity, because you met children who knew that their parents were lost, and to come to this, I could show you pictures, wonderful girls and boys, they were still hoping that their parents would survive, but I would say, at least 80%, at least 80% of those whom we managed to bring to this country, the Kindertransport, together, 80% lost their parents completely. Even now, when I go to Israel, I could show you some letters, I visit, many of these places, I would say at least 40% of those children are not alive anymore. I mean they reached 70-80 and older, but those who are still alive, and there are thank God, in various Kibbutzim all over the country, and in the towns, Tel Aviv, and just in Jerusalem I met many. And they are extremely grateful, because we saved their lives, we were not able to save their parents. And if I got a little bit of satisfaction in my life, it is that, I could show you letters, some of these boys and girls, many of them are already retired, but they've done wonderful work in Israel. In the army, in agriculture, in industry, most of them are already retired, but their children continue. When you go to a place today, like this English religious Kibbutz, Kibbutz Lavi, highly successful, when you see the children of those whom we saved, who are today top people in education... just had a function, when someone died, the man who, in a school, in a big very important school in Jerusalem, the headmaster of this school is the son of a young man, he is now an old man, he's still alive, in a Kibbutz, Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu, that is that same man with whom I boarded for eight years when we went to school together in Magdeburg, and his son, the man whose father is my friend, he's still alive thank God like I'm alive, and the son is today top Headmaster in one of the most important Schools, High Schools, Secondary Schools in Jerusalem. That gives of course satisfaction.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 37 seconds

BL: Did you have an office in Bloomsbury House or where was your office?

AH: My office was in Woburn House. The main centre was Woburn House. Bloomsbury House was taken because Woburn House became too full.

BL: And what was it called, that office?

AH: That was the Office of the Central British Fund.

BL: But where you were.

AH: No I was, I built our own office, we had our Bachad office on the fifth floor of Woburn House and I had twice a week, I'll never forget that, I had to do fire-watching, during the Blitz we had to do fire-watching, I did fire-watching together with Dr Epstein, who was the principal of the Youth College at the time which was also in Woburn House, I remember this like it is today. And from that office, I could show it to you because someone sent me last week, her mother died, and she found this circular which we sent every week, on Wednesday morning, it was written on Tuesday, we sent out a circular, four or six pages, duplicated, I'll later show you the, one of these letters, which we sent out every week, to the children throughout the country, later to those who were in the army, the British Army, we had what was called the Forces Department, all in Woburn House, we had a, on the fifth floor we had at least five rooms. Most of the people who worked there did it all without any payment, they

came in the evenings, helped to type, duplicate, and post it, and unfortunately some of these activities are forgotten.

Tape 1: 57 minutes 45 seconds

BL: When the Kindertransport came, did you have...

AH: Well it was not really called Kindertransport. You call it now... They came because there were visas given, and so they came in stages, they didn't come into one, 10,000. That's all misrepresented well, sorry, I interrupted you.

BL: Well we have to change tapes now.

TAPE 2

BL: This is tape two, and we're conducting an interview with Mr Arieh Handler.

I was just asking you about the Kindertransport, which as you said wasn't called Kindertransport then, but the children who came after Kristallnacht, before the war. How many of those children did you bring out, or did the movement bring out?

AH: Well first let me put it like this. It was all done, the bringing out was really done together. There was an exception of what Rabbi Schonfeld did when he brought a group of children from Austria, which were not more than about 250 or 300 children.

BL: And probably Winton [Nicolas] as well...

AH: Yes that's correct, correct. Here I must say something very positive, and we all we did it all together, it was done, it had to be done formally under the aegis of the British Fund, that would be a British institution which took care, that was all done later in Bloomsbury House, I must say whatever use individuals may have had, they all did wonderful work I mean in saving people, I mean the children arrived, thousands and thousands of them; they didn't come as 10,000 Kindertransport, I mean that is really what the public doesn't understand, it's not the public's fault, it's the fault of those who introduced this word 'Kindertransport', I mean I hate it, I mean it. What we did is we simply, we all worked together to get visas, to get people out and we managed to bring at least 10,000 children. And I like to stress that was really done together, we sometimes had a difference of opinion on what was done and I remember there was a time when other English people left London, nothing to do with the Kindertransport, and went to Letchworth, or to Exeter, or.. to be away from towns where there was bombing done. I had many friends who were working in the City, every day they came from outside London to their work in London, and at five or six o'clock you saw them at King's Cross or at Euston Station taking their trains, to go to wherever their families lived at the moment. Now why do I mention it?

Tape 2: 2 minutes 53 seconds

These thousands of children they had to be taken care of specially, and we felt the more you keep them together, in a Jewish surrounding, that whether religious or not religious, it's unimportant, it was Hechalutz, Bachad, Habonim, Bnei Akiva, we all worked together,

because we all wanted the children to remain together, whether they are religious or not is completely irrelevant, whatever it was, that they should remain Jews. And we feared, and unfortunately we were right to fear that too many will get lost. On that issue we had a little bit of difference of opinion when we argued in Bloomsbury House or Woburn House. And again, I don't want to criticise at this moment, I think, which I don't mind saying, if the community, at the time, the Jewish community at the time, would have been a little bit more by people who knew what it was all about, I think we would have not lost so many. But in the meantime at least, lives were saved, that was important.

BL: So how did you select people who went to the Hachsharah, or how... do you see what I mean, after they came, how...

AH: Very simple, we simply, we tried to meet them and to persuade them, and we did it must say very cleverly, we met them, we talked, we met them at the reception room when they arrived, and many of them when they arrived let's say I think it was called Dovercourt, I think it was called Dovercourt, that was one place where they arrived. And we went there, and we put, we said to them 'Look, why don't you come to a place like Barnstable, which was Hechalutz Habonim, or to Gwrych Castle or Castle, or to Rosset St. Asset [?] I must say wherever we met the individual, they always preferred, on the whole they preferred to go with us, but it's true we didn't have enough places, it's true we had to find money to maintain these places, it was not easy.

Tape 2: 5 minutes 50 seconds

BL: So where did the money come from?

AH: There were two things, we did two things. Number one, we pressed the Central British Fund to give us money to be able to establish these centres, and we used our political know-how to get these funds. For instance, let's say the Marks and Sieff and Lasky as an example. They had a strong input on the British Fund because they were people who gave money, and we used them. And I remember I once went to Dorchester, where Chaim Weitzman was and I knew Chaim Weitzman's influence from the Marks and Sieff family, they were very, very close friends. I think they almost lived, in the house or flat that was three minutes walk, or five minutes' walk from the Dorchester, the Marks people and the Sieff people had their private residence. And we persuaded them to put pressure on the Central British Fund to give us money in order to establish these centres, both Hechalutz and Bachad, Habonim and B'nai Akiva.

Tape 2: 7 minutes 14 seconds

BL: Sorry just to clarify. So what was the difference between Bnei Akiva and Habonim ?

AH: Well, we worked together. I want you to know we had we worked completely together, we knew that there were those who wanted non-religious communities and those who wanted religious communities. I'm very proud of that when I say it, I formed what is called the Jewish Agricultural Committee, which was supported by the Central British Fund. The Chairman of the Jewish Agricultural Committee, Mrs Sieff, Rebecca Sieff, a wonderful woman, she was also at that time the Chairman of the Wizo, an exceptionally fine woman. She was later to become the Chairman of the Jewish Agricultural Committee. I had the

person, whose wife is still alive, he became later a Lord, Hirschfield, Lord Hirschfield, he lived not far from here, I persuaded him to become the Treasurer, of this Jewish Agricultural Committee, and various others, I was the so-called Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Agricultural Committee. The job of the Agricultural Committee was to find places, not as farming places, but really institutions where we could place 40, 50, 60, men, in Broomsgrove, in Kinnersley [?], in Barnstable, really all over the country, both for the religious and the non-religious, there was no problem there, it was done through the Jewish Agricultural Committee, and the Jewish Agricultural Committee raised funds on its own, but also got very good support from the Central British Fund. I mean in this respect there was no problem whatsoever. As I said the problem was between us and some people in the Central British Fund when we said 'it's not good enough that we take children in non-Jewish homes, it's nice of the non-Jewish families that they are prepared to take them, but it's not good enough. When you leave Germany and parents, your parents were sent to some concentration camp, Auschwitz or whatever, we said at least it's our duty to make sure that their children should remain Jews, because there their parents die because they were Jews.

Tape 2: 10 minutes 9 seconds

BL: But the issue is Zionism did also matter, because many British Jews felt...

AH: Yes, they were not..., I must be fair, the majority of British Jews at that time, they were not Anti-Zionist; there were some who were anti, but the majority they didn't care very much but they were not Anti-Zionist. What they said was, you know I must explain, there was no fight between us. They said to us: look, they said to us boys or girls, or gentlemen, they said our job is, that's what they said: 'Our job is to save children. We have them here now, there is a war on, we don't know what is going to happen, if we've got a non-Jewish family prepared to accept them, allow them to go there and we'll see later what's going to happen. Which was quite reasonable. We, who were strong Zionists, and some of us religious, we said to them 'yes that's all very nice, but we don't want to lose these children'. I remember had to say to one official, I won't mention the name, in Bloomsbury House, I had to say 'Look, it's bad enough that the Nazis are succeeding to destroy physically the parents, because they took them to the camps, to Auschwitz etc. Buchenwald, so then I said, but at least, make sure that the children should remain Jews. And don't forget, I mean you are much too young, you can't realise this, you know war, I remembered... you know there was a time... the British never lost their nerves. I remember when I took the 73 bus from Woburn House I had to go to Marble Arch, or to the Dorchester Hotel I took the 73 bus, and I remember like today, this is nothing to do with my story but I want you to know it, and I will never forget it, and I was sitting in the 73 bus, in Tottenham Court Road, there was a direct hit, next to the bus, it hit the church, famous church in the centre of, in the middle of Tottenham Court Road, and now you can find a completely beautiful church, in memory of that where many people were killed. Why do I mention it to you? I remember it like today. I was sitting there in that bus, there was a bomb just next to us, we remained alive. And the conductor, a typical Londoner, for about ten minutes we were all quiet, not one word. We knew that we survived, because we could have been killed, the centre was not more than maximum 100 metres away from us. I know the place, whenever I pass Tottenham Court Road I remember it. And we were sitting in the bus, the driver was quiet, everyone was quiet, it was a crowded bus. Not one word spoken, for about ten fifteen minutes. After fifteen minutes, the bus went on. Why do I say it? There was a wonderful spirit. And some of these Jewish people with whom we argued they said to us 'Look, there's a war on', they said. Very reasonable. The main thing is that there's a war on. The main thing is to save lives. And if you have a non-Jewish family prepared to accept them,

let's send them, wherever it is, they survive, and that's the most important thing, very logical. What was our argument? We said yes, if there is no other way, that is a way. But if we can find a way to place 200 boys and girls in a Castle which was then given to me for the duration of the war, Gwrych Castle, in North Wales, next to Abergele. I don't know if you know that part of England, of Wales. If we can get such a place, and we can place 200 boys and girls there, in their surrounding, it is better than to put them to a family which has their own problems, because there is a war on. And I believe that we were right, and they were wrong. They meant well, they meant well, but they should have listened a little bit more carefully. And of course this created in the community a lot of friction. There were some, let's say, this Rabbi Schonfeld, who brought 300 children from Vienna, and he took them rightly, and placed them immediately into a Jewish surrounding, which was better, and those who we saved, and Hechalutz, the non-religious, I would say at least, at least 75% of those are today in Israel, those who are still alive, and have contributed enormously in the army, they did their job. And others, I mean I get letters now, from people, I have to answer which I haven't answered for six months, someone who was in one of the non-Jewish places, remained a Jew, otherwise he wouldn't have written to me, but is away from anything Jewish. And wanted through me to hear about some of his friends, whom he remembered were also saved but he had no contact with them. And I always say that's the beginning. If someone is in non-Jewish surroundings and now says he wants to get back with old friends, that's a good sign. So, anyway, you want to ask me more.

Tape 2: 17 minutes 27 seconds

BL: Yes can I ask you about your personal life during that time.

AH: Yes, don't ask my wife, because she's still annoyed with me because I as you can imagine, I had a life, 16 hours of the day at least I had to work, at least. And Henny, we had two children, and also had to live, but...

BL: Where did you meet?

AH: We met funnily enough, we're always laughing about it, when I was in charge of the youth movement, someone told me that there's a girl from Berlin who has in Berlin conducted a choir, and it was in a music school in Berlin. And I knew about the family, I heard about it. And they said to me 'Look why should we start a little choir, in the movement here in London, and there's a wonderful girl who could do that'. So of course I didn't have much time, I said alright, arrange it, I was extremely busy with my other activities, you can imagine that was a job, really a 24 hours job, I travelled all the time to visit the children wherever they were, and but then I was told it's worthwhile for you to come, and we then started the choir, Henny had in the movement printed sheets of Hebrew songs, that was Henny's job, and people were always laughing, because when I saw Henny once, she was a very beautiful girl, so I once or twice went to see what they were doing. Henny knew already about me because she heard my name already in Berlin, she did some voluntary work in the Mensa [dining hall] of the Jewish Rabbinic College in Berlin, and I was already in Berlin quite active, and I then heard her and we met, and people were laughing, because I never had any time and suddenly I had time to go three four times to listen to her Hebrew Choir. That's how we met, and soon afterwards we... and Henny unfortunately... of course I knew of my parents because my parents at that time managed to send them to Palestine but Henny...

Tape 2: 20 minutes 23 seconds

BL: How did you manage?

AH: It was very simple. My father was able to prove that he had I think 2000 or 3000 pounds, which was a lot of money in Germany, and if he was able to prove that, he got what was called in German you call it 'Kapitalistenvisa'.

BL: That was still before 1938?

AH: That was before 1939, yes, and my parents, I got them out, just before war broke out, just before war broke out. I was lucky in this respect, and then of course Henny's parents, they stayed in... they were in Berlin until, the beginning of the war they managed to get to Paris, but then of course the Germans got to Paris and there was not much difference then. And we then, we married in one of these ... we married at the beginning of the war. And Henny for a time, for a time lived in London, a very short while in Golders Green and and then for a very short time in Henley-On-Thames, where quite a lot of people from, who wanted to get away from London because the Blitz was there, so they lived at Henley-On-Thames near Reading, and then Henny had a job, we had a very good Hachsharah Centre in Bromsgrove, which is near Birmingham, I got that place, it was the agricultural college of the Quakers, Cadbury, the Quakers' Cadburys. We persuaded one of the Cadburys it was a great success on my part, to persuade, and the Jewish Agricultural committee helped me, we persuaded them, and I said look, your place is empty during the war, give it to us, we'll make sure that it should be nice, and we'll have there some 70 or 80 boys and girls, and Henny became, already, we had already one child, Henny became the matron of the place, to look after food and cleanliness. I couldn't stay there, so after a week I had to be in London, I had to work here, but most Shabbatot I managed to go there. I remember Henny, you may know the name, Moshe Sharret, who was the Prime Minister after Ben Gurion, his name was Shatok, he had a brother in Berlin, Yehuda Shatok, who was a musician, he was in the same music school where Henny also was, in Berlin, the music school, that was before... that was already Hitler, that was already Hitler time. Right I won't bore you with that, you have more questions.

Tape 2: 24 minutes 12 seconds

BL: Yes, internment. Can you please tell me, were you interned?

AH: No. I told you the story. I told you the story. I was supposed to be interned, and I came with my case to the Police station here, and I think I mentioned this, and when I got to the Police Station, it still stands, it's the same Police station, five minutes from here, and I lived at Hall Road, also nearby. And when I arrived there the policeman said 'who are you?' I said 'I'm Arieh Leon'. 'Arieh Leon Händler? Must be a funny person. The Super wants to see you.' So I went up to the Super on the first floor. And he said 'Who are you?' I was with my case, 'I'm Arieh Händler, I've come to be interned. -'What did you say? You are Händler? -'Yes. '-You go home. They tell me you're more valuable outside than inside. So you stay outside'. And that's how I was not interned. And I then returned straightaway to my office in Woburn House, and continued. Then our job was of course, I could show you an interesting circular which we published then, we then sent out circulars to all the various internment camps, Isle of Man, etc, unfortunately there was also trouble. One boat on which boys were interned, was sent to Australia, you must have heard that, because they didn't have enough places they interned some in Australia and some in Canada. Some of them are today very wealthy people, and in Toronto one, a good friend of mine, he was interned, and managed then to build his life

again. But one boat, which went to Australia, was bombed by the Germans, and people were killed. So I was not interned, that I must say, really, to say how wonderful in this respect the British were. I had no restrictions in my activities. I didn't do anything bad, but they could have said you have to register there, and register there, no, they, I had my registration certificate and I was able to travel by boat, by car, by whatever I wanted.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 23 seconds

BL: But the Home Office knew these were Zionist... things.

AH: Oh yes, there were, I must say, and always stressed said, that there was the Minister of Agriculture called Lansbury, one of the men. They knew that we had a different opinion on the question of Palestine, obviously, and in the Labour party, there were, we had problems, Bevin [Ernest] etc, but in my activities, and I also know some of the other people in Hechalutz, it's true I had a special position, but I had not once any problem in my activity. On the contrary. Wherever I had to contact government departments, it's not nice to say, but I had more support from them than from Jewish institutions. The Jewish institutions were not against me, or against us, but they said 'look, we can't help you' you do your work, but we can't help you. That I heard often from them, and I was very annoyed, because there were times when I could have had a bit more help from their part, and I didn't get it. But the so-called official bodies, the government bodies, particularly the Minister of Agriculture, they were so pleased with my and our activities. At that time the country was divided, the whole country was divided into war agricultural committees. They did excellent work. And we of course offered our services, because we knew there were not enough hands available, people were in the army, and we had young boys and girls who were able to do something. So in various areas we offered our help, we didn't even discuss it with our so-called Jewish institutions, they did not have much understanding for that. They raised money, they Jewish institutions, that they did, they tried to place children or whoever, with some families, they didn't bother much about it, what kind of families, but to place them, which was good. Whereas we did more. We were thinking of the future and in fact we managed then later even to persuade the British Authorities, the Army Authorities, to take some of our boys, to get them first into the Pioneer Corps, and then into Army properly. I know my brother in law, the husband of the sister I mentioned before, who went later to Lavi, he was on Hachsharah, in North, near Belfast, we had a huge farm outside Belfast. All these boys, at least some of them, we managed to put into uniform, and now I can say it, and these same boys who were in British Uniform and were soldiers, wherever they could be in touch with people in the... that was already at the end of the war and when peace broke out..., they were still in uniform, we made sure that there should be contact between us and those in the internment camps, or camps, sorry DP camps, and under most difficult conditions. I could show you, I have a picture, where I travelled with the then Chief Rabbi, Israel Herzog, and ten other people, most of them from Israel, not Israel but Palestine, and a few from America, we went to these internment camps, to these DP camps, people under very difficult conditions, and we knew, we persuaded the army, the British Army, I must say, they were wonderful, we persuaded the British Army to allow some of their soldiers, which were our soldiers, like Eli, this my brother in law, to go into the DP camps, and to help them a little bit. And also, to prepare them, to travel to Marseille, to the Exodus. I remember like today, I must tell you the story, I remember it just now,

Tape 2: 32 minutes 42 seconds

I had to go to the Exodus, to Marseille, but I couldn't mention it when I left here.

BL: This was when?

AH: This was, already after the war, but it was difficult, everything was under military control, and the British didn't want to allow the boat to go to get to Palestine. But I had to get there, in order to be in touch with our, we had, some of our boys we had in the army, they were then given certain jobs in Marseille to be of help, but we couldn't write, we couldn't talk, we had to go there. I remember it like today. I was flying, yes I was flying from Northolt to Paris first. And when I got to Paris I got to the immigration officer, I had to show my passport, he knew exactly who I was, he knew exactly what I was doing. He asked me where I was going, I said well, to Paris. He said 'you're going to Paris to enjoy yourself?' I said 'yes, I've got friends in Paris.' He knew that I went on from Paris, that I was supposed to go from Paris by train, to Marseille, where the Exodus was waiting, because they didn't allow the Exodus to move. But we had to get in contact with our people there on the boat, we had people on the boat, not in uniform, but one boy died in the meantime... And of course, these officers, the immigration officer, he knew exactly I was not going to Paris to enjoy myself, he knew that from Paris, I went to Marseille.

Tape 2: 34 minutes 59 seconds

BL: How did you know that he knew?

AH: Because of the way he asked me. He said 'you're not going further on from Paris?' I said 'no', so he said 'But I think you might want to visit Marseille. I said 'I might, but...' But I knew exactly from the way, very friendly, very friendly, and I at least in my experience, which I had throughout the war here, and I had not an easy time, I had to do a lot of work, I had to rush around from one place to another, any support which I needed from government authorities, whoever it was, the Minister of Agriculture, or Home Office, for all sorts of reasons, they always knew, they knew my background, they knew that I didn't do it for the sake of only help, but that I was very much connected with the future state of Israel. They knew that. And I had never any difficulty. They, they knew in Woburn House, where we sent out our circular, one of these circulars, they were sent to the army, throughout the country, even to soldiers who were stationed very far away, in England, because we did not only have... we had quite a lot of British Chaverim, not only people who came from the continent. I remember one who died, later professor, his name was in... where he comes from. Professor Howard Fish, later Professor Har-el. And I remember this like today. We were sitting, we met in the underground once, he was in uniform, he was active, he was not a foreigner, he was a Britisher, and all these people, he was an officer in the navy, they all, whenever they could help, in keeping in touch with the people who were, Jewish people, he travelled, he was sent once to India, and we conducted our activities all over, and it was all pre-state, and the British knew that. Now the top authorities, the Foreign Office type of people, they didn't like us, but all the rest, they didn't care. They knew that what we were doing was nothing immoral, they helped us. The Foreign Office, at that time and for a time under Mr Bevin, they were not very helpful, because they knew that we want to establish the State of Israel, and the, so I myself, just to come back to me, then in 1946, yes, 46, I went to, I went to Israel to stay there, not to Israel, to Palestine, and I don't know whether I told you, did I mention this story to you? Just about three weeks before, not more, four weeks before the state was established, and the

British handed over Lod, the airport, to the Arabs, that was a time when by chance, Abba Eban and myself, and a third person who was from Hechalutz, we were given instruction to travel, to go to Palestine. My family was already there. Henny and the two boys were already there. And I had to go on a certain job, and Abba Eban was sent from America by Weitzman, via London, he was a Londoner, to Palestine, or to advise Ben Gurion on certain matters before the state was established. And we travelled by British Airways to Rome, we got to Rome, and when we got out there they said to us 'Who are you?' And they knew already Abba Eban, and 'Abba Eban, Arieh Händler', and there was someone else from Hechalutz, I forgot his name, and they said... Abba Eban said to them: 'Are you arresting us?' They were the Police, Carabinieri, they said 'Oh no, no, no, we are not arresting you, we are taking you to the Hotel Bristol'. And Abba Eban said again: 'But you are arresting us, because we don't want to go to the Hotel Bristol, we want to go to Lod.' 'Yes but Lod is not anymore in the hands of the Jews, not anymore in the hands of the British, it's in the hands of the Arabs. You can't proceed.' So Abba Eban said to the Police officer 'Leave this to us'. '-No, I'm sorry he said, you have to come with us. So he said 'Alright you are arresting us!'. So for seven days we were staying in Rome. I remember it like today, we were walking Via Veneto all the time, and waiting, waiting. And then on Friday a message came through. And oh yes, he had said 'You can't go through, there is no plane' So Abba Eban said 'Yes there is a plane: Pan African' And Pan African was really the fore-runner of El Al, it started with small little planes, under the name Pan African. And the message came through, Pan African can take us to Tel Aviv, there is a little airport outside Tel Aviv and you can go on Shabbat. Of course my journey was not so important, I am not going on Shabbat, in any case for Abba Eban in any case it was really important, and he would have gone in any case, so he went on Pan African, I went one day later, it was a little airport Sde Dov, it still exists, a little airport, then everything was alright. But they really arrested us for seven days, we could not move.

Tape 2: 42 minutes 38 seconds

BL: But who arrested you? The Italian Police?

AH: The Italians, but on behalf of the British. Formally it was not an arrest, but they didn't let us go anywhere. And that was I remember it like today, because it was a very small airport, and the planes very small little planes, Pan African planes. And then, a few weeks later, finally the state was established. And at that time, I will show you later the invitation I had, and when I showed this invitation to Yitzhak Rabin, when he was Prime Minister six years ago, I was sitting next to him at a function, Independence Day function, I said 'Oh ja, would you sign it?' So he also signed it. A nice little invitation. And at that time by the way, and this has nothing to do with Britain, at that time the Americans, or the American Jews, and the American State Department, Truman, they said 'Look, we are in favour of establishing the State, but wait a little bit because we want the British to accept it'. And Weitzman sent a message to Ben Gurion, that was Abba Eban's trip, to wait a little bit. And then, Ben Gurion, and he was right, said, he didn't know, yes or no, yes or no. And he s... 'On Wednesday, he decided, I declare the State, whatever happens.' And we had an invitation, I had an invitation, Friday, to be on Friday three o'clock in the Tel Aviv Museum Sderot Rotschild, and we were not more than about 50 people, because even the majority of those who had to sign, I was not one of the signatories, those who had to sign were still stuck in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was surrounded. Only one person, someone who works in my persuasion, Rabbi Fishman, later called Rabbi Maimon, a friend of Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion said, and Ben Gurion was not religious, but he was a good friend of Rabbi, they were in prison together in Turkey for many years. So he said 'I will send a helicopter to bring Rabbi Fishman so he should be with me'.

And it was tremendous. At 3.30 we were supposed to be there. We were there. At 4 o'clock Ben Gurion got up, read the declaration, Independence Day Declaration, there was a little... it was called the Eretz Israel music group, they played, and at 5.15 everything was finished, because it was Friday, Friday afternoon, everyone went home, either the religious to their places. I took Rabbi Fishman to his hotel, the Talpiot Hotel, it's now the Swiss Embassy. And I now I really tell you history. And when I went home, and it was Erev Shabbat, when we went later to synagogue at about 6.30, the Egyptian planes were already over Tel Aviv, and were bombing Tel Aviv. I mean this Friday night people were dancing on the one hand and they were worried what is going to happen tomorrow.

Tape 2: 46 minutes 35 seconds

And today it is clear. If he would not have declared that state on that day, there would have been so many complications, I don't know whether we would have had it. That was Ben-Gurion. And the only country who said really, 'go ahead with it', were the Russians, and the Czechoslovakians.

[Interruption]

BL: Yes we were talking about the Independence Declaration.

AH: Ya. That's right. Now, I also explain that here. See, there was, a deep discussion going on both in Israel, not in Israel at that time, in Palestine among the Jewish people there, and in America, and here in this country, whether one should really declare the State, because at the time one had the good will of the Americans, but the only real supporters at the time were the Russians and Czechoslovakia who helped with arms, and there was a deep division within the Jewish Community the world over. And here I must also mention something which I think is important, also in the light of the present political situation. Half a year before, before the state was declared, there was a meeting of the Zionist General Council, where I was a formal member, even as a young man. That was, yes, 47, half a year before the State was declared. And the meeting took place not in Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was very dangerous at that time, it took place in Tel Aviv, and there was a discussion whether to accept the British White Paper, which meant partition of Palestine. Half for the Jews half for the Arabs. It's very important also in the light of the present situation. And there was a wild discussion. I remember the place in Tel Aviv on the ground floor of a, of a very nice school building, a wild discussion, because the discussion went through all parties. You know let's say my party, the religious party. There were those who were on the right, who were against it, there were those who were on the left, to which I belonged, who were in favour of it. The same in the General Zionists...

Tape 2: 49 minutes 52 seconds

BL: Which party 'Mizrachi'?

AH: Mizrachi yes, but at that time we had two parts of the Mizrachi. There was Ha-po-el Mizrachi, the labour religious movement, to which I belonged, I was the Treasurer then, and the general one. And the same happened in all other parties, left and right. There was Abba Hillel Silver, Rabbi Hillel Silver, the Liberal Rabbi, Reform Rabbi leading man in Cincinnati, he was one of the leaders, strong man, strong personality, wonderful speaker, he was very much on the right, he was against accepting Partition; Stephen Weiss, Rabbi Stephen Weiss,

the leading Rabbi of the biggest Reform Synagogue in New York, strong man, he was in favour of accepting it. And so it went through all parties, also the Labour party, there were some who were a little bit more on the right, but not so many. And after a wild night discussion, a vote was taken, by the way, Mizrachi was really divided, Rabbi Bar-Ilan was against, Rabbi Maimon, who was a friend of Ben Gurion, in favour, I was one of those who was also in favour. And the vote was taken, and the majority accepted the Partition. I intend writing something about it in the Times, against Arthur Miller's letter, article, in the Times this week. And it was a difficult discussion to accept it. The Arabs of course said no, no to everything. And whenever I meet Arabs in meetings let's say in Chatham House, in the Royal Institute of International Affairs, I'm quite active from time to time, I always tell these Arabs 'Look, if you would have accepted the Partition at the time, you would have had your State, all the time, and you haven't accepted it then and you haven't accepted it today, because you want everything and that won't go. And I mention it because in our, in our World Movement, Zionist Movement, there was this inner division, but the majority was in favour and accepted it. And at the non-Jewish world is forgetting that, that in reality, if the Arabs would have accepted at the time, and even today, if they accept what at the time they all accepted, there could have been peace between us.

Tape 2: 52 minutes 48 seconds

And I want you to know that this problem somehow moves our Jewish, our Israeli life until today, throughout... Because you have the same problem today, if the Arabs would accept Partition, one could come to terms, even if today, there are still quite a number of Jewish people, Israelis, who would not like to accept it, but they have accepted it. So all I'm trying to say is that things we did not solve at the time unfortunately are not yet solved, and that is bad.

BL: Can we just go back a tiny bit, talking about the Hachsharot camps, obviously when people were interned and later went to the Pioneer Corps,

AH: In this country?

BL: In this country, must have closed down. Or what happened to the...

AH: We kept on these places as long as possible until we were able to send all of them to Palestine or to Israel. We kept them all, but then we established as you may have heard, we were particularly strong in this, we established our own, we closed all Hachsharah centres, all of them, and established and bought one big farm, the famous farm in Thaxted. A farm of over 450 Acres, it was where we kept those who really wanted to train for...

BL: When was that?

AH: That was, when all the rest closed, we bought then... that was one of, I believe one of my greatest achievements, because that it cost a lot of money, and I managed, I was then, I started was then called the Bachad Fellowship, they have raised really good moneys, I show you later show you a picture of that, and we bought that farm, and this farm remained, already until the state was already established, and in fact Eschkol, the Prime Minister then, once the minister of agriculture in Israel, he visited the place, it was a beautiful place, it was the largest Hachsharah centre which existed in the world.

BL: When was it founded?

AH: When we opened it? I have to be careful not to make a mistake, just a minute, that was established, the state we already, the Israeli state was there already, I think it must have been 1952-53. And it went on for at least another ten years, eleven years, twelve years, we trained an enormous number of boys and girls, not only people from this country, people came from other countries, from Australia, came, were trained in the centre, then we came to the conclusion, I said to my friends, why do we need a farm here? We can do the same work, training in Israel, because the state was established, we had no restriction in taking people there, if someone wants to be trained in Essex he can be trained in Israel, we close it, and use the money to help our Kibbutzim in Israel.

Tape 2: 57 minutes 0 second

BL: But I mean during the war, much earlier, in the forties, people were interned, and then went to the Pioneer Corps, joined the Pioneer Corps, what happened then? Also there must have been a reduction in numbers.

AH: Oh yes, of course, that is from the Gwrych Castle where we had 200 people, in Rosset , and all over in Devon and in Wales, you're quite right, we closed down a number of places, another sister of Henny, died only a year ago, she was in charge of a very nice little place Ruthin, in Wales, Ruthin, these places we all closed down, there was no need, because people were in the Pioneer Corps, because people went, legally or illegally on aliya, so we didn't need it anymore, and that is when I came to the conclusion we can close all places, but I kept one, not kept, we started the farm, which was our own, which was a very valuable piece of land, in Essex, and we kept it for about ten years, and then we closed it down too. Because by the way the present situation, we have at the moment I would say every month there are groups of boys and girls from this country, who go to Israel, who are being trained in our training centres in Israel, they come back, either some of them then finish school and get A-levels, and then go, and for instance, on our plane now, last week, when I returned from Israel, I had a group of six Bnei Akiva boys and girls, who were not youngsters anymore, they were in Israel to prepare the ground for thirty who will go now,, to be trained in Israel.

BL: I have to stop you because we have to change tapes.

TAPE 3

BL: This is Tape 3, we are conducting an interview with Arieh Handler, and it's the 14th of July 2003.

We finished the last time discussing the camp, the Hachsharah camp you set up in Essex.

AH: Which was a farm, not only a camp, that was already a proper farm, 350 Acres, a very important, a very important religious farm in Essex. And there we trained first of all we trained there 100s of boys and girls whom we took from various places in England to get proper agricultural training there but what is more, we used the farm as a place where during the summer when farmers all over the country needed help, we took them to the farm and we sent them from the farm out to farmers, to help with the harvesting work, because we must say that even at the end of the war, even when peace broke out, it took a long time until the normal English boys and girls returned from the army, agriculture work was essential, and we

made sure that at least, we didn't give all the help, but an enormous amount of help, because we took them boys and girls from the youth movement, from the Bnei Akiva, and I know it was done also it was done also in a small way but it was done also by Habonim. We took these young boys and girls, particularly the children of refugees, of German refugees, who were not in the army or didn't have to go to the army, and they helped farmers, first of all in that area, and in many many districts. As I mentioned to you before, England was divided by the government into various districts, every district had a war agricultural committee, and my job was to keep in touch with the leaders of these war agricultural committees, and to ask them whether they needed in August, September, or October, they needed help on their farms wherever it was needed, and they were extremely appreciated. And I have to find a letter which I had from the then Minister of Agriculture, his name was Landsbury I believe, where he expressed thanks to me and to us, to all my colleagues for the extreme help which we'd given them during the war and at the end of the war, and later when peace broke out. Because the boys didn't return from the army so quickly.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 10 seconds

BL: So from when to when did this farm exist, that's the main question.

AH: The farm existed only from the middle of the war until, I forget now it was already long after the State was established, because we kept it up of course, let's say I think it must have been in 1952-53-54 because we came to the conclusion that there was no need to maintain such a farm here in this country, we closed the farm, and the same work, training for Palestine, or for Israel, we could do in Israel itself, so we took young boys and girls from here direct to Israel, or that was as it was at the time, Palestine, to Israel, and there they were trained and either became members of Kibbutzim, Moshavim, or had their own little places wherever.

BL: What was the name of the farm in England?

Tape 3: 4 minutes 32 seconds

AH: Sextet. That was the famous farm in Sextet, Essex, it had no special... it was the famous Hachsharah farm in Sextet everybody really knew about it because it was a centre throughout the year, I could show you pictures where not only the Israeli ambassador, but leading members of the community, non-Jewish friends came and visited the farm because it was extremely well run. I was not an expert in farming, I was living in London and I only established it. And I was there very regularly, but we had real experts, who were trained. One for instance, Aaron Elon, later Dr Aaron Elon, he was trained in the Reading Agricultural University in Reading, and he became then the first manager of this farm. And later we had a young man named Kuli Landau, who is not alive anymore, who was trained in agriculture in this country, became a farmer in this place, the farm manager, and later, in Israel, just to show the good training which they received here, this man, Kuli Landau, became later director of the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel. Just to show that the work which was done in these places was not just child's play it was not just a summer camp, it was serious work. And we were given a lot of recognition by the government for the work which we've done.

Tape 3: 6 minutes 28 seconds

BL: Can you tell me, the members, or the people who went to the Hachsharah, during its whole existence, in the middle of the war, during after the war, to the early fifties, did it change, I mean how, what was the percentage of actually refugees, and sort of British ...

AH: That's a very good question. I will put it like this. At the beginning, when we started the farm, there were I would say at least 75% were refugees. But it went down later, later these were already English boys, and I would say later at least 60% of boys and girls who were trained on that farm and later left the farm for Israel/Palestine, were already so-called British, I mean Jewish people, but British. To give you an example, just, I just met him in Israel. The former Ambassador, a very important, Israeli ambassadors to this country, happens to be, he was a boy born in Manchester. His name in Manchester was Gubi Haffner, later, I'll show you later a book, later he became Yehuda Avneah, the ambassador of Israel, he was actually the main letter-writer and speech writer of Menachem Begin, and later also Rabin. Why do I mention it? He, his sister and various other people from Manchester were already British born boys and girls, who received their training on the farm, went to Israel, either to a kibbutz or whatever, to University, and became leading members of the community in Israel. These were not, they were not only trained so that they should be able to make a living. I would say that at least, at least 60% of the boys and girls, those refugees and later British born, those who are now in Israel are all, play quite an important part in the life of the country... They are not all ambassadors of course not, but they are, ... the brother-in-law of this man Yehuda Avneah, he became for many years director of the Aliya department, immigration department of the Jewish Agency in Israel, or some of them were later sent like he, as special advisors either to the United States, or to this country, or to Australia, to help training young people that means what we did, what we've done, and I'm very proud of that, and it wasn't done by myself, it was done by a wonderful team of people, some of them are still alive, but some unfortunately died, and what I'm trying to say is that the training which we gave to these refugees, and later to British born boys and girls was such good training, that in Israel they then became quite important people.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 18 seconds

Let's say, we've got as I mentioned before, we've got today, and I was instrumental in starting it, a famous English Kibbutz, an English religious Kibbutz, Kibbutz Lavi, in the Galil. If you would come there today, this is one of the most successful Kibbutzim in the country. They, they have a hotel there which is more expensive than the King David in Jerusalem and excellent, well-run. They've got, in addition to agriculture, they've got a factory where they produce, it's not a factory, they produce furniture for synagogues throughout the world. In every sphere of agricultural life, they are leading. And I should add, not all these boys who were trained here in this country, refugees, went to this one kibbutz. Many went to other Kibbutzim throughout the country. Many were not later, are not anymore in agriculture, became lecturers at Universities. What I'm trying to say is that the work which was done at that time, not by me, by those who really run these places, they became I would say very important members of Israel's community.

Tape 3: 12 minutes 10 seconds

BL: Did you also take people from... because you mentioned before the DP camps you worked in DP camps in Germany. Did they also come from England?

AH: No. Yes, where we made a special effort, got quite a number of DP people to this country. But, we, we had to decide whether this was right, because in the end, and we did this even before the state was established, so we had difficulties getting visas for them, so once the state was established there was no need to bring anybody from the DP camps to this country. We took them straightaway to Israel. And I must say, here again, the work here that was done here in the centre, not only in the farm, and we had all over the country, and that was at the Hechalutz, which was the non-religious ? movement, they did exactly similar work... We were a little bit more successful, because we had a very successful farm in Sextet, but these other groups, non-religious groups, Habonim, particularly Habonim and Hechalutz, they've done particularly good work, excellent work, and I must add, that this is really the strength of the work which was done for refugees. Whether they were religious or non-religious was completely irrelevant. The important thing was that we gave them proper training. And the religious and non-religious, meaning Bachad and Hechalutz, we worked closely together. As I mentioned to you before, we had a Jewish Agricultural Committee, which was, had nothing to do with being religious and non-religious. It had to do with training people for Israel. And there both, extremely good work, and we were envied I must say, by those organisations in the States, or in South Africa where they were trying to do similar work, was not as well done as it was done here in this country.

Tape 3: 14 minutes 49 seconds

Before now we get to you and your period in Israel, can we just talk a bit more about your personal, private life in Britain in the forties. You got married but you also studied, so maybe you can tell me a little bit about that?

AH: Yes, unfortunately I should have studied more, but I was so busy. I became, I joined the London School of Economics, the LSE, and I was particularly interested in Economics, obviously. To tell you the truth, particularly during the wartime, when LSE was also in Cambridge, I did not have much time, could not give much time to it, because as I told you before, the work which I... Even referred to the family, my wife didn't see me much, the, it was a more than 24 hours job, and became... not only I, there were other people, there was my colleague, died in the meantime, a leader, he was a Shaliach of the Histadrut, of the non-religious workers movement, Fritz Lichtenstein, later Peretz Leshem, and his wife, he also came to this country from Palestine, he was there, he lived there much longer. I was really I at the beginning in 1938 I came to this country, I just was only four, six weeks in Palestine, later I was much longer, but let's say this man, Peretz Leshem, Fritz Lichtenstein, or the man who was, he was not at all, he never passed into Germany, Lichtenstein came from Germany, Marduk Schadnur [???], these were all non religious leading members of the Histadrut, of the Hechalutz, they've done extremely good work, and some of them.... they, since they were neither Ger..., I was a so-called German. From London I travelled to various countries, but I was a little bit restricted, because I was not yet British, I was just German. Whereas some of those whom I just mentioned, like Fritz Lichtenstein or Marduk Schadner [???], we were able to send them on special missions for instance to Spain, to Portugal.

BL: When?

AH: Really in the middle of the war, some at the end of the war. As you can imagine, I don't want to embark on this so much, there were certain things which we had to do, I from London, and I used them, because they were, they came already with a so-called Palestine Passport, which meant British passport, and we were able to send them, perhaps wrongly put,

'we sent them', we used their capabilities to go to countries from where we also did rescue work, during the war even, and when peace broke out, there we needed an enormous number of help, because we had, our main job was, that was one of my main jobs from the office here, when I was in Woburn House, to keep in touch with the DP camps, throughout Central Europe and Former Germany, and we used every person who could help us, I don't mind saying and we sometimes used businessmen who were permitted to go to the continent, to France, or to Germany, which was then under British or American control, we used every person in order to help our people.

Tape 3: 19 minutes 20 seconds

And I must add here, because this is completely forgotten, the situation in these DP camps was sometimes disastrous. I remember, it must have been already, after peace broke out, end of 45, 46, when, I don't know whether I mentioned this, when I travelled with a group of people who came specially from America, specially from Palestine, not yet Israel, some from America, particularly the then Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Chief Rabbi Herzog, who was before the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, and his two sons, one son later became President of Israel, and the other one Yakov Herzog, who was a very important man, who died very early. We had a group of some, at least 15 people, I was the youngest among them, in uniform, a British Uniform I had, hanging still, because I used my clothing coupons in order to buy, to get the British Uniform, and you had to use your coupons for it, your clothing coupons. And we went on a tour of all the DP camps in Central Europe that means mainly Germany, in the American Zone, French Zone, and British zone. That was how Germany was divided at the end of the war, at the beginning of peace. And I remember, I got pictures of that, when we visited some of these DP camps, people under the most terrible conditions. We did not believe that we would be able to make out of these human beings active workers, active citizens in the new Palestine, new Israel. I remember when I visited, I forgot the name of the place near Vienna in Austria, or the DP camps in France, near Strasbourg, people under the most difficult circumstances, when they saw somebody, the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, it was not yet Israel, they thought that this man would be able to give them, to bring them all health and security and of course he couldn't. The only thing we could do is we could talk to them and give them moral support, to tell wait another half a year, another year and something will happen to you, we will be able to take you, because we were not able to take them, there were no visas for them. And most difficult conditions in these camps. Alight, they were able to eat, they got something to eat. But they, don't forget that these people who at that time suddenly realised that they had no parents left, no brothers, sisters. Why do I mention it? We tried to bring some of those to this country, to these Hachsharah Centres, but we did not always know whether this was the right thing to do. Because if you take a person who comes from really, just left the camp where he would almost have been killed, destroyed, to take them suddenly to a country like England under completely different circumstances, we did not always know whether we did the right thing. And in fact when we went, this delegation, quite a number of leading rabbis from the States, and one from Switzerland, beside the one from Palestine, our major was to tell them 'Look, wait a little bit more, we will be able to take you in another half a year or year to Palestine, later Israel, that means we tried to give them the feeling that their life is not lost, was not lost. And I must say in the end we succeeded there, because all of those whom we then managed to bring to Palestine, some legally, some illegally, they became normal human beings again, with some of their problems. But in this respect the work we have done here, and I forgot to mention we used some of those boys and girls who came from Germany originally, whom we managed to bring here before the war broke out, in 38, 39, Henny's two sisters, and boys and girls, we managed to train them in such a way that they

became later leaders of such groups and later they went to Palestine, or Israel, it's irrelevant, and got their own Kibbutzim, I could show you here, I got a letter here, which I received from some who were trained in this country who came from Germany of course, received their training here, we managed to send them, I'll show you the letter, and still 45, to Palestine, they became members of Kibbutzim, particularly one family, became members of one Kibbutz, Tirat Zvi and I could show you the letter, where is it...

Tape 3: 26 minutes 52 seconds

BL: You can show me later.

AH: Yes I'll show you later, a letter which they wrote to me, and then I wrote to them. These this family, I mean they married, a boy and girl they married, unfortunately the wife died two or three years ago. The husband, who was trained here, Baruch Friedler was his name, is today, he's not a young man anymore, a leading member of a very important Kibbutz in Israel, Tirat Zvi, and he's got children, grandchildren, grand-grandchildren already. When you see these people today, and I visit them from time to time when I've got time in Israel, then you really feel that is the greatest success story, because these were people who...

Tape 3: 28 minutes 8 seconds

[Interruption. Phone rings.]

What I'm trying to say is the greatest of all these activities, which was I was just one little instrument in that, there were so many others who were involved in it, the greatness of it is that after all which they've gone through, arriving from Germany in 1938, or some 39, to this country, and in this country, after the difficulties here, the Blitz, and everything connected to it, I mean they were all part of it, Henny's sister, she was in one of these... we also had town centres, Batei Chalutz, and we had here in West Hampstead, I remember in West End Lane, we had one of these Batei Chalutz, where we had boys and girls, they were not in agriculture, they did all sorts of other, whatever else, locksmiths or whatever, and one night, she was with some other friends, did not go home to her place, and that same night this Beth Chalutz, it was a centre of Chalutzim in London, it was a direct hit, a direct hit, all who were there, were killed, the whole building destroyed, and why do I mention it? These are the type of... Now by chance, she was by chance, she was with a friend at that time, it must have happened to others too, and these people, after they've lost their parents, after they've lost almost everything, they then finally got to Palestine or to Israel. Obviously, to train these type of youngsters after all this what they've gone through, I mean many of them could have become the most difficult people to live with, and some it was like that, but in the end these same people, and you go today to quite a lot of religious and non-religious Kibbutzim, and particularly those boys and girls who were trained in this country, they are today, often the mainstay of their respective Kibbutzim, and this is we are proud of that.

Tape 3: 31 minutes 10 seconds

BL: During their time here, the refugees, the young refugees, did you feel the, what were they, for example the outbreak of the war, and the end of the war, how did people, how did these youngsters....?

AH: That is a very important question which you put. And I've got to be careful, I don't want to show everything only in rosy pictures. I don't know whether I showed you this one picture,

I told you we had one centre with 200 boys and girls in Gwrych Castle, in North Wales, where we were married, in 41, and there we had boys and girls, 200, who all of them lost their parents. They, we thought that they would all become social cases, because you know when... I remember the day when I, I think I told you this, when I had to travel from London to, on Sunday, when the war broke out, to tell them that war broke out, that practically they won't see their parents anymore. That's what happened. And that was only one place, 200 in Gwrych Castle. There were all over the country. We worried that it would be difficult to make out of those people, really useful citizens, of their respective countries, because people who gone through this shock, but there I must say these centres, and I must give credit also to quite a number of non-Jewish institutions who helped us, let's say these war agricultural committees, with who we were in contact all over, they couldn't do very much, but the way they treated our people helped a lot. And, how shall I put it, then they were a number of years they were here, they were trained, and I must say we managed to make out of those really healthy, normal human beings. I remember, also it was a few years ago, I was sitting in with some friends, who were in Israel, they happen to live now in Jerusalem, and I saw a gentleman who remembered me, I didn't know him, who was, who came from America, who went from this country, after a Hachsharah, who went to the States, not to Palestine. And when he saw me, he was so grateful to me. I said why are you so grateful to me? He said 'Look, I'm, it's true, I'm now living in the States, and quite.. business, and he said look, I was one of the boys who was trained here in Gwrych Castle, it that place. I didn't remember him of course. And he was so proud, because now, his son, a famous professor in, at University in Tel Aviv, Bar Ilan University, he writes regularly in the Jerusalem Post, his son... why do I mention it to you? The satisfaction which we all have in this type of work, is not so much that we saved an individual, or an individual family. It was much more. The result was that their children, and grandchildren, are today playing an important part in Israel's society. Not everybody mentions immediately that he came from Hakhsharah centres, but it's remarkable, the statistics, of how all these youngsters were extreme, became real builders of the state and if I forget now for a minute Israel, once there were quite a lot who today are playing quite a nice part in society in the United States or here in England, I don't want to mention names, so it gives us a feeling of satisfaction that the work that was done had an important purpose.

Tape 3: 36 minutes 30 seconds

BL: What role did religion play?

AH: Yes, that's an important question. Always we are a bit biased when I say it, I believe religion played a very important part, because it somehow kept them. And I think I mentioned it to you, I've got a deep grievance, I must say it here to you, to many of the so-called leaders of the younger Jewish community, that when these boys and girls arrived in this country, that no one worried about it, whether, what sort of social and religious life they would lead, they thought the most important thing is, I think I mentioned this to you before, they said 'look as long as you save them it's good enough'. But it's not good enough. I could give you examples of individuals who now regret that for years they were not in touch with the Jewish community, and they're missing something at the moment, and I think one has to write a book on this subject, because I believe religion has played an important part, and particularly those who were lost, and they were neither religious in a Christian sense, nor religious in a Jewish sense.

BL: Yes but for example if you compare the religious Zionist Movement to the Hechalutz ? In lets say Gwrych Castle, was it Kosher, was the Shabbat kept ?

AH: Oh yes, in our places, not only was Shabbat kept 100%, and kashrut, and everything connected with religion was kept properly, I would say much more, many of... we arranged, we had, we're very proud of that. We had in Manchester two centres, called Merkaz Limmud Hostels, in the middle of the war, when we took boys and girls, mixed, I mean it was not just a Yeshivah where people, where men only learned, we took them from these agricultural centres, from Thaxted from Gwrych Castle, from Rosset, from St Asser [?], from Whittingehame, all over, and took them for six months, to a Merkaz Limmud, both boys and girls, they lived together, they received Jewish studies, Hebrew, Torah, and I must say, I don't want to say anything negative, God forbid, about Hechalutz, but, I know from many Kibbutzim, good friends of mine were not religious, living in Kibbutzim, they are now like me, old people, they are upset that some of their children, went to India and to Thailand and to all these places, and some of them remained there, and some of them did not return to the Kibbutzim, something got lost in their lives and it's not a political ideological discussion which we've got, some of these parents said to me they are very concerned that many of the children today of non-religious Kibbutzim, they are not anymore children, they are already married young people, are not returning to the Kibbutzim, some of them are not even returning to Israel, because something got lost, and here I would say, the religious Hachlutz movement, Bachad, had a great advantage. Not everything was easy there, don't have any illusions, we had young boys in these centres, during the war, I don't know if I mentioned it, I remember it like today, when I was told to come straight away from London. It was night. It was Blitz, that night, I had to go to Manchester, where we had a centre, Manchester, outside Manchester somewhere on ... Farm [???] and what happened there, suddenly two young boys of that group, decided, one wanted to leave everything connected with religion, and he went to Glasgow, joined the Free German youth, which was a communist, a communist group, and the other one, just the opposite, was his friend, became very very religious, and left, we were not religious enough. To tell you the stories of individuals. This man did not suddenly become a communist, he later became a top professor of languages at Glasgow and Edinburgh University. For years there was no contact with him. His son is deputy attorney general in Scotland.

Tape 3: 42 minutes 45 seconds

BL: What's his name?

AH: His name? I don't mind to say it... Price. Professor Price. After he retired as professor, he was not anymore orthodox, but remained a good Jew, he and his wife then when he retired went to Israel, lived in Yerushalayim for a time, unfortunately he died, she is in a home at the moment with Alzheimer, and his son is in Edinburgh, he is deputy attorney general.

BL: So what do you do in a situation like that when two boys...

AH: Yes, now in such a situation what I did was first of all, two nights, I talked and talked and talked to them. Because both extremely valuable young people. Both. They left. And I tried to convince them, I tried what I could. Today I know that at the time, I believe that we lost them. Today I know we did not lose them, because in their own development, the one who became very orthodox, left everything but then is still, very much in contact with our Kibbutzim and as I mentioned to you, that means that the work that we've done was very important, and religion played an important part. And you must realise that we, I can say that, we were not trying to convince people to be religious, you know, to make proselytes, we did

not want that. What we did is try to explain that to give them every possible chance to decide on their own what they would want. And in this respect we were very very successful. Really this professor Price who left everything and in the end decided to return to Yerushalayim, he didn't become very orthodox, but remained a very very good Jew until his death.

Tape 3: 45 minutes 42 seconds

BL: Did you have contact to the religious institutions in England founded by German Jews, Munks Synagogue, Belsize Square Synagogue?

AH: Yes we had contact with all of them. Let me put it like this. Also, Rabbi Schonfeld, and Chief Rabbi Hertz, I had very close contact with them. We had contact with them, but I can be outspoken. They did not always understand our problems. That was, that was a little bit nasty, institutionalised religion. You know, if they were part of their community alright I think they were happy with it. But they did not understand enough the problems of these young people. I must say there were two amongst them were different, we did not always agree with them, I mean one was very right wing, these Rabbis I mention two names now, but in spite of the fact that they were right wing...

BL: You mean right-wing...

AH: In terms of religion. In terms of religion. Not necessarily right, they were not fascists, but right-wing in a religious sense, don't forget, we in our centres, boys and girls mixed, that was, it was not segregated, it was not, it was everything together. And they were not always satisfied with that, but I must say there were two, I mentioned them, one of them was Rabbi Schonfeld, the son-in-law of Chief Rabbi Hertz, who was more left, and the other one was Rabbi Munk, who was in Golders Green, Schonberg was in North London, we had different views, but they had enormous understanding for what we did, I was particularly lucky because the mother of Rabbi Schonfeld, who was the widow of another Rabbi, Rabbi ViKor Schonfeld, she worked for me, we had this Bachad fellowship organisation, which is today called Friends of Bnei Akiva, because all these centres they cost a lot of money to maintain, and for this I had an organisation, and I'll later show you an interesting photo of that, and the mother of this Rabbi Schonfeld, with whom I had religiously a little bit of difference of opinion, she worked, she was working for us, she was employed, she was a wonderful woman, the whole family was wonderful, but I would put it like this. It's not nice that I say that, which is so-called institutional religious bodies, let's say like the United Synagogue, of whom I am a good member, we did not get much support from them, nor did we get much understanding, nor did we agree with everything what they did.

Tape 3: 49 minutes 17 seconds

BL: On what issue for example?

AH: Let's say they were mainly interested that there should be synagogues, and they had some synagogues outside London and there was a war, people were placed in other places, and they were mainly interested that people should go to the synagogues, but they didn't worry that some of these boys and girls were with a non-Jewish family. And being placed with a non-Jewish family of course brought young men, or women into inner conflict, they said 'where is my community?' And many left, many left the Jewish communities; among these 10,000 Kindertransport children, ... thousands of them are not anymore with us.

BL: Did you have any contact with Rabbi Salzberger from Belsize Square?

AH: Yes. I personally had particular contact with him, even if he was Liberal, Reform, now you'll be surprised what I tell you now. When I was in Germany still, and I went to school, and when my parents, sent me from my little town where I come from, to a bigger town where there was a bigger Jewish community, I continued with my studies in the non-Jewish gymnasium, and I studied for a few years in Frankfurt in what was called in Frankfurt the Lessing Gymnasium. Rabbi Salzberger was there, the so-called religious teacher. He was religious teacher there. And people are surprised, my religious orthodox Rabbi, allowed me, because this school was a Humanistic Gymnasium, Latin and Greek, we had to go, even on Shabbat, to school. I didn't write, they didn't insist that I wrote on Shabbat, but in Germany, things were functioning on Saturdays. I think here not. And I was a member of this Gymnasium, and Rabbi Salzberger as it happened was a religious teacher. In fact when Salzberger came to this country we remembered each other from that time. I was a young boy in school, and I knew him quite well and I appreciated him very much. Rabbi Georg Salzberger. How do you know him? From Belsize Park?

BL: From Belsize.

AH: But not in your time.

BL: No, no, obviously.

AH: You only know of him. He was really the first, he started it, really, Belsize Park.

Tape 3: 52 minutes 29 seconds

BL: Did you ever go?

AH: Oh yes, oh yes oh yes.

BL: Do you have any memories?

AH: Of the Shul or of Salzberger?

BL: Both.

AH: No of Salzburger I remember extremely well because I remember him from Frankfurt, he was my formal teacher. I mean, I was also, I was living in the Yeshivah, today this would be.. I was living in a Yeshivah in Frankfurt, orthodox, was at the same time, continued my studies in the Gymnasium, non-Jewish, and in that Gymnasium there was a formal religious lesson every, twice a week, two hours, and Rabbi Salzberger gave this lesson, so of course I knew him from then and appreciated him, and when I came to this country also the town where I come from originally, Magdeburg, was also a very liberal community, and there the Rabbi, Dr Wilder, also very very much a Reform, Liberal, he also came to this country to Cambridge, and we had contact, my contact both with Salzberger and Rabbi Dr Wilder. So in spite of the fact that I was orthodox, am orthodox, I appreciated them very very much. And I like the way he, even his synagogue, I like the, the way, even if they're formally Reform, but they are very traditional, the ... ? I knew him extremely well, but he died many years ago.

Tape 3: 54 minutes 15 seconds

BL: Did you go... You said you went to the services.

AH: Oh yes, I went to services in certain, I had a number of friends who either, their children had Bar Mitzvahs there and so and I had a close friend, I won't mention names, who was an active member in that Shul, and so I know the Shul, it's a very very fine Shul. But in spite of that I must say that the Jewish community, I can't say this about the AJR, because they were refugees, we lost too many of our young people, some of them have returned, but they returned with, they've got their problems. I sometimes get letters from people who know that I'm quite active in certain fields, and they tell me that it was wrong, that when they were placed with non-Jewish families, there was no contact then with the Jewish community. And that was a big mistake, and that even they are blaming even the so-called orthodox United Synagogue. Because they could have also done much more. They have an excuse, they say to me look, what could we have done, there was a war, there was a Blitz, every person had to make sure that he should survive, which is true but I still say one could have done a bit more.

BL: Let's talk about the post-war years. You said that a delegation went to the DP camps. What was it like for you to go back to Germany and see what was happening?

Tape 3: 56 minutes 15 seconds

AH: I tell you, even a funny answer. You know, obviously I felt very much because some of my friends, and parents of my friends, were killed, say Henny's father whom I didn't know, was killed in Auschwitz, and many others. So obviously, it was a shock for me when I got back to Germany, I remember my first visit to a town which I knew so well which was completely destroyed, you should have seen, it was terrible. But I must say, perhaps it's my character, I did not have any hate, feeling of hate, neither against the Germans, nor against any let's say Jews who didn't want to leave, I knew people who didn't want to leave but they could have left. I do not have any feeling of hate. For me it was more, how should I say, the whole religious question, and I say it until today, you see, I blame the almighty God for it, and I'm a religious Jew, I can't blame individuals, these were difficult times, I remember, it's a good question that you ask. I remember my first day in Germany was really I flew, to Frankfurt, which was completely destroyed. I had only feelings of pity, even for the Germans I must say. Only feelings of pity. And, you... also my situation, and I say it, often when I write on this subject, 'look, in a way I cannot forget that the Germans, the Nazis, Eichmann, who was the worst of them all, they gave me permission to go in and out of Germany, to take people out. So I tell you frankly, I don't say I blame more, but I blame the Western Countries, including England, who did not take this whole problem seriously. And I cannot forget, that in the middle of the war, when the deputy of Hitler, Rudolph Hess flew to Scotland, and when British Aristocracy wanted to receive him. So how can I blame the simple German, who was also, I mean, I even if I belong to the Zionist movement, I was also in Germany as a young boy I was also a member of the Socialist Youth movement. And I remember how at that time socialists did try very hard to fight the Nazis. They didn't succeed. And when I came to this country I did not succeed. When I came here in 1936,37, as a young boy, I told you the story when I went to Chief Rabbi Hertz and he tried to help me but couldn't because they were all, no one was able to do something. And I cannot forget that at that time we did not, we could have taken out people from Germany in 1936, 37, 38. Alright then in 39 at the last minute

things were done, of course when people were able to prove that they had £2000 you know, £2000 was at the time, like today £200,000, or at least 20,0000, much more.

BL: We have to change tapes.

TAPE 4

BL: This is tape 4, we are conducting an interview with Mr Arieh Handler.

We were discussing your feelings on going back to Germany.

AH: Yes, as I said before, when I, my first visit was really to Hamburg, the town where I partly grew up, Frankfurt meant a lot, it was a very strong Jewish community. And as I mentioned to you before also, obviously getting to Frankfurt, Frankfurt was a tremendous town, you know Goethe and all this, and it was half destroyed, the town. And I wouldn't say that I had a feeling of pity on the Germans who were partly responsible for their troubles, but I did not have any feeling against the individual Germans.

BL: Did people accuse you; did people say it's wrong to go to Germany?

Tape 4: 1 minutes 30 seconds

AH: There were one or two people, but not so much to me, because they knew I was going for a certain purpose, you know to go to visit the DP camps and to be with those who suffered so much. But there were quite a number of Jews at that time, both in this country, in America, all over the world, Palestine, who said one shouldn't go back to Germany. For me this was irrelevant for two reasons. Because I would go to help those who were still there, and I had in Frankfurt, we had people who came from the DP camps, I met them, so obviously one had to be with them. I think I mentioned it before, when I arrived in Germany, not when I arrived, when my plane, the POAC, it was called, I really remembered then that there was such a wonderful time for the Western countries to save at least those Jews who wanted to leave Germany. And with what exception of a few, the thing was not... people did not take it seriously. France could have taken quite a lot of Jews. It's true, the Nazis came later to France, but many things could have been different. And England, and other countries, not enough was done. And when I, on my first visit back to Germany, I only remembered that the Nazis, I will say something terrible, the Nazis gave me the permission to go in and out of Germany before the war to get people out, and I managed to get people out, but I was one individual, and there was one organisation, so my feeling is not, was not, I mean I knew it I was entering history, because when you come after the war to a place like Frankfurt, Frankfurt was known as the town of culture in Europe, and you get there to this place and you see that half the town, completely destroyed, or the town which I said I did not visit, the town I really come from, Magdeburg, was completely destroyed. So I'm only a human being, I knew these were Germans who were killed, but at the same time, they were human beings. And my feeling was that, which I carry with me all my life, that we human beings are not in order. There is something wrong with us. Also today, there is something wrong with us. When you think of Iraq and you think of all these fights, and you think of the suicide bombers in Israel, there is something wrong with us. Just being, we were just now in Israel, and I was sitting in my place where I was and my wife and my son, there were two minutes away, two minutes away, in their car, from a place in Jerusalem where a suicide bomber killed 29 people. 29 people. So we as human beings there is something wrong with us, it's not only a

question of Germans or not Germans, so that's why my feeling was only 'how can we save as much as we can?'

Tape 4: 6 minutes 15 seconds

BL: Do you know any people, any of your friends who went back to live in Germany?

AH: Yes, yes, I know, and human nature is a very funny thing. I give you an example, because you ask this question, and I tell you a story. Shortly before the state was established, then in Israel, I visited a Kibbutz not more than 6 miles from Jerusalem. When I visited that Kibbutz, all the women were already taken out of that Kibbutz, it's called Kvar Etzion, why, because they knew that the Arabs wanted to destroy this Kibbutz. That was before the state was established, two weeks before. When I visited that Kibbutz, the women were already taken out, and when I left the Kibbutz, five days later, all the men of that kibbutz were killed. 120 men killed. Two other kibbutzim were imprisoned, but they were killed. Why do I mention that to you? You asked me a question. There was one person in that Kibbutz, who was one of the founders of that Kibbutz, a young man he happened on that day when they were killed to be outside, in Jerusalem or in Tel Aviv, he was not killed. This man, a very fine person, exactly my age, he, he was so disappointed, all his friends were killed. So he went to Frankfurt, to start his life there again. He is still there by the way, he sends me every Rosh Hashanah a greetings card, he is already a Doctor, and he as become quite a wealthy person. In Frankfurt, and gives a lot of money to the Universities in Israel. Now who am I to judge whether it is right or wrong for such a man, in Frankfurt, to go and live there. I believe that he went there because his world has gone completely.. his world broke. All his friends, 150, 120 friends, all killed, and I can imagine, I can understand such a person. And alright then he stayed, built up a little family, every third month he goes to Israel, he gives a lot of money to Israel, so why do I say it? I can't judge, and I say it's wrong to judge anybody in this respect. In each case there will be a reason, even if it is a reason... of a person who says he can't make a living in Israel, or he can't make a living in London, and he may be able to make a living in Berlin or in Frankfurt. So I don't judge.

Tape 4: 10 minutes 39 seconds

BL: So coming back to you, where did you want to be after the war?

AH: Now, I must say I wanted to be after the war in Israel, and that's why immediately when I come to my personal story, I did my work, and I can show you letters I asked my colleagues who sent me indirectly to London, I said 'look, I want to go back', and of course they said you can go back but first you got to finish your job in London, which really was really training of these boys who then went to Israel. And then I went to, I was not before living there, but then I started, I went to Israel end of 1945-46, and I was heavily engaged in political and constructive work there, and you know when we started this one Kibbutz Lavi, I was very much instrumental, we started youth centres in Israel. And I must say something very personal, then there came a time when the state was already long established and I was very very active in it, I've always been a bit of a lefty, not a communist, but my outlook on many things is very progressive, and I don't blame others who think differently, and my movement, the religious labour movement, which I represented, more than actively, I was the treasurer of the religious labour movement in Israel until after the state was established, and then at a certain moment, my colleagues, some of my colleagues, only some, they decided to

join up with the more right-wing religious group, also Zionist, religious Zionist, but more right-wing; and I was a minority, I remained in a minority with my friends.

Tape 4: 13 minutes 10 seconds

BL: So this was Mizrachi, or what was it then?

AH: My party was called Hapoel Ha Mizrachi. Labour, religious Labour movement, but we worked together with Mizrachi, but Mizrachi was in two independent movements, then, the leaders of, many of the leaders of the movement with whom I was together, the labour movement, the religious movement, the labour movement, they said 'look, these Mizrachi people, they are old people, that's really what they thought, they will die in any case, we'll simply join with them and we take them over.' I was against it. There was a conference, I was with my friends and I remained a minority. And then, this was all on a very friendly basis. The leader of the party, who was later, who was at that time Interior Minister in Israel, Moshe Shapiro, he said 'look Arieh now you have to carry out this'. Because I was the treasurer, it was an important position. So I said 'Look Moshe, I lost, but you can't demand of me to carry out this what I don't agree with. It was all very friendly. And I said that I won't do. And at that time, many of my friends who were not members of my movement, at that time the Prime Minister of Israel, Moshe Shertok, Sharett, he was after Ben Gurion, he was quite a close friend of ours of the family, they and a few others, they said 'look Arieh, we know that you don't...', and he was Labour Party, the Prime Minister at the time, 'we know that you don't agree with your friends, and we understand that, because they were also left, they said we've got a job for you, we want you to build in London Israel's insurance companies', Migdal, which was part of the bank the Anglo-Israel bank which is now Bank Leumi, where until today I'm a so-called trustee, without getting any money out of it, a trustee, because it was founded by Theodor Herzl,

Tape 4: 15 minutes 37 seconds

And they said..., and this insurance company Migdal belonged to this Bank Leumi. And I had many friends there because I was active there. And they said to me 'Arieh, do...' that was in 1956, 57, 'go for us to London and build this insurance company and other financial bodies'. And I said 'are you gone crazy? I've never had anything to do with insurance, it's not my line'. Yes but we, we, don't worry about that, you are the economist and you do whatever you think is right. And I agreed with it, because I didn't want to do what my own, the Chaverim wanted me to build this joint movement, which I was against. And in my heart I was always was part of that religious labour movement, and that's how I came to this country, and continued here these various activities of mine, whether the youth movement, and even until today you won't believe it, I continue to do all my work, it's too much now, and then of course I had various stages, I don't know whether you know, I was very much involved, I was chairman of the national council of Soviet Jewry, and my whole life was always a life of saving where we could save Jewish lives, once it was in Germany, and I forgot to mention to you, it's too personal almost, when I was in Israel, partly before the state was established and then after it was established. You know when you hear about the Aliya, from Morocco and from Algiers and from Tunis, from, and that was always my life, from Israel, I was sent to Africa, if I would tell you now I have to be careful, on a false passport, to Casablanca, to Tunis, to Tripoli, before the Aliya from these countries started, and it's true I particularly always made contact with my type of people,

BL: Within the Jewish community?

AH: Within the Jewish community,

Tape 4: 18 minutes 36 seconds

and I could tell you stories, most unpleasant stories, because I remember once when I arrived in Tunis, now at that time when you arrived at the airport, not like today, you, the plane touched down, I know it was in Zurich like this until 25 years ago, when you arrived, a few minutes later you came to the immigration officer, you left the plane and you walked a little bit and you came to the immigration, and I came with a passport which the Mossad, the secret institution of Israel prepared for me, it was an English passport with a different name, a non-Jewish name, so when I got to the immigration officer, my friends from Tunis who knew that I would be coming, it was all arranged, the leaders of the youth movement, the Chalutz movement, not only religious, they were shouting 'Arieh!' when I arrived. I thought I... You know there were these French Arab police officers, you know Tunis was partly French at that time, Arab, I thought I didn't know what to do... but nothing happened, I got in. And I had similar experiences in Casablanca, and in Tripoli and in other places. So why do I mention it? These activities I did still when I was in Israel. When I then came to this country, I continued my activities, and until today, I built up the Bnei Akiva organisation, which is still the strongest youth movement in this country, the Jewish Youth Movement, and continued with these activities, and when the problem of Russian Jewry developed, as you could see a number of documents, at a time when none of us even dreamt that there would be possibility to get Jews out of Russia, I was then for many years, I had established the National Council for Soviet Jewry and remained very active until we could get the Jews out of Russia. That was really one of my jobs. In fact you know the name Anatol Sharansky, when he was already in prison, his wife, she managed to get out of Russia, it was still under the Soviet Regime, and she started working to get her husband out, not only her husband but others. And when she arrived from Russia to Europe, the first two weeks she stayed here with us. Why do I mention it? Because I continued, economically I got into insurance, and banking, that was really my Parnassa [Hebrew for business/profession] because here in this country I didn't really want to be an official of a Jewish organisation, so I, the way you see me here, I became a managing director of a Swiss bank, here from London, and first I did it building up Israeli insurance, and later I continued in banking until I retired from it, and I continued with all my other Narrishkeiten. And so there you've got it.

Tape 4: 22 minutes 58 seconds

BL: Were you also involved with the Ethiopian Jews?

AH: Good that you ask me this question. I forgot this altogether. I was not only involved, I thought I mentioned it, did I not mention this to you? In 1972, '71-'72, we had here in London a group of people who were very much involved in finding a way of to get the Ethiopian Jews out of Ethiopia, long before they arrived in Israel. I must say one of the... there were four people particularly who were involved in it, one was the former, he was not the editor but the owner of the Jewish Chronicle, Kessler, you must have heard the name, he was the owner of the Jewish Chronicle, he, then there was Lady Henriquez, and there was Professor Bentwich, who you saw there on this picture, then Lord Fisher, who was later President of the Board of Deputies, Sam Fisher, and this little man Arieh Handler. And we had a committee for the Ethiopian Jews. And at that time no-one thought of even getting them

to Palestine, to Israel. And I was invited together with Lord Fisher to an international diamond conference in Johannesburg, and on the way back, we undertook, it was our job, Henny was with us, and we can't forget because she got sick all the time, and we went from there to Addis Abbeba, to Ethiopia, Lord Fisher and myself and our wives, and of course when we got to Addis Abbeba we wanted to go to the Falasha Jews, to their places. Now you must realise that they lived in villages where not even a Land Rover could get in, so we had to go by helicopter to these places. Henny got sick, she still remembers it, and we visited all these little villages of Ethiopian Jews, Falashas, you cannot imagine the poverty. You know there were no roads no nothing, and when you got into them, and they had a tent, and there they had their synagogue, in a tent. And in this tent you found Siddurim, prayer books you know from where? Polish, because there was a famous man, who for 50 years before us, Faidlovitz [?],_he worried about the Ethiopian Jews, all these things are forgotten unfortunately, and he sent from Poland, Polish Siddurim, to these Ethiopian Jews, that's like sending I don't know what to... I don't know what to say.

Tape 4: 26 minutes 30 seconds

And we were deeply impressed, what we saw there. We knew the problem, our committee worked very hard. Now I must say something which I don't mind if it will be known. When I came back from Addis Abbeba when we finished our job, I went to Jerusalem, and I had meetings with three people, first with my closest friend, who is like my brother, Dr Burg, you saw him in there, who was then Minister of Interior, very clever man. And I said to him, you've got to bring these Jews to Israel. So his answer was, 'Arieh'... in Ivrit, in Hebrew, 'Arieh, we've got enough troubles'. I said I can't accept that. But he said you are right Arieh, but that's my answer to you. From him I went to Yigal Alon, who was at that time Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Minister. I didn't know him so much, for me he was the Foreign Minister, nothing else, and he said to me in different Hebrew terms exactly the same things, 'Arieh, we have enough problems'. Then I went to the then Chairman of the Jewish Agency, before he started really El Al, what was his name? I forget now his name, he was chairman of the Jewish Agency, South African. And he said to me exactly in English terms 'Arieh, we have enough problems'. And theoretically nothing happened, but we all pressed, not only I, I mean the pressure came from there, and the pressure came from all sorts of people who realised that we cannot allow these Falasha Jews to remain there. And then, a year later, the Falashas came to Israel, and today as you know they are all there, and I take a lot of pride in the fact, again very personal, I started a big youth Aliya Centre in Israel which is called today Yemin ORT, you may have heard about it. Unfortunately two weeks ago the son of one of the deputies and managers was killed by the Arabs, just two weeks ago. It's on the Carmel, Yemin Ort, that was in the name, I must show you, when you saw a picture, when I showed something to Mrs Thatcher, I had to explain, this was a Youth Aliya, I had to explain to her the picture, Ort Wingate, I don't know if this means anything to you, General Ort Wingate was a British General, very pro-Jewish, he was really a Tsadik [just person]. His wife Lorna, I remember she was at the openign, and Churchill sent a message to the opening when we had it, and there are today 500 children, mainly Falasha children in that place, and there is another one Hodayot, which is next to Kibbutz Lavi, a religious Kibbutz, where we've got again, 350 Falasha, and I started this settlement, this institute, Yemin, that is Hodayot, and the other is Yemin Ort

Tape 4: 30 minutes 45 seconds

and today you know, not only are all Falasha Jews all of them are in Israel, but we are now bringing those Falashas who have not been Jewish for many years, Falasha Bora, we are bringing them now, many of them are already there, so that was... Let me put it to you like this, it sounds a bit not nice when I say it, I really was very much connected with various stages, I was not the person responsible for it, I was connected with the stages of various Jews, and I take particularly pride in the activities for bringing the Russian Jews to Israel. It's not an easy problem, it's getting harder every day, because there are many Russians who are coming now, who really are not Jews at all, and that's a problem, so when you ask me what I did, when I left Israel I never wanted to be engaged, my occupation, with anything connected with Jewish activity, but I wanted to do that all voluntary, and this I did then here in this country, I continue today my activities for Israel, on a non-professional basis, on an honorary basis, that's it.

Tape 4: 32 minutes 45 seconds

BL: When you came to Britain, when you came back, where did you settle, and what sort of...

AH: when I came back here. It's a very good question, I'll surprise you. When I the first time came to this country, I lived in Hall Road, which is a few minutes from here.

BL: The first time, in the thirties you mean.

AH: When I came back in 38. No it's a good question because I came already before on a short visit. There I lived in a little hotel in Bedford Way next to Woburn House. But when I, you asked the question when I returned properly here to London, I lived first in Hamilton Terrace, you laugh, first we lived in a house opposite where before the Chief Rabbi Hertz used to live, he lived in Hamilton 5, we lived in Hamilton 6, then we moved, after 10 months, we moved to Hamilton Terrace 86, which is exactly opposite where the present Chief Rabbi is living, 85, then we moved also on Hamilton Terrace to 68 Hamilton Terrace, and from there, we are here in this house since then.

BL: Why St John's Wood, was it a familiar area?

AH: I tell you yes, I must say, I liked St John's Wood, I had, when I came here in 1938 and I lived in Hall Road, and there was when war broke out and there was a famous Blitz started, I went, I wasn't yet married to Henny, but we went together to the shelter, St John's Wood Underground shelter, and it was so crowded that I said I won't go there anymore. But the second night there was again another blitz over London so I went into a shelter in the house opposite St John's Wood station, which is now Air Court, I'm sure you.. it's a big building a lot of Jewish people living there, and it was so crowded again, that I said to Henny, 'Henny that's the last time anybody will see me in a shelter'. And since then I never went into a shelter, in spite of the Blitz, and you see I'm still alive... So that is my story, my connection with London.

Tape 4: 35 minutes 44 seconds

BL: Were there other refugees living here when you came here?

AH: In this area? No. The refugees lived already at that time particularly in Golders Green, the non-religious ones Belsize Park, this area, West End Lane, and I don't know why, I stuck to St John's Wood, I always liked it here. That I must say. But as you know, in spite of what they say about London, I mean, my heart is still more there in Israel than here. And I've got of course half of my grandchildren, and some of my great-grandchildren, are all in Israel.

BL: That brings me to the next question. How would you define yourself in terms of your identity?

AH: Very good question. I cannot, would not define myself, first of all negative: not as an English Jew. That's number one. I really regard myself as a Jew, I'm a good Jew, who really is, I would say completely connected with Israel. And I do not regret that I lived so much in the Diaspora I mean in London or in other places, and even if I live here through my activities I'm very much connected with various other countries, as you can imagine, and I would say that basically I regard myself as an Israeli Jew, even if I'm living at the moment here, and you must say that when I'm in Israel for instance that I'm as much living there than I'm living here, and I'm not the only one who is like that, there are quite a number of Jewish people.. and I think that doesn't matter, we are a small nation, we are distributed all over the world, and as long as we remember that we are Jews, and know how to live together with non-Jews, I take a lot of pride, look as I told you before. My school education, I've always been in a non-Jewish school, in fact I was in a monastery school, and until today my connection with non-Jews, I wouldn't say that it is as much as my connection with Jews, I couldn't say this, but, if I would tell you a little bit about my so-called economic activities, or even today, in this country, my connection with the Labour party, I've, I am not regarded as an Englishman, I'm not an Englishman, particularly not with this accent, but... I know to value every human being, and I believe we need the state of Israel, but we don't need it in order to be nationalistic Jews. We need it so that our people should be able to live, to exist, whether the Falashas or the Russians, or whoever needs Israel, we are there for them. And let me tell you, it's the last point to your question. I'm quite happy with my life, in a sense I tell you why. I've been able to help not only Jewish people from whatever country they came from, whether it was Germany, whether it was Europe, the DP people, whether it was African Jews, or Ethiopian Jews, or whatever. But I have the same feeling, it's not always responded, but I mean I have the same feeling today for every other country. For instance I believe that the world is in great difficulties, why, because each one thinks too much of his own little country, and when you see what goes on in the world at the moment, and it's exactly the same thing, we had a little discussion here in our Labour Party Group here in the neighbourhood, where there are lots of coloured people, and therefore it's particularly against the government and all that, and I always when I sit, and there are 20 or 30 people who come to a meeting, I don't go to every monthly meeting, I always tell them, many of the blacks and Indians and Pakistanis who are there very active in the local party, I always tell them if the Europeans would act, would have acted all the time like you act, like you speak, like the Pakistanis or whatever, then the world would have been all the time at war. But if you want a little bit of peace then you have to give in a little bit. And I must say one or two listened when I say that to them, but only one or two.

Tape 4: 42 minutes 36 seconds

BL: What about your continental identity?

AH: Yes, very good question. I have a lot of understanding for, I have not much connection with, with France, but I'm quite near to quite a lot of Germans, and I'm not referring to Jews, also to Germans, and when I visited, and I haven't been in a long time, Berlin, where a very important part of my life, even if it was only for a few years, took place, I have a lot of respect for Germans. A lot of respect. And the same goes for other countries, let's say Scandinavian countries, where I was helped very much, and we never mentioned this where we had difficult times, very difficult times, where we tried getting people out. I was particularly successful in the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Sweden. So to answer your question, I'm not a nationalist. I really believe that the world is in such difficulties because each one is too much a nationalist and does not think of the other person as a simple human being. And since you ask me I would say, in a way I would like to be remembered in my life not necessarily as someone who helped the establishment of Israel; I did help a little bit, but I want to be remembered as a person who has respect for anybody else who is a good human being. And I would wish that, that the world, when I'm gone, should go in this direction.

Tape 4: 45 minutes 3 seconds

BL: Just a few more questions. What impact do you think it had on your life to be a refugee, or to... you were forced...

AH: That's a very good question. I'll surprise you now. Let me give you a first answer. I've never in my life regarded myself as a refugee. It's a very good... I've never thought of that. But since you put it indirectly, I've never in my life regarded myself as a refugee. Look, I come from Magdeburg, Berlin, and so on, I lived my youth really in Germany. But I never regarded myself as a German, I never regarded myself as a German Jew. And now I'm jumping. I came to this country. And I had important years in this country, very important years. You know the war years, they shape you, war years are.... Because only during the war can you realise what your colleague or what your neighbour is. Only during the war. When things are very difficult. And I had here the most difficult things that you can imagine. When we thought... I remember when I travelled from London by car or by train to North Wales, during the war, and I said goodbye to Henny, because I didn't know whether I would come back again because we expected the Germans to take over. So it means I could say I regarded myself as an Englishman. No, I... wherever I am I feel at home. Really. I visit my... I've got quite a lot of relatives in the States, I've got quite a lot of friends in the States. I haven't got much time now to go there. But I used to go there quite a lot. And I regard myself there always happy. See, I cannot understand people who say 'Oh I like it only here or there.' I regard it as silly. Because the basic question is 'are you a human being, and are those with whom you are together human beings?' If they are human beings then that's what you are. Nothing else. All the rest is just talk. And that is, I don't know whether I answered your question, but that's my answer.

Tape 4: 47 minutes 35 seconds

BL: But that's in a way a indirect consequence of your experience.

AH: Yes, yes. It's correct, you are right, you are quite correct. Look, I'm a member, I went on.. had to go several times in my business activities, my banking activities, to South America, not for a long time.. I went to Argentine, Buenos Aires and Brasil, and I must say I always liked it; there were difficulties, they had a lot of economic difficulties these countries, terrible, Chile and all that. But it's true, wherever I came, I always met, even my so-called

formal activities, banking activities, where it had nothing to do with Jews, but I always worked together with Jews. And I must say I was always happy in all these countries, very.. today even, I always said to Henny 'look now I can't do it anymore ', but I would like to visit these countries, because I always had friends everywhere, but I can't do it now, but I would say I never felt as I told you before as a refugee anywhere. I never felt anywhere as the main, let's say the German, the Englishman, I always want to be regarded as a simple normal human being, nothing else. And I would wish that if many more people would think like that then the world would be better.

Tape 4: 49 minutes 35 seconds

BL: But was it important for you for example that your wife has a sort of similar background?

AH: No, I wouldn't say this. Look, I must warn you, Henny's background, she comes from a good Russian family. Henny: I say something bad about you. (-Yes) Henny comes from a Russian Jewish family, a good Russian Jewish family, Ukranian, she just spoke this morning or yesterday to one of her cousins who is still in Moscow, a wonderful man. But I couldn't say that I know anything about Russian Jewry or Ukranian Jewry. But Henny of course wasn't born there she was born in Berlin. You... you...

BL: Almost. We are almost finished.

AH: You see, Henny is watching me...

BL: I just asked (to Henny), actually, whether it was important that you had a sort of similar experience. But your husband answered that it wasn't that similar, but I meant that you had a refugee background.

AH: No, but we... Even our parents had a completely different background. I mean your parents and my parents. Henny's parents were real, real, Russian Ukranians. And the whole family... And when we visited the first time Moscow, when it was possible easily to really, we spent one Friday, all good Jews but not one religious, and we spent the first Friday night in their family, Professors, there were wonderful people, but it took the whole night to answer questions, because they were all good Jews, but on a completely different background than I come from and so I had to explain. Don't you remember?

BL: Ok, let me ask you the last question. Do you have any message for anyone ?. You have said already all kinds of things...

AH: Yes, I tell you, I have a message for, I say it as a refugee, 'kiviachol' [Hebrew for 'as we say'], as we say, I don't regard myself as a refugee, I said so just before, my message to Jewish people, not only to Jewish people is: Try wherever you are to be a good human being, then you will be able to be friendly with your Black neighbour or brown neighbour or Jewish or non-Jewish, and I think that is also how we also try in our life to proceed with friends of all sorts, whether Jews or non-Jews, and I would wish and I'm saying it often particularly to refugees in this country, to lose, to give up this refugee mentality, that's why I've never been active in the AJR. I mean I was there when it all started, but I was never active because you know for me being a refugee is nothing special.

BL: So what is refugee mentality? What do you mean by that?

AH: The refugee mentality is that you are different than the other. Very simple. And I don't like it. I simply don't like it. I. You should always be, a Jew should be a Jew, and an Englishman should always be an Englishman, that's alright, but he should make out of that something special, and in this way to differentiate themselves from his neighbour, there is no need for that, we make in Israel some of these mistakes, we make here these mistakes, we make them everywhere. That's it.

Tape 4: 54 minutes 27 seconds

BL: Mr Handler, we've discussed many things. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

AH: Let me... Give me time, I may still come back to you on that. Because there are... Look, you could have asked me perhaps many many more questions, but it's impossible. You know I was engaged throughout my life in rescuing and educating young Jews, this has been my... I didn't quite want to do this professionally, that's why I left, at a certain moment that's why I left Israel, because I would have had to continue living from this, and I didn't want to, I wanted to be free in this respect, because I've achieved... and I would say that a lot of our Jewish organisational life goes wrong, and a lot things in our Jewish organisational life are wrong, it is because each one of us believes, whether it's the Association of Jewish Refugees, or whether it's the board of Deputies, or whether it's the Zionist group, or the other..., each one believes that 'what I do is really the answer to our Jewish problems. And in Yiddish one would say: *'Es hebt zoch nicht un'*, it's not true, we could all work together much better together if did not believe that what we do is the only right thing. And that is where we are making so many mistakes. That is one little message which I give you.

BL: Mr Handler thank you very much for the interview.

AH: Right I hope it won't bore people.

BL: I'm sure it won't.

AH: And if I can at a later stage provide you with a little bit more material I do that, because some of the things should not be forgotten.

BL: Thank you very much.

AH: Good. Thank you. I must say, Henny, to be able to... to have such an audience to listen and not to say one word against me, it's terrible, unbelievable [laughs].

Photos.

1.This photo was taken in Magdeburg in 1928, long before Hitler came to power. Hakoah, Jewish sport club. Friends, I was the youngest (in middle, kneeling) and was in charge of the sports club. On left, Lineal, in Haifa now. All the rest died. All active in Israeli life. Went to Israel most of them before Hitler came to power. One or two still alive. One of them is today the owner of the biggest Public Relations Firms in Israel, Lineal Bink.

TAPE 5.

Photos

2. Family. Wedding of sister in Magdeburg, shortly before she went to Palestine. Father on left, Helena, older brother, couple, sister, brother in law Benjamin Unger, later Chazzan, others are brothers and sisters-in-law of my father. 1933. All went to Palestine long before State was established, even before the war.

3. Went to Paris for visas for Jews to get to France.

4. Portrait of AH. Taken in Sweden. Jewish girls had been taken in from Teresienstadt, didn't know what to do with them. They were sent to Lapland. All primitive farmers there. Jewish girls from Poland. I said how could you send them to Lapland? Jewish girls from Poland. AH said to them, you do harm to both sides, now they have to be saved. Went to Minister of Social Welfare, social democrat, like me. I'm not against anyone marrying a non-Jew, they have a different mentality. She said Mr Handler what else shall we do with them? We can try to open Jewish homes for them. But I didn't succeed. They were sent to Lapland. Some 40 came away. Most of them married these Lapland farmers, many committed suicide after that. One girl from Czechoslovakia. Terrible. Some are in Stockholm, some still there. Jewish people wanted to do good, they wanted to help, but they didn't consider what would happen to these girls. At least 100-150 committed suicide or lived in conditions no-one wanted to know about.

5. Manchester youth centre. Training for Palestine. Jewish studies, for six months. Rabbi Sperber, whose son today is one of leading professors of Jewish Studies in Bar Ilan University. Hans Heinemann, Professor of Jewish History. Young men, 3, 4 died, one became Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel. Other, Alon, became lecturer in Agriculture in one of the Israeli Universities. All had special duties in Israeli institutions.

6. AH with young man Freier, from Germany, very gifted. Would be interned. Was sent to Australia, died on that boat. Was interned as German Jew, highly gifted man, here shortly before he was interned, giving him instructions before he went. Tragic story. One of my jobs was to sit with these boys and tell them what to do.

7. Avoncroft College, Agricultural College, owned by Cadbury Family, Quakers. Approached Cadbury family, and asked for this college, for young boys and girls from Germany. They said of course. Henny was matron. Rabbi Heinemann also. 60 boys and girls who received proper agricultural training in that place. Wife of Rabbi Jacobs. Moshe Sharett, spent time there. Henny was pupil of his brother.

8. Madrichim leader, Erwin Seligman, from Hamburg, good educator, in charge of education.

Tape 5: 17 minutes 50 seconds

9. Wedding photo from Gwrych Castle. Over 200 boys and girls from Germany. Near Abergilly in North Wales. Once had to go and tell all of them that war had broken out and they wouldn't see their parents again. Beautiful wedding. Candles on stairs. Wedding ceremony the only person not there was Arie Handler, at conference of the movement. Chief Rabbi came and arrived from Liverpool, Arie wasn't there, but he made it eventually. Beautiful wedding. Everybody had chicken.

10. With mother in London. On left, one of the senior members of the movement, Abba Bornstein, son, Danny, who lives in London. Schlichim, emissaries. Avram Zeligman, in charge of farm in Sextet, and David Ha-Israeli, teacher of Bnei Akiva in UK. 1950s.

Tape 5: 24 minutes 30 seconds

11. This photo was taken three, four years before the state was established at Conference of Religious Zionist movement. Next to AH: Pinchas Rosenbaum, director of trading company in Geneva. The other person is Dr Kollip, lecturer at Bar Ilan University. On right, immigrant from US, Chicago.

12. 1953, in Madrid, just arrived from Tangier, on special mission before the Moroccan Aliya started, job was to make contact with friends in Tangier and Casablanca. Stayed with the Reichmann family in Tangier. Man in photo is son of Reichmann family, oldest brother of brotherhood who owned quite a lot of property in the world. Canary Wharf also. Didn't know that Moroccan Jews would go to Israel.

13. Part of the family, parents, sister, brother-in-law, all Jewish people who came from Germany and they settled down in Israel and became well-settled.

14. With Henny at function for Sarah Churchill at our home, she came at our home, picture, 30 years ago.

15. Function marking start of a new settlement in Negev. Religious settlement.

16. 10 years after the establishment of the state, son who just finished a course in the Israeli army. Others are leading members of the religious kibbutz movement.

17. Younger son, Gabi, got his officers' degree. Now lecturer at Tel Aviv University. After Six Day war Rabin was in London, asked about son, he told him he can't tell him which unit he is serving, and he answered I'm the Chief of Staff, you can tell me. So I told him, and he said 'Oh you're quite right, you better not tell anybody.

18. Golda Meir visit. With Lord Sam Fisher, very close friends of Harold Wilson. Formally introduced Prime Minister of this country to Prime Minister of Israel. Dr Loevenberg, representative of Jewish Agency in this country, friend of Harold Wilson.

19. Annual conference of Religious Zionist movement. Dr Burg, Minister of Interior in Israel, sitting to representative of Israeli embassy, President of Board of Deputies, Mr Fiddler, Harry Landy, Dr. Braude and Mr Barry Mindle.

20. Platform of one of the most successful functions at Hyde Park, demanded of Soviet Union to enable Mr Sharansky to get out. Mrs Sharansky, two weeks earlier had come out of Russia, urged us to do everything possible for her husband to be released from prison. Chief Rabbi Yacobovitz, most successful functions. Sharansky was released later.

21. As chairman of the National Council for Soviet Jewry, Edgar Bronfman, Ambassador Abraham from America, other leading Jews, Mr Dulci [?], Chairman of Jewish agency, introduced them to Mrs Thatcher, who took special interest in putting pressure on Soviet government to let Russian Jews emigrate to Israel.

Tape 5: 39 minutes 45 seconds

22. With King Hussein, and editor of the Jewish Chronicle. Told him he was the leader of the religious Zionist movement, discussed 10 minutes with him how could Israel convince the Arab states that what we are doing is not against the Arab World, he agreed, but how can we explain it to the rest of the Arab Nations. Most interesting conversation. Asked a lot of questions. This must have been about 9 years ago.

23. Function 4 years ago. Jewish leaders function, introduced to Prime Minister Blair. Since he knew I am one of the founding members of the Labour Finance Industry Group, I told him where I thought Labour must make some changes. He listened carefully.

24. Nicest picture, taken two and a half years ago in Israel, with our great-grandson whose name is Israel. And we wish him and Israel Kol Tuv and Hazlacha Raba.

25. Most important document in my life. Invitation 13 May 1948 just one day before State was established, I was invited by the then Chairman of the Jewish Agency and the future Prime Minister Ben Gurion, to be present on Friday afternoon at 3.30 to attend the signing of the Independence Day Declaration. There was pressure not to establish the state, pressure from Weitzman, until all the other nations would agree. Ben Gurion felt that if he did not declare the state on that Friday it would not happen. I remember that day as the greatest day. We were together on Friday at 3.30, small group, I was not one of those who signed, and at 4 David Ben Gurion stood up and read the declaration. At 5 o'clock we left. When I showed this document some 7 years ago to Yitzhak Rabin, he was so moved, I was sitting next to him at an independent state function, he said to me 'Arieh I've got to sign this too, and he signed this little paper invitation I had. And I must say I value this paper with his signature so much, it's more than everything else I have in life. And it seems to me I am the only one still alive who was present, the last person, the one who signed, was Mr Mendel Wilmer, he was a Communist Member of the Knesset. He died last week, so it seems I'm the only one who is still alive when it happened.

26. Membership card which I signed for Shula Lisagorski, now the wife of Rabbi Doctor Louis Jacobs. She signed this when she entered Avoncroft College, owned by Cadbury. Matron was my dear wife Henny.

27. Timetable of Hachsharah Centre at Avoncroft College. 85% of all those who were in this college are in Israel.

BL: Mr Handler thank you very much again for this interview.

AH: Thank you.