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Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin

LEADER AND PERSONALITY

With an Introduction by
Rabbi Samson H. Levey

An Interview Conducted by
Malca Chall

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INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin is a human being, but he is no mere mortal. He is not God, but by virtue of his intrepid faith and his unswerving faithfulness to the basic ideals of ethical monotheism he has achieved immortality.

To evaluate Edgar F. Magnin is by no means easy. He is a man of many facets, involved in the total spectrum of human life, an active participant in a multiplicity of religious, educational and cultural endeavors. His life spans an era of major development in the West, and as a man and as a mentor, he embodies the frontier spirit which has influenced the tenor of California life. He has helped mold the minds of myriads, has touched the core of their being, has made them aware of a religious philosophy which has affected the very foundations of their lives.

People are not, nor can they be, neutral towards Edgar F. Magnin. They may agree with him casually or wholeheartedly, or disagree with him moderately or violently, but they can never ignore him or be indifferent to him: he is a spiritual force of exceptional magnitude that must be reckoned with in this turbulent age. And whether one agrees or disagrees with Magnin's point of view, the tremendous stature of the man cannot be denied.

Born in San Francisco in 1890, Edgar F. Magnin is a product of Jewish life and the Reform Movement in Judaism. He was reared in a traditional Jewish environment and was educated for the Rabbinate at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, where he was ordained in 1914. In 1916 he married Evelyn Rosenthal, the lovely valorous lady who has shared his life and helped build his beautiful family. The call of his native California was irresistible, and he returned to the West Coast as a rabbi.

The hub of Rabbi Magnin's attention is the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, one of the landmarks of Los Angeles, a marvel of religious architectural beauty, the blue-print of which he helped draw. He has served Congregation B'nai B'rith for sixty years, and has elevated it from a local temple to a pulpit of world renown. His influence extends from this hub through metropolitan Los Angeles and the Southland's Jewish community, with its manifold agencies and organizations, to the larger domain of America and the far-reaches of the earth. He has raised generation after generation of outstanding Jewish citizens.

As the representative par excellence of the Jewish point of view to the non-Jewish world, he is an incomparable giant in the domain of religious understanding and Jewish-Christian dialogue. He has been a guide and an inspiration to millions who have listened to his radio and television broadcasts and read his newspaper columns. There is no other rabbi in the Western Hemisphere whose name is as widely known, whose views are as widely disseminated.

The voice of Edgar F. Magnin is an authoritative echo of Biblical Revelation. His pronouncements are a proclamation of an authentic progressive Judaism. His fierce independence is not only integral to his frontier spirit but it is a reflection of a genuine rabbinic tradition. His simplicity of style, language and expression are a manifestation of reason and common sense. What Magnin feels is the pulse of creation, what he senses is the impulse of the Creator, and what he articulates is a fusion of both as he perceives them. From his distinctive Judaic point of view, he announces a universal message of unity for all mankind which transcends all differences and distinctions, a clarion call of redemptive brotherhood for humanity.

And yet, withal, Edgar F. Magnin is an earthy, colorful man whose human traits and qualities are the prime ingredients of a unique and highly exciting personality. He is no carbon copy of anyone, nor can any one else duplicate him. The manner in which he functions is inimitable, distinctively his own. With consummate skill and ease he can articulate in a few minutes what others may take hours to expound. He can condense in a few paragraphs the gist of volumes.

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin's message is Jewish, and it is simple, uncluttered by technical verbiage, unencumbered by dialectical confusion. A theologian of spiritual pragmatism, his arena is the human predicament and his wrestling is with those adversaries which emerge from the darkness to drive a wedge of distrust and hatred among people, and threaten the peace and harmony of American life.

He has never pretended to be infallible. Quite the contrary. If there is any one thing that Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin loathes it is pretense in any form. This is but one of the measures of this man Magnin--unequivocal honesty and absolute integrity.

In his own unique way he has fought to improve the human condition and to ameliorate the stresses and distresses of society. A rugged individualist himself, his primary concern

is with the individual, which in the final analysis, provides the surest guarantee of a sound society.

Rabbi Magnin has sought to bring the blessing of education and intelligence to all segments of the population. His intellectual undertakings are multifarious. He has served on the faculty of the University of Southern California for many years, and lectured at other eminent institutions of higher learning, imparting his profound insights with unusual charm and effectiveness. The Edgar F. Magnin School of Graduate Studies of the California School, Hebrew Union College, bears his name. The worlds of religion, literature, and the arts are his natural habitat.

All of Rabbi Magnin's accomplishments bear the imprint of religious genius. His own youthful vigor defies time. He is refreshing, vibrant, and as startling as the shock-waves of an atomic blast. His agile mind probes and prods. Eloquent poet of the pulpit, he is a brilliant master of both the written and spoken word, a revered and beloved sage, whose wisdom and passionate faith have brought diverse people closer together, thereby exemplifying the universal nobility of the human spirit.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Edgar F. Magnin, now eighty-four years old, has been a rabbi with Wilshire Boulevard Temple (previously B'nai B'rith) in Los Angeles since December, 1915, a perhaps unprecedented record of fifty-nine years in one pulpit. To many people in Los Angeles, the Rabbi and the Temple are synonymous.

It has been said of him that he is the most influential member of the Jewish community in the general community; that he is a pragmatist who believes that it is safer for democracy if there is communication with people who have different ideological approaches; that he is a straight-line communicator who goes directly to a problem.

Because of his towering reputation as a major rabbinical figure and as a ranking leader in both the Jewish and secular communities of Los Angeles, the Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum of Berkeley had long considered Rabbi Magnin a primary subject for its oral history project on California Jewish Community Leaders.

Despite the fact that he is at an age when most rabbis have long been retired, as spiritual leader of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Rabbi Magnin still oversees the multitudinous duties inherent in a very large congregation with a membership of twenty-six hundred families, three rabbinical colleagues, and a full-time staff of thirty-six persons comprised of an executive director, a librarian, an accountant, four secretaries and other clerical assistants, a building superintendent, and a live-in custodian with his own staff. The full-time, part-time, and many volunteer staff members devote themselves to serving the Temple: its Sabbath and holiday services, Sunday School, weekly bulletin, and its various ancillary functions like the Sisterhood, the Forum, the children's camp, the cemetery, and the board of directors. The personnel, working in the large, comfortable, and magnificent three-story edifice, is exceptionally capable, and their duties have been delegated and are well defined, but Rabbi Magnin is still in charge and every member of his loyal staff, most of whom have worked with him for many years, knows it.

Some have said that if you did not know Rabbi Magnin, you could never tell just from talking to him what his business was. There are those who claim that he is not really a spiritual

leader. There are others who feel a sense of uplift just by being in his presence. While in these and other aspects of his life and work he is controversial, it would be difficult to find anyone who could take issue with the statement that Rabbi Magnin is a man with a great lust for living. A combination of strong physical traits, which have been inherited, and an acquired positive, up-beat mental attitude, has produced a blend of characteristics that enable him to retain overall command of the administration of his large congregation, to participate actively in community affairs, to play golf twice a week, and to give the appearance of a man of sixty rather than eighty-four.

He seems taller than his average height, his face is unlined, his voice is deep and resonant, his laughter is hearty, and his step is full of bounce. Except for some added weight, he probably hasn't changed much in the sixty years he has lived in Los Angeles.

When he comes into the Temple, as he does from three to five mornings each week, he can often be heard greeting members of the staff. By the time he starts to climb the stairs to his second-floor study he is whistling, and Esther Lewis, his secretary, is ready for a busy morning. The pace in his office, and often in the entire building, quickens measurably.

The Rabbi takes and places innumerable phone calls; he and Esther Lewis carefully read, and if necessary revise the drafts of his thrice-weekly Herald-Examiner columns; he reads his mail and dictates letters; he talks to executive secretary, Gerald Burg; he reviews various pending matters with his fellow rabbis, and he may see occasional visitors. During the course of the morning (or the entire day, if he stays over into the afternoon), he may joke and laugh, he may be angry, he may be sad, he may be serious and studious, but he is always active.

I had seen Rabbi Magnin on television delivering a prayer during the 1969 inauguration of Richard Nixon, but I did not know him at the time I was assigned to the interview. In his letter of June 30, 1972, consenting to the oral history project, he stated that since he was very busy, all research would have to be undertaken by the interviewer who was welcome to use the albums kept in the office. He offered to "sit down for one or two sessions to check up on accuracy or add any details that I can."

Outside of the Temple I talked with historians Dr. Norton Stern, editor of the Western Jewish Historical Quarterly, and Rabbi Max Vorspan, professor at the University of Judaism and co-author of the History of the Jews of Los Angeles. Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, for many years before he retired, the leading Catholic prelate in Los Angeles, provided thoughtful commentary on the Rabbi and his relationship with the non-Jewish community. Former directors of the Jewish Welfare Federation-Council, Julius Bisno and Martin Ruderman, and former director of the Community Relations Committee, Joseph Roos, added detail and insight, as did octegenarian Aaron Riche, for many years a volunteer activist in the Jewish community, and Seymour Fromer, director of Berkeley's Judah L. Magnes Museum.

I visited the Rabbi's friends Al and Dorothy Golden who believe that Edgar Magnin would make a perfect subject for a biography, Sol Lesser who has known the Rabbi since they were boys in San Francisco, and Walter Hilborn, who, while fond of Rabbi Magnin, wishes he were more like Hilborn's friend and model rabbi, Stephen Wise.

Finally, additional insights came from Henry Magnin and Mae Magnin Brussell, both of whom are deeply fond of their father and were willing to talk about him as a father and community leader. My only contact with Mrs. Magnin was in asking her help with selection of pictures after she had voluntarily put out a few photograph albums for me to look through one day when I interviewed the Rabbi in his home. She seemed to understand exactly what was appropriate. I regret not talking at length with her, but at the time I was doing my research I felt that interviewing Mrs. Magnin about her husband might be an imposition and an intrusion of her privacy.

Working in the secretary's office, I gradually became a part of the environment about which I was doing research. I was, in effect, where the action was. The staff got used to seeing me there and I began to feel like part of the Temple family. Most of the members of the staff come in to confer either with Esther Lewis or the Rabbi at fairly frequent intervals. The rabbis come in; so too does Harry McDermott, the chief custodian with the Irish brogue and the joyous disposition who has lived for nearly forty years in an apartment on the first floor; in and out several times a week is part-time employee and pensioner, Hortie Wolfe, who, among her other tasks, is responsible for maintaining the scrapbooks and who derives a deep sense of purpose in being able to serve the Rabbi.

Esther Lewis answers the phone as "Rabbi Magnin's secretary" but she is, in fact, his administrative assistant and has been so for some twenty years. With exceptional intelligence, efficiency, tact, patience, and almost unfailing good humor, she handles all of the Rabbi's correspondence, his telephone calls, his appointments, and the many other secretarial duties, too numerous to list, which are part of the routine of a busy executive. She keeps at hand, or in her head, many records dealing with the Temple's business and its history. She knows how the Rabbi will react to almost anything which is likely to cross the desk.

Esther believed in this project and she did whatever she could to insure its success. She remembered where I might locate useful background material; she often made lunch for me and we ate together in the library or on warm days in one of the open courtyards. She agreed to keep out interruptions after I complained that they were making the interviewing sessions almost impossible. And she helped the Rabbi with the difficult chore of reviewing his transcript. To Esther goes my deep appreciation for her friendship, her encouragement, and her unfailing assistance to me and to the Rabbi. She deserves special credit for the fact that this memoir has become a reality.

Although Rabbi Magnin had agreed to sit down for only one or two sessions to assist with the details of the research, he actually taped eight interviews between August, 1972, and May, 1973, and a ninth in April, 1974. Dates for travel to Los Angeles were arranged for times when it would be convenient for him to see me for one, or perhaps two one and one-half hour periods. He gradually got used to seeing me in the office and talking to me about his past activities.

He willingly answered questions if he could remember the details, or if he considered them important to the development of the memoir. Speaking informally, and in his characteristic stream-of-consciousness-style, he illustrated his points with stories, with jokes, and with mimicry, disclosing that sense of humor for which he is noted throughout Los Angeles. But some memories of past or current events could move him close to tears, or to anger, or to quiet, carefully phrased explanations, or even to reciting bits of poetry. In short, he was himself--self-assured, thoughtful, emotional, ebullient.

During our first several interview sessions he answered all incoming calls. Because his restless intellect pulls him in several directions simultaneously he might be reminded in

mid-sentence of some other matters, and at once request his secretary to place a call to someone either in the building or on the outside. This kind of activity reached its high point shortly after the Inaugural Worship Service in January, 1973. His open door policy always admitted the rabbis who might come in with various questions which required immediate answers. Once they brought in pretty little straw baskets, and asked Rabbi Magnin if the confirmands could carry them with flowers instead of the traditional nosegays. After discussion, he agreed on the change.

With the realization that my interviewing time was limited by the Rabbi's busy schedule, I saw these interruptions as a threat to the satisfactory completion of the project. Complaints to Esther resulted in a shift of locale, for one session, from his study in the Temple to his home. When we returned to the study for the remaining interviews, the Rabbi, conscious of the problem, even though obviously tempted, never went beyond just a fleeting, barely discernible gesture toward his call button.

It was undoubtedly this characteristic of quick thinking and immediate action which prompted the Rabbi to contact the Catholic diocese at the time that the old, frame-structured St. Basils Church was burning across the street from the Temple. At his invitation St. Basils held mass in the Temple every Sunday during the year in which the magnificent new church was being built at the old location. In appreciation of this gesture of good will, and because of the close bond of friendship that had grown up between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community, and between Rabbi Magnin and Cardinal McIntyre, the diocese honored Rabbi Magnin by inviting him to sit on the altar during the dedication of the new St. Basils church.

Out of this incident the Rabbi made up, for a speech he was to give at a banquet in his honor, this now-legendary story: One Sunday, an Orthodox rabbi wanting to meet Rabbi Magnin, came into Temple Wilshire and saw a priest conducting the mass. Thinking he had seen Rabbi Magnin, he said later to a colleague, "I always knew that Rabbi Magnin was Reform, but I never realized he was that Reform."

Most of the Rabbi's time, through the years, has been spent in two settings--his study and his home. They form an interesting contrast. The study, immediately adjoining his secretary's office, is a large, high-ceilinged, oak-panelled room. Along one side

is a line of leaded glass windows which admit a soft light but allow no view of the street. A long, high table beneath the windows holds a tape recorder, and tapes of the Rabbi's sermons, pamphlets, and a few pictures. Bookshelves, full of volumes dealing with American history and Judaica, cover most of the walls including the narrow spaces set between the three doors, two of which lead out into the secretary's office, and one into the main hall. A door at the rear of the room, near a small fireplace, opens onto a hall off of which is a private bathroom and a closet. From here a flight of stairs goes to the balcony of the sanctuary.

In one corner of the study an antique oil-burning Sabbath lamp hangs from the ceiling. On a round oak table is a century-old seven-branch brass candelabra. A television set on which are pictures of Mrs. Magnin and their grandchildren, a massive oak desk surrounded by comfortable chairs, and several wrought iron lamps with parchment-like shades complete the furnishings.

On the walls hang pictures of the Rabbi's mother, his wife, his children and grandchildren; his mentors, Rabbis M.S. Levy and Emil Hirsch, and his predecessor, Dr. Sigmund Hecht; his audiences with Popes Pius and Paul; his friends Albert Einstein, Cardinal McIntyre, Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Douglas MacArthur, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Earl Warren; and a Rembrandt etching of Abraham and Isaac.

The walls in Esther Lewis's office and in the front hall downstairs are covered with plaques, framed letters, and pictures of the Rabbi talking to notable persons of the United States and other parts of the world, a few of whom are Bob Hope, Dorothy Chandler, Cecil B. DeMille, Yitzhak Rabin, James Doolittle, Walter O'Malley, many of the astronauts, motion picture celebrities, and ambassadors.

In contrast to the Rabbi as a public man which one sees in the Temple, is the Rabbi as family man and private citizen which one sees in his home. This is a spacious, Spanish-style house which the Rabbi and Mrs. Magnin built nearly fifty years ago. Its comfortable furniture, original paintings, and decorative objects picked up on many trips to Europe, Asia, and elsewhere during their fifty-eight years of married life show how the family could retreat from the demands made upon a public figure, and how the children could be reared in surroundings which allowed them to grow up feeling that their home was much like the homes of their peers.

With the completion of the interview, the time came for the Rabbi to review the transcript. During all the year that we were taping he thought that the tapes would serve as a basis for a written biography. Thus he was quite surprised when he received, for review, the slightly edited, verbatim transcripts of the first two interview sessions, and realized that others, like them, would follow in sequence.

Transcribing the tapes had presented a slight problem. The Rabbi's style of informal speech varies from very rapid to slow, is replete with interposed illustrations and dramatic mimicry, and for emphasis, repeated phrases and sentences, slang, and an occasional old-fashioned swear word. Using various kinds of punctuation, the transfer from the spoken word to the written was accomplished without, it is hoped, the loss of the flavor of his speech. Those who know Rabbi Magnin will surely be able to "hear him" as they read the memoir.

Facing this kind of transcription was, no doubt, a bit of a jolt to Rabbi Magnin, as it is, in fact, to almost all oral history memoirists. But with good grace, the Rabbi accepted the inevitable. Because he is aware that his informal speech is considerably different from his carefully prepared prose, because it would have been a most difficult task to revise it and we do not encourage such revisions of the transcript, Rabbi Magnin made only minor revisions: he rewrote some sentences in order to clarify his meaning, he eliminated most repetitious words and phrases, some slang, and some references to other people and organizations which he felt did not contribute significantly any additional information about himself, and might lead, in their abbreviated form, to misunderstanding.

The material in this memoir would probably not be different whether it had been delivered formally or informally. What emerges is an understanding of the Rabbi's background and his views on the many subjects to which he has addressed himself through the years. He is a public figure and one need not agree with any or all of what he has said or done to admit that what comes through is the personal account of a unique personality--an intelligent, well-educated, self-confident man of strong opinions, decisive action, and boundless energy.

Malca Chall
Interviewer-Editor

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I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION
 (Interviews 1 and 2--August 9 and September 20,
 1972)

Grandparents and Parents

The Magnins

Chall: I'd like to find out first something about your family life and your background. Could you give me the date of your birth?

Magnin: I was born on July 1, 1890, in San Francisco. My mother was Lillian Fogel and my father was Samuel Magnin. He was the son of I. Magnin and Mary Ann Magnin, the founders of the department store. My father and mother were divorced when I was just a child.

Chall: How young?

Magnin: Oh, very young. I don't remember the exact date. I wasn't more than just a little kid. I was brought up in my grandparents' home, my mother's, the Fogel's home.

Chall: You never knew your father then?

Magnin: I never really knew him. In those days a divorce was a divorce. It was a feud. Not like now where I entertain my ex-sons-in-law in my home. Not only that but I had an uncle who was married to my father's sister, my mother's brother, so it was a double divorce. So, in those days my father was never pictured in the best light.

For years I never saw the Magnins. Later on when I came here I had an aunt, Mrs. Myer Siegel,

Magnin: who was a darling, and I was very close to her and of course her husband and family.

Then, later on in life, it's a long story and I'll get back to that later if necessary, I had contact again with the Magnin family. My mother lived to be ninety-five. But, even before she died I went to some [Magnin family] events; I married some of them. After all, her grudge was largely against my grandmother, not even my grandfather, but my grandmother, Mrs. I. Magnin. She would have given me anything if I had been close to her, I'm sure. But, it would have hurt my mother; it would have wounded her.

My father gave me no support; we got along without it, but he should have at least offered to do it. And then, when I was at college in Cincinnati as an adolescent, he could have written a letter and said, "Look, what's happened between me and your mother is one thing, but if there's anything you need . . ." Then, later on in life, he wanted to meet me. He used to hear me over radio when I was on the network, and tell people how proud he was. Then, when we held services downtown in the early days, he used to occasionally come in and sit there and listen, but never say anything. So, I never really got to know him, but I have no grudges or bad feelings.

On the other hand, I was very close to my aunt, Mrs. Siegel, who lived here in the early days. She broke away from San Francisco and came here.

Chall: Was Mrs. Siegel a Magnin?

Magnin: Flora Siegel was a Magnin, my father's sister. I was very close to her. Then, in later years I got to know the rest of the family. We don't see each other often, but Cyril and I are very good friends, also his children. I went to Cyril's seventieth birthday; I went up there for it. We have no bad feelings. My Uncle Joe, Cyril's father, and I toward the end were very friendly. And as a matter of fact Uncle Emanuel John of New York left a trust to his widow; she's still alive and she's a very old lady. At her death the trust will be divided among the twelve or thirteen nephews and

Magnin: nieces, of which I'm one. He had no prejudices. I had no prejudices against him. I just didn't know him.

So, I grew up with this feeling. My father married again and I have half brothers and sisters, whom I've casually met from time to time. I wouldn't be able to pick them out of a crowd. But, I have met them at affairs and I've always been polite. Why not? What the hell have I got to lose? I'm not worried about them.

Chall: Did your father come down here to live, in Los Angeles?

Magnin: No. He always lived in San Francisco.

Chall: He remarried there?

Magnin: Right. And my mother never did remarry. She lived with her brother for many years and then came and lived for about twenty-two years in our home. I don't know my father's age when he died.

My grandparents, on the Magnin side, were born in Holland, didn't know each other in Holland, met each other in England. My grandfather was looking for a certain Dutch family and came to their home to inquire. My grandmother's maiden name was Cohen. He wanted my grandmother, but in those days the older one had to get married first, so he had to wait. He got on a ship and went to San Francisco and then when he went back to England he married her. So, they were Dutch and lived in England where my father was born.

The Fogels

Magnin: I was very devoted to my maternal grandfather who was a very simple, unassuming man.

Chall: What was his name?

Magnin: His name was George Fogel.

Chall: Where were they married?

Magnin: Oh, I don't know, I guess in New York. Don't ask me, I don't know.

Chall: They both started out together from New York?

Magnin: Yes, yes. They probably married in Brooklyn or someplace in New York. I wouldn't know.

Chall: Do you have any idea what took them to the west coast?

Magnin: No, I never discussed it. In those days who asked anybody anything?

Chall: Had they come from Orthodox backgrounds?

Magnin: My maternal grandfather probably did because he was an officer in the Geary Street synagogue which was Conservative. I had an uncle, Moses Wascerwitz, a lawyer, who was the president of the shul for many years. He married my mother's sister, Mamie.

Originally my name was Edgar I. Magnin, Isaac Magnin; I changed it as a kid to my grandfather's name, Edgar Fogel Magnin, because of my love for my maternal grandfather. He was like a father to me and I was very, very close to him. A sweet, unassuming, simple man. He had a clothing store down at the waterfront, down on Clay Street. And he used to sell to the sea captains.

See, I'm still San Francisco after fifty-seven years. I wouldn't want to live there for any reason at all. Never. But, you know this is my childhood; and I used to sit down there and talk with them.

But, anyhow, the Magnins, I think came out by train, as far as I know. My grandfather Fogel was born in Poland, his wife in Berlin. He and his wife took a clipper ship from New York down to the Isthmus of Panama, crossed on mules, came up on another clipper ship to the Golden Gate. So, my grandchildren are five generations in California. And my oldest grandchild happened to be born in San Francisco, fifth generation there.

Magnin: So, it's quite a history.

Now, as I say, the I. Magnins became very prominent and wealthy, and the other grandparents lived the simple life. They belonged to the Geary Street temple, to Beth Israel, and I was raised in Beth Israel. It's Conservative and that's the reason I can fit in with any kind of a Jewish group, daven or do anything because I was raised that way.

Chall: Why, do you suppose that in a presumably scholarly book of the kind that Martin Meyer wrote, The Jews of California, that he would deliberately leave out your parentage?*

Magnin: First of all I wasn't so important at the time. He wrote that the year after I came to Los Angeles. What was I? A kid? I wasn't such a big shot, you know.

Chall: It was 1916. That's true. But you were included in his book and everybody else's parentage is listed.

Magnin: Well, there was no secret about that. I'm the son of Lillian and Samuel Magnin. I guess he just didn't think about it. He knew my mother and father were divorced. What difference does it make?

Chall: Tracing families for biographical material is often important for research. However, in another reference to you your grandfather Fogel is referred to as a marine surveyor.

Magnin: No, he wasn't a marine surveyor at all. He had a clothing store down at the waterfront. In those days the men went out to sea and the captain used to take what they called a "slop chest." They used to take goods with them that they sold the men on the ship when they needed them. And my grandfather

*Martin A. Meyer, Western Jewry; "Jews of Prominence," San Francisco, Temple Emanu-El, 1916.

- Magnin: supplied some of these. He used to have one of these stores that had no windows, and it was closed with boards, and in front were captains' chairs, real captains' chairs. The captains sat in them. And I as a kid used to sit there with these fellows with their wind-burnt, wrinkled, furrowed faces, and their horny hands. They used to bring shells from the South Seas. We had everything there, coral and so on. And I would sit there and talk with these old characters. It was down on the waterfront then, down on Clay Street, right near the Ferry building. And I was a kid, see. That's one reason why I'm cosmopolitan, and I like all peoples, all cultures, and all religions. I romped around Chinatown and among the Italiani, and Siciliani, at Fisherman's Wharf, and I used to see the ships at their moorings.
- Chall: Did you ever go out on any of those Whitehall boats?
- Magnin: No, I never went out.
- Chall: I don't have any information about the Fogels. How big a family are they?
- Magnin: Oh they had three sons. They had five daughters. They weren't a prominent family. They were nice people.
- Chall: What about the Fogel brother who married the Magnin? [Harriet Magnin Gassner]
- Magnin: That was my Uncle Jake. He was a clerk all his life. Uncle Jake and my mother lived together for many, many years after they got divorced.
- Chall: They lived in the maternal home?
- Magnin: When the rest of them died they lived together. They were company for each other. And then when he died my mother came down and lived with us.
- Chall: So then Jacob never remarried?
- Magnin: No, neither did my mother. My mother should have. She was a nice looking lady. She could have.
- Chall: Did they have children? Did Jacob have any children?

Magnin: Yes, one. I used to see my cousin in San Francisco even way back. I didn't go to the home but I used to see her in Golden Gate Park on Sundays and I was always friendly. She married one of my Sunday school classmates. His name was Fred Shipper. He was a lawyer.

Chall: The fact that two Magnins married two Fogels, suggests a pre-arranged marriage. Do you know if this was so?

Magnin: I don't think so.

Chall: So, as you were growing up, you were the only child in the house?

Magnin: Yes, and I was the pet.

Chall: So you were close to your grandfather?

Magnin: Very. He was always very proud of me.

Chall: And what about your grandmother? What kind of a woman was she?

Magnin: Oh, she was a rather erratic person. She was a simple old lady; I don't know how to describe her. She was kind of a character. I loved her very much. When I look back on the whole business my grandfather Fogel's the one that stands out. And I can see him waiting when I came back every summer, when I came off the train at the Oakland Mole. He said very little. He was a very quiet unobtrusive man.

Chall: But you always felt his affection?

Magnin: Oh, I was very close to him. I felt like he was my father you see.

Chall: Well, in a sense he was.

Magnin: Yes.

Chall: And your grandmother and your mother, did they get along well together?

Magnin: Oh yes. There were no problems that way. There were no fights or quarrels, none of that stuff.

Chall: Was there observance of Sabbath, Pesah, or Chanukah?

Magnin: They had seder. The funny thing is my grandfather was an officer in the Geary Street shul, and yet they didn't have a truly kosher home. My grandmother had kosher meat up until the earthquake, but she also had oysters, crab, tamales. I think they had lard in them, but she didn't know that.

As a matter of fact I'll tell you something. I have a pork complex. It's a mental thing. I can eat shellfish but I can't even look at a piece of bacon. It turns my stomach to look at it. It's crazy. Then, I found out after sixty or seventy years I was eating ham and didn't know it, in soups and gravies. Then like a damned fool I had to read recipes and cans. Now, I limit myself.

Chall: It'll keep you healthy.

Magnin: My wife was raised in a different way entirely. She always ate pork products. I say, "You keep it out of the house; you can eat all you want when we're out but don't have it in my icebox. I don't want it." It's a mental thing, like snake meat.

Chall: Yes. Well, the reason that I ask that question is because I'm trying to--

Magnin: Trying to psych me? Is that what it is?

Chall: I'm not really. But I'm trying to get at least the early years on record. They're not on the record at all. Do you have any knowledge of when the Fogels came to the United States?

Magnin: Unfortunately, I have no idea of those dates. I know only that my grandfather and grandmother came to California from Brooklyn on some kind of a clipper ship.

Chall: Are there any Fogels remaining? That was quite a large family, three sons and five daughters.

Magnin: I think everyone's dead by this time. My mother

- Magnin: lived to ninety-five, and they couldn't have lived much over that.
- Chall: Where was your mother among the eight? Was she one of the older ones? Do you recall?
- Magnin: I don't remember anymore. It's possible, I don't know.
- Chall: Are there any pictures or other mementos or papers that the Fogels left behind or any that you have?
- Magnin: No, I have some pictures of my mother somewhere. There's one right over there. See that one? One, two, three, four down. That's my mother with the grey hair. She lived to ninety-five and had all her faculties. She was really an amazing woman in some ways. They were not a family like the Magnins, a name that everybody knew. Prominent. Nobody except their own friends would be particularly interested.
- Chall: There are no other grandchildren?
- Magnin: Yes, on both sides.

Growing Up in San Francisco

The Neighborhood and the City.

- Magnin: We lived on Grove Street not far from the City Hall in Hayes Valley. Incidentally, Jim Corbett the prizefighter lived very close but he was older than I. And Rube Goldberg came from that area, the cartoonist. I knew his father. He used to wear one of these Texan hats, these slouch hats. His father was a character. His father was a friend of my grandparents. I was a kid, but I knew the families.
- Chall: Was this the Jewish neighborhood at the time?

Magnin: Well, there were no ghettos in San Francisco. It wasn't big enough for that. When I was a kid we never knew what a yarmulke was. I went to Geary Street shul and when I prayed I had a hat on. Yarmulke comes from Poland to Brooklyn to Los Angeles. It's Brooklynese and Polish. Since the founding of the State of Israel it's become kind of a badge to some Jews. I would go to the Geary Street shul and Hebrew school every day, and when I prayed I prayed with a hat on. When I got through I took my hat off.

There was no ghetto in San Francisco, actually. There were some areas where some Jews lived. First the wealthy ones lived around Golden Gate Avenue and that was fashionable I think. I guess I was a baby then.

Incidentally I grew up in the atmosphere of the Tivoli Theater. I had an uncle who was related to someone who was an actress at the Tivoli, in the chorus. I used to go behind the stage. I can still see the Tivoli. That's where they had opera and the musical comedies. That was the foundation of music in San Francisco, you know, the opera there.

And so I was raised in this atmosphere and that's why I am the way I am, see. It was a very poetic atmosphere. When I look back at it, it was so different. I guess everybody's birthplace seems the same. But it was particularly colorful.

Chall: It sounds as if, when you were growing up, you were given a pretty good range of freedom to wander about the city and try out different experiences; is that so?

Magnin: I don't know what experiences I had. I left there when I was sixteen. I used to walk up and down the hills with Leo Rabinowitz. I have a letter from Leo here. Do you know who he is? He's a lawyer. Here's a letter from Leo he sent me the other day. He reminisces. (We used to walk the hills, Louie Newman and I, when we were about sixteen or seventeen. I'd come home for the summers.)

Magnin:

He says [reading], "Dear Edgar, your phone call was a glad surprise and gave me a great much needed lift . . . " He wanted to know about the Nixon affair where I'm going to speak, when the president comes here. He wants the Temple Bulletin. He gets sentimental; he likes to read the bulletin. " . . . get a picture of your activities, considering its purpose is to publicize the Temple it's more than modest about your group in comings to and from. There are no adjectives. You let the facts speak for themselves; different from good old Dr. Levy. Remember his slogan, 'Give me flowers while I still can smell them'. Every stage of life teaches something special. Everyone is different. Age eighty for me has its own special joys for which I'm duly grateful. But there's no fooling one's self. If you live long enough you have to taste the bitter with the sweet, one way or another. That's life." Incidentally, if you see Leo he can tell you more about me as a kid than anybody else.

Leo adds, "You have no idea how much you've been in my thoughts. I even dream about you, always in the center of crowds, lively activity about you. Keep up the good work. You said you had luck with you, we all need a bit of luck in everything but you've earned your results. Maybe in the utmost of all your gifts and living at a maximum, credit is all yours. I rejoice and share vicariously in every good thing that you experience. I close my eyes and in my mind I see a row of people, the upper deck of a ferry boat. Your mother, Uncle Jake, you, seeing you off to Cincinnati." I was sixteen at the time. "Looking up at the dark sky is a big transport plane to start you off to the Aleutian Islands. I cherish our memories . . . " [The Rabbi pauses, deeply stirred by the recollections.]

The 1906 Earthquake

Chall:

Do you remember anything about the 1906 earthquake?

Magnin:

Yes, very much. I remember waking up with all the books falling off the shelves, and the vases and everything were falling off from all over. Then we lived in Hayes Valley. The fire stopped at Van Ness. We were about three or four blocks, maybe five blocks at the most (I never counted the streets) west of Van Ness. So, it never touched our house. I think it's still there. It's a slum area [now] and maybe they tore it down. I once was tempted to go in it. Anyhow, I used to pass it occasionally.

I mentioned my past at the memorial service the other day. I said, "You know, Thomas Wolfe is one of my favorite authors." I don't know how familiar you are with his novels but I love him. I said, "Tom Wolfe said, 'you can't go home again,' but Tom Wolfe never left home. That's all he ever wrote about were his folks, and his early life, and the trains going by."

So, the other day at the memorial service I was talking about San Francisco. I said, "You know, I've lived here fifty-six years; I'm rooted here and I love this city; but you know I've never left there." I said that one day I went out to lecture there and I got off the plane and went out to Golden Gate Park and went around places. I said that they spoiled my merry-go-round, they changed the animals on it which were so much nicer than the ugly ones they've got now. I mentioned the Don Quixote statue, the Japanese bridge, the Sutro gardens--oh, I went through this whole business. And the people were crying. I said, "This is it. You must have had some kind of experiences like that in your own life; you must have had. What counts? When you're all through with all this hullabaloo of fame and nonsense and money--when you're all through and ready to die what are you thinking about?" It's the same way with Cincinnati. I have wonderful memories. I loved it. It seemed provincial to me but I loved it. That's of course where I married too.

Chall:

We were on the earthquake in San Francisco.

Magnin:

Yes. Well, then I went downtown to Market Street and I saw the damage that was being done. See, what

Magnin: happened in San Francisco was this. First of all, it was the frame houses like our own, mostly, that stood up. It was the brick that fell apart. They only had a few tall buildings like the Claus Spreckels building in those days. The gingerbread fell off. The building itself didn't topple over or anything like that. But the bric-a-brac dropped off. Then, of course, what happened in San Francisco was the gas mains broke, and the fire started, and the winds came up, and this is what caused the damage, in addition to what was shaken down. It was the fire.

Chall: Your own family though was not directly involved? Did you all do anything about taking precautions?

Magnin: We stayed out in the park, I think, a day or two. It's a little faint in my memory. I know I had an aunt that lived out on Walnut Street, somewhere-- oh a few blocks beyond Divisadero. This was not too far from Golden Gate Park. So, I do think we had one night in the park.

Then, after the earthquake . . . We had friends (we used to call them family but they really weren't family), and I went over to Oakland and went to Oakland High School for about six months. Then I went to Sacramento for a few weeks. I stayed with some friends there.

Then, in Oakland in this family I stayed with, the boys had a newspaper route. They've got me in the Newspaper Hall of Fame.

Chall: Do you remember the name of the family that you stayed with?

Magnin: The name was Ringolsky. One of the sons was a lawyer who changed his name to Ringold after a while. Mrs. Ringolsky was a sister of my uncle by marriage, Mr. Wascervitz. Incidentally, Aaron Sapiro who fought the Ford case was a nephew-- Aaron's mother was one of the sisters.

Public Schools

Chall: Where did you go to school?

Magnin: I went to the John Swett Grammar School, which is on McAllister Street. I don't remember the teachers very much but I remember the principal. His name was Mr. Lyser. Then I went to Lowell High School for a year, and then I went to Cincinnati and graduated from the Walnut Hills High School, and later from the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College.

Jewish Influences

Magnin: I can tell you the Jewish influence on me. I went to the Geary Street shul of M. S. Levy. See his picture up there on the top, in the corner? He was a character out of Dickens, out of one of Dickens' novels. He wore a silk hat, a white tie, a Prince Albert coat, stiff shirt; he had buttons on it in spots. He talked like this. [Imitates very formal deep proper voice.] He was a self-educated man, not too much of that, but he had a personality. His brother was Rabbi Leonard Levy of Pittsburgh, the vellum edition. He had charm and was better educated. M. S. Levy had a personality.

And even in that Geary Street shul he could control those Conservative members like no rabbi I've ever seen. And I liked Levy. He had an influence on my life. He was a very kind man. The boys used to sell chewing gum, and he'd pick up a whole box from them; and the paper boys--in the evening--he'd buy all the papers from them. He was a very remarkable man. And he talked like this. [Another imitation.] And it impressed these people.

Every year he'd have the same sermon at the same time according to the Sedra of the week. Oh, he was a character!

Magnin: Leo's father [Joseph] was the cantor by the way.

The way I tell the story which isn't true-- I won a gold medal in Hebrew, and I had the feeling I wanted to be a rabbi. Now when people say, "How'd you come to be a rabbi?" I say, "Levy came to me and said, 'You'd make a great rabbi' and I agreed with him." This is the way I tell the story jokingly. But he influenced me to a great extent because of his personality.

I used to go to Hebrew school every afternoon. I used to walk there and back. It wasn't too far. The shul then was on Geary Street near Octavia, before it moved out near Fillmore. Yes, I used to go there with Sol Lesser. I was talking to Sol on the phone today, Sol Lesser the motion picture magnate. He [Levy] was Sol's uncle. And Sol and I (he was at the Temple the other day, I saw him yesterday at the Hillcrest Country Club)-- Sol and I are very close because when we were kids we used to play handball in the alley there. We used to call it matzo alley, in back of the shul.

Chall: I picked up a clipping from your scrapbook and it comments on the fact that at the time that Rabbi Levy was celebrating his thirty years as a rabbi, twelve in Beth Israel, "a striking feature of the service was the confirmation of Edgar Magnin, a thirteen year old lad, who read the whole of the Sedra for the day in Hebrew, a performance which Dr. Levy declared he believed had never been done in this city before and by a boy so young."

Magnin: Well, it wasn't a confirmation. It was Bar Mitzvah. I never was confirmed.

[Rabbi chants a brief portion.] I went through the whole business, everything.

Chall: Well, whether you want to admit it or not it is quite an achievement. What was the reason for the achievement? Was it partly Rabbi Levy and mostly your family? Did your family want you to achieve; did they have strong desires?

Magnin: I don't know. I wouldn't remember why. I probably

- Magnin: liked it myself. Probably even then I was thinking of being a rabbi. I can go into any Orthodox shul and daven. They can't understand it. I go in there and--[chants again]. One of the Orthodox rabbis--he's now moved to Jerusalem--always said, "You're more Orthodox than we are in some ways." He meant in feeling, you know.
- Chall: Can you tell me something about Martin Meyer and his influence on the young men?
- Magnin: Martin didn't influence me too much. I was already an adolescent and I had my own ideas. Martin, I respected. He was a very charming man, a very loveable, a very fine person. But, I don't think that Martin influenced me in any particular way, except that I admired him. But no, I never tried to unconsciously imitate him. I never did that with anybody.
- Chall: He was supposed to have had an influence on young men, in terms of their attitude toward social service, not necessarily political but philanthropic.
- Magnin: Well, he started that Committee for Personal Services in State Institutions. It's got another name now and I was chairman of that for many years. And in that sense, yes. In those days San Francisco was the big city, and if San Francisco had a certain organization, we'd have to have one like it. We sort of looked up to San Francisco. But, outside of that, no.

Rabbi Voorsanger [Jacob] I didn't know so well although his son went to Cincinnati with me; at the college we were classmates, you know. He dressed the way they did in the old days--in the Prince Albert coat, and white tie, and one of these--I don't know how you describe it--but it's sort of a square derby hat. One day I was coming up on the Powell Street car, and he and Cantor Stark were riding too. I can just see them. They were standing up holding the strap. They were dressed in that formal way. You know, so different from other people.

Rabbi Voorsanger used to come to the Geary Street shul on the second day of Rosh Hashonah and

Magnin:

speak, and then he would talk on the Midrash. He had a good background, a good Jewish rabbinical education. And then in my early years here, I used to go to Sinai Temple and some of the Conservative or Orthodox synagogues on the second day, and speak. So I would do the same thing, because I learned this from watching him. He was a very distinguished man, a very nice man.

I'll tell you who was a very colorful man up in San Francisco, and that was Rabbi Jacob Nieto. Nieto was a character. He looked like a combination of Mephistopheles and Jesus. He had a little goatee. He was a Sephardic Jew. I think he was born on one of the Caribbean islands, and he was a very glib speaker and a very daring man for his day, too. He was quite unconventional but a very brilliant man. He was a prominent Mason. They admired him greatly. He was a good speaker.

Then they had a rabbi up there (I won't mention his name). He was the one I told you about who married the couple while they were laughing. He was calling Jacques, Jackass, all the way through the ceremony. They had a few of them up there. But, there were also some other rabbis up there that I didn't pay much attention to.

Chall: But your close friends were young men in both Emanu-El and Geary Street?

Magnin: Well, I didn't know too many of them in Emanu-El, I knew most of them in Geary Street.

Chall: Who else besides Leo Rabinowitz and Sol Lesser?

Magnin: Oh, I wouldn't remember.

Chall: Why did you retain this long attachment, friendship with Leo Rabinowitz?

Magnin: Well, it's like David and Jonathon. We were buddies, pals--I was almost like a member of his family.

Chall: Is there somebody whose last name is Hochwald that you recall?

Magnin: Yes, but I don't remember much detail. How did you get onto that?

Chall: This comes from the people at the Magnes Museum who gave me a few names.

Magnin: What was the first name?

Chall: I don't know.

Magnin: Well, there was a Hochwald I remember. But, most of these people, outside of Leo and his brothers--outside of the Rabinowitz family, and Sol--most of them are just faded out. Remember, I'm eighty-two years old.

Chall: Did you know Eugene Block?

Magnin: Yes, Eugene Block was a close friend. He was a debator and he also edited one of the Jewish papers up there [Jewish Community Bulletin]. Oh, Gene was an old friend. A very nice person. I mean I never palled with him like I did with Leo. Now we were pals. We walked the hills together, chewed the fog together and all this. It was different. Oh yes, Gene and I would talk.

Chall: What about Louis Newman?

Magnin: Leo and Louie Newman and I used to go to Martin Meyer's house in the evening sometimes. And we'd come home on the streetcar changing from one car to the other. At one o'clock or twelve o'clock at night I'd walk down those foggy streets. Today I'd be scared to go if there were lights. Nobody bothered me.

And Louie and I (by the way, his sister is a member of this Temple) were very good friends. I knew his mother and father too. They were lovely people. And later of course, I knew his wife, who was a very nice lady. She came from a Sephardic family, I think. Louie studied with Stephen Wise and he copied Stephen's mannerisms, but he had brains. He was brilliant. He could write good verse. He was so far ahead of most of us. I liked Louie very much, very much. When he was young he wanted to be a militant messiah. He wanted to be

Magnin:

a crusader. He got over that when he went to New York. I just gave some money to a good cause in his memory.

Introspection

Interest in People

[With the recorder turned off, Rabbi Magnin reads a page or two from the draft of his unfinished autobiography "The Tale of Three Cities."]

Chall:

When you read these sections of your autobiography, what you indicated is that you apparently were aware of the various kinds of social differences in the city. You were thinking about them, and aware of them, and you were quite interested.

Magnin:

I was aware of them and interested in people, and things, and nature, and life.

Chall:

Your contacts primarily were with your grandfather and his friends and his business associates on the waterfront, so you got to know them.

Magnin:

Well, that was on certain Saturdays. I wasn't hanging around there all the time. I was playing with the kids like anybody else.

Chall:

I see. Were you really an introspective child?

Magnin:

Very. I'm a mixture of an extrovert and an introvert. It's a funny thing. There are moments when I must have isolation and I build an inner world. Einstein says he did this. I build a wall around myself. But, most of the time when I'm with people, I like them--when I'm fooling around and kidding and laughing, and telling stories and listening. It's a mixture of both. See, I can get along with a multimillionaire, with a pauper. I go out to the club--the doorman there, and every janitor in this building are my friends. I've got a word for

Magnin: each and every one of them. In other words, I'm a democratic person, but many people are afraid to approach me. I don't know why. I'm the easiest person in the world to meet and they're scared. What the hell are they scared about? Nobody is easier to meet than I am. What are they afraid of?

Chall: I don't know. I'm surprised that they are, but perhaps they are afraid of what you might say to them because you are so outspoken.

Magnin: A girl was sitting out there, she's going to get married. We confirmed her. She's afraid to come in. "What are you afraid to come in for?" Some rabbi told her that I was a genius, so she's scared to meet a genius. It is damn foolishness. You know, people are funny.

Chall: Well, they may be afraid of your reputation. Because some people are afraid of a great man who mingles with the great people; they're afraid they can't talk to him, which isn't true. It's usually just the other way around.

Magnin: Douglas, Justice Douglas, invited me to his home for dinner. He said, "I have a simple little home. When are you coming to Washington?" He's another one. As simple as he can be.

And on the other hand, every waiter, when I'm at a banquet, comes up, "How are you? Can I bring you anything?" They know I'm a crank on food. And they bring me what I want, and every one of them is a buddy, every one of them. "How have you been? How's the family?"

One boy there, Tony, he came from New York. He comes up to my table on the dais even if he's not serving the head table; there can be fifteen hundred people. "Tony, how are you? How's your family? How's your daughter? How are you getting along?" This is the way to live.

Chall: Now, this ability that you have to get along with people, which is partly cultivated and partly your basic personality--it's not superficial? You're interested in these people?

- Magnin: I'm not a politician's handshaker. I don't want anything from most of them. No.
- Chall: You're interested in them sincerely?
- Magnin: Yeah, and I like them. They're not interesting. I wouldn't sit and talk with them more than ten minutes; they would bore me. But, they're people. They're lonesome people. What have they got? Each one's got a tragedy in his family. Some rotten kid, or somebody who is off on a tangent. They need a word of affection to know that somebody gives a damn. That's all it is. It's just that simple. But, I don't want to sit and talk with them for hours. It would wear me out. Most people would.
- Chall: So you have this interest in people as people. Did I understand that you said you also have a need for isolation and introspection?
- Magnin: At moments. Everyday I read for so many hours. And I'm by myself.
- Chall: And you do need that? You couldn't get along without it?
- Magnin: Oh, God, no; I want to read. You see, I talk largely from the cuff, with just a little outline. I have to read and think. When I read, I think. I mark the book all up. Oh yes. There isn't a book I have that isn't all marked up.
- Chall: Do you concentrate and become so deeply immersed that things can be going on around you in the house--for example, when your children were young--you don't hear the commotion?
- Magnin: They didn't bother me.
- Chall: Now, then another side in this introspection, you understand the needs of other people?
- Magnin: Yes, and I think I'm very sensitive to them. I can almost tell them what they want when they come in. And then people ring up on the phone. Like yesterday a woman was having some problem with her children, and I said, "Who the hell doesn't? Look, you can't shut it off but don't get ulcers because

Magnin: it isn't worth it. If you were dead you wouldn't know the difference. They're going to live their own life." She says, "Oh, God bless you. I could kiss you. You helped me." So, you talk with people from your own experience in life.

Poet and Realist

Chall: One reason that I asked you about your home life and your family is because I was noticing that in some of your early sermons and essays, you have a great deal to say about women. And I think it was because in the 1920s there was that earlier woman's movement.

Magnin: I'm not conscious of that. Isn't that funny?

Chall: I want to read you a couple of things I've picked up, and I wonder where you gained the feeling. Now this is from a 1920 sermon talking about the movie Humoresque, and this is a quote: "If there is anything more beautiful than Jewish home life, I mean the traditional Jewish home life-- I desire to know what it is. If there is anything that stimulates the divine more intimately than Jewish motherhood, I would fain know what it is. . . . The Jewish mother was a priestess for the home was a sanctuary, the table the altar, the father the priest, the children . . . "

Magnin: That's poetry. I was young then. It's baloney. They fight with each other. [Laughter] Making matzo balls.

This is an idealism--I wouldn't talk that way today. You see, today I'd get up and I'd say, "There was always a certain respect for Jewish women, and naturally, but don't get an idea that every Jewish woman was a priestess. They used to fight and scrap around and gossip."

Chall: There were several other little items of that kind. I just wondered whether you really had women on the pedestal.

Magnin: Nah. Listen, I'll tell you one thing. I've always been realistic and never fooled myself. I'm a mixture of a mystic and a very pragmatic person. I'm a mixture of a poet and a realist. And I know when to keep my feet on earth and when to take a look at the stars and pull one out of the sky. And when I'm in the pulpit, I can have them laughing one minute and crying the very next because I'm the same way. It isn't done for show, you see.

I'll show you something. This is the Hebrew Union College Annual when I graduated and I haven't changed to this day. This was published in 1914, and here these guys all write serious stuff and I have one little thing in there--I think it's in here.*

Chall: You have something in there about what it's like to be in the old school in Cincinnati.

Magnin: Yes, but you never saw this. I don't want this to get out of my room. [Reading] "Jottings. Edgar Fogel Magnin, '14. Congratulations to my class--myself included! Congratulations to American Israel--the community at large! Congratulations to the faculty especially, for they get rid of us, at last, and forever and aye!" See, I haven't changed. It was 1914.

"Nine clean-cut, modern, energetic, enthusiastic, inspired young men. . . . Nine young men fired with a message, and that message represents the highest that Reform Judaism teaches, which, we take it, is the highest that any organized religion teaches. The Lord hath commanded and we must speak! Thank God for the call! Thank God for the privileges and opportunities that have been given to us! Thank God for the inspiration that is ours, after many, many days of bitter struggling with ourselves. And I feel sorry for him amongst us who has not experienced the keenest and bitterest of mental and spiritual struggles. Surely there must be something essentially lacking in the life of such

*Hebrew Union College Monthly. Graduation Number; Vol. 1, no. 1 (June, 1914): 25-27.

Magnin: a one." Now here is a kid already with a deep belief. You see how God comes into this picture.

Chall: Now, you really meant what you said?

Magnin: Oh, damned right. Wait till you see what I'm doing. See, this is humor and pathos. This comes into poetry without realizing it. I can hardly read it sometimes.

[Continues reading.] "To those of us who were an integral part of the old regime, that held sway on Sixth Street around the corner from the cabbage markets and a pace or two from the stock yards, the new buildings in Clifton, with their changed environment and atmosphere, are a source of such joy and inspiration that a newcomer can scarcely . . . " [Interruption] "Moreover, we are in the position to note the marvelous evolution, in fact revolution, that has been going on and is going on at the present time in every phase of College activities. . . . How can we expect a young adolescent in the midst of his most bitter sturm and drang to remain cheerful, optimistic, hopeful, after having emerged from a hard morning's work at University High School into an atmosphere of dense smoke, dark, narrow streets" (this was the old college) "fringed by one-time aristocratic abodes, now squalid and dingy in their aspects: dirty rooms, poorly ventilated, and dark as Egypt?" I didn't write badly when I stop to think about it.

"Compare with the environment just depicted that of two up-to-date, clean, well-furnished, well-ventilated and beautiful buildings, crowning one of Cincinnati's most beautiful suburban summits. Across the way is beautiful Burnet Woods, with the university buildings standing out between the trees, the symbol of culture and refinement. In the valley below you can see the factories innumerable, and here and there a long freight curving in and out, progressing (just like Thomas Wolfe used to write about trains) like some tiny snail; these things symbolic of business, efficiency, the struggle for existence. But even in the West all is not business, for on the other side of the valley are tall, wooded hills, and between them late in the afternoons one can count a thousand

Magnin: different tints--some of them exquisitely subtle and delicate--painted by the setting sun." And then I say in Hebrew, "Ma gadlu maasecha Adonai! How wondrous are thy works, O Eternal! Here is enough food for the most rampant imagination. Here is an environment that offers a liberal education in itself to him who is possessed of eyes that see. Especially is the Western boy touched by this late afternoon scene, because he knows that the sun is going home."

You see, this gives you more insight into me than anything else. More than where I was born and what kind of duck I ate. You see, this is a mixture of--almost like a novelist--of humor and pathos. I don't know why I didn't start to be a writer, a novelist. I should have done it, I think. I don't know.

Chall: Well, maybe you like to speak too, so now you have the combination of the speech and the writing.

Magnin: That's right. [Interruption]

Chall: So, you started out with a deep feeling of poetry and sincerity, kind of messianic. It wasn't exactly a messianic spirit.

Magnin: No, it's not a messianic spirit because I'm not looking for some kind of Messiah to come. It's a feeling of sensitivity, of relating to life. The same thing as you'll get from Walt Whitman. I don't mean that I have his genius, but much the same spirit as you'll get from Walt Whitman or from Thomas Wolfe. Robert Browning is one of my very great favorites. She'll [Esther Lewis] give you some of the printed material and talks I've given on Browning and people like that. You see, I don't give these phony sermons.

For instance when I talked at Rosh Hashonah! You know T. S. Eliot's Wasteland and the Hollow Men and all? I gave the philosophy of T. S. Eliot. He saw the nonsense going on today way ahead of our time. You know what I talked about on Yom Kippur? James Joyce's Ulysses and Homer's Ulysses; I tied it up. Because, you see why? The adventures of Ulysses, he's fighting our

JOTTINGS.

EDGAR FOGEL MAGNIN, '14.

Congratulations to my class—myself included! Congratulations to American Israel—the community at large! Congratulations to the faculty especially, for they get rid of us, at last, and forever and aye!

Nine clean-cut, modern, energetic, enthusiastic, inspired young men—eight of them, at least (present company excepted, naturally). Nine young men fired with a message, and that message represents the highest that Reform Judaism teaches, which, we take it, is the highest that any organized religion teaches. The Lord hath commanded and we must speak! Thank God for the call! Thank God for the privileges and opportunities that have been given to us! Thank God for the inspiration that is ours, after many, many days of bitter struggling with ourselves. And I feel sorry for him amongst us who has not experienced the keenest and bitterest of mental and spiritual struggles. Surely there must be something essentially lacking in the life of such a one.

¶

To those of us who were an integral part of the old *regime*, that held sway on Sixth street “around the corner” from the cabbage markets and a pace or two from the stock yards, the new buildings in Clifton, with their changed environment and atmosphere, are a source of such joy and inspiration that a newcomer can scarcely appreciate. Moreover, we are in the position to note the marvelous evolution and, in fact, revolution, that has been going on and is going on at the present time in every phase of College activities. It is marvelous to see what an effect environment has on life and opinion. How can we expect a young adolescent in the midst of his most bitter storm and drang to remain cheerful, optimistic, hopeful, after having emerged from a hard morning's work at University or high school into an atmosphere of dense smoke, dark, narrow streets, fringed by “one-time” aristocratic abodes, now squalid

and dingy in their aspects; dirty rooms, poorly ventilated, and as dark as Egypt? Compare with the environment just depicted that of two up-to-date, clean, well-furnished, well-ventilated and beautiful buildings, crowning one of Cincinnati's most beautiful suburban summits. Across the way is beautiful Burnet Woods, with the University buildings standing out between the trees, the symbol of culture and refinement. In the valley below can be seen factories innumerable, and here and there a long freight curving in and out, progressing like some tiny snail; these things symbolic of business, efficiency, the struggle for existence. But even in the West all is not business, for on the other side of the valley are tall, wooded hills, and between them late in the afternoon one can count a thousand different tints—some of them exquisitely subtle and delicate—painted by the setting sun. *Ma gadlu maasecha Adonai!* How wondrous are thy works, O Eternal! Here is enough food for the most rampant imagination. Here is an environment that offers a liberal education in itself to him who is possessed of eyes that see. Especially is the Western boy touched by this late afternoon scene, because he knows that the sun is going *home*—it is journeying toward those he loves; it will stand directly over the streets he used to play on. He looks at his watch. It is such and such a time out there now. And he cleans the dial of his little Elgin that he got for his Barmitzvah with a tear that trickled down upon that valuable timepiece without his knowing it.



Good-bye, Cincinnati! Dear old conservative city, with its air of culture and solidity. You may not offer a metropolitan life to those who choose to make their home in your midst. It is true that it requires years before one can grow accustomed to your slow traction service, with its miserable equipment, and other testimonies of your ultra-conservative spirit. But we love you just the same. The city of our adoption has become the city with which we shall always associate the finest and most sacred reminiscences of our lives.

Can we ever forget your hospitality, your courtesy, your more than kindly interest in us? Where else could we go, I ask, and hang our hats on a dozen different hat-racks in a dozen different homes, with the same feeling of "at-homeness"? We shall miss you very, very much. Many a day we shall pause in our work, lay our heads upon our desk and travel in imagination back into the very heart of you. There we shall take our seats in the same classrooms and be delightfully bored all over again. I can assure you, we shall be happy to be bored in the way we used to be, for we shall miss your great scholars and thinkers and the fine academic atmosphere for which you are noted! And again we shall solve all the problems of the world just like we used to, and with the self-assurance of an intellectual Hercules!

O! that we might go all through it again! At least at some moments we feel that way. True, we have longed to graduate all these years, and then when the time arrives at last, we hate to think of it. It is but another form of the eternal paradox, nothing more nor less! That is how Dr. Neumark would explain it.

But when all is said and done, we do hate to leave, because we know that we are practically leaving forever, barring an occasional visit. We envy the D Graders for once in our lives! We envy them with their Harper's Elements of Hebrew! We envy them as they recite in inspiring chorus the regular verb and flunk on the irregular. Lucky children! If we believed that wearing short trousers would make us one of you, we would apply the shears this very night. But we must be philosophic and take things as they come. Instead, we shall apply the shears to this article, saying once again:

~~Good-bye, dear old Cincinnati: God bless you!~~

Browning: An Empathy For Jewry

The Message Of A Great British Poet To A Skeptical World

ALL through the years the poetry of Robert Browning has had an influence on my life.

Last summer I dropped in on him. I stood with bowed head at his tomb in the famous Poets Corner of Westminster Abbey.

I also enjoyed the new musical Robert and Elizabeth now playing on the London stage. In Florence I visited the home of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and as I passed over the threshold I seemed to hear a soft, feminine voice singing: "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways . . ."

ROBERT BROWNING had an empathy for the Jewish people. It is believed that one of the Rothschilds was influential in securing a position for his father in the Bank of England. Whether this is true or not, I don't know but I don't think it would have made much difference to a man who loved all people irrespective of race or creed.

Browning's Saul is one of the many poems that reflects his Biblical knowledge and the influence it had on him.

Jochanan Hakkadosh and Rabbi Ben Ezra deal with Jewish personalities.

He describes the persecution of the Jews during the Middle Ages in his Holy-Cross Day.

"By the torture prolonged from age to age, / By the infamy, Israel's heritage, / By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace, / By the badge of shame, by the felon's place, / By the branding-iron, the bloody whip, / And the summons to Christian fellowship, / We boast our proof that at least the Jew / Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew."

BROWNING'S POETRY reflects a deep religious conviction. It should be read by people who believe that religion is passe and is of concern only to simple-minded and dilapidated old individuals with loose dentures.

Rarely does it occur to these people that in the abandonment of religion they have lost something very precious and have found no substitute.

Part of this lack of religion is due to a misconception of science. Actually, some of the greatest scientists are religious. Other factors are Communism which ridicules everything sacred; and a misinterpretation of Freudianism.

I OFTEN wonder why people who find flaws in religion don't see them in every other phase of human thinking and activity. Communism and capitalism have their defects. No two philosophies agree on any one system of thought. Education is entirely inadequate and is constantly being criticized. Science has provided us with a rich technology which has added to our physical comforts but has left us frightened almost to death and spiritually starved. It has never answered the basic questions and

probably never will. This lack of faith has brought about a loose attitude toward morality as well as much anxiety and insecurity.

What do we hear and see on radio, TV and in the newspapers? Violence . . . riots . . . crimes . . . strikes . . . wars . . . prejudice . . . neo-fascism . . . moral laissez faire especially among young people . . . rebellion partly out of idealism and often for the sake of excitement and publicity . . . black backlash . . . white backlash.

With all our comforts, material advantages, greater leisure, more wealth, we are still unhappy. Some times I think the Jew of today is less content than his grand-parents.

BROWNING GIVES us something to think about. He was the philosopher-poet. He should be read and reread by some of the educated fools.

Ironically enough, some of the "servants of God" — a minority to be sure — make statements that have shock value and receive publicity but which are shallow and only create confusion in the minds of the laity.

I recently heard a panel over TV consisting of clergymen discussing the sickening subject "Is God Dead?" Some wore collars turned around. There were two Rabbis with neckties.

I have rarely listened to such a concoction of theological mish-mash and double talk. These men didn't understand themselves. Their conversation was as full of contradictions as Swiss cheese is full of holes.

THIS MISLEADING phrase, "God is Dead" is derived from Nietzsche who was brilliant but insane. He was weak and effeminate and as a defense mechanism laughed at love and mocked at mercy.

A story is told about a wag who passed a wall on which was written "God is dead—Nietzsche." Underneath it he wrote "Nietzsche is dead—God."

A few ministers who have said that God is dead mean that He is dead for them. They have lost the faith of their childhood days, much of which undoubtedly was dogmatic and based on myth and superstition. Some Rabbis have imitated them in the effort to appear "intellectual." These people constitute a small minority.

JUST BEFORE the High Holy Days, our most sacred season of the year, a Rabbi had to get into the act. According to the newspaper, he stated that God was "limited." He must have a cosmic tape measure or perhaps he has a private wire to the Deity.

Maimonides in the twelfth century held that no human being with a limited, finite mind could explain the Infinite Mind and that whatever positive attributes we ascribe to Deity are purely relative.

Words can never explain the inexplicable. Theology is a poor but honest attempt to give answers where none can be had. It imitates philosophy in the effort to be objective but this is impossible.

By RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN

A HANUKAH FEATURE
WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THE B'NAI B'RITH MESSENGER



RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN
—A Visit To A Man Of Understanding

RELIGION is more of the heart than of the head. It is rooted in intuition and deep instinct. It is as natural as hunger, thirst or sex. It reaches out like the flower that raises its head to kiss the sunlight without knowing why. The religious instinct is like that of the birds who never studied meteorology or read the weather reports but know exactly when to fly north or south. It is like that of the beaver who is an engineer without a degree or the infant's natural reaching for the mother's breast.

When we say we know God we mean we feel God. We don't know Him exactly in the same sense as we perceive objects through our five senses. A child doesn't understand higher mathematics. An animal has less intelligence than a child. But the mind of the greatest genius is less than that of an animal or a child's compared with the Infinite.

THERE ARE other foundations for our faith besides intuition. How does one account for the vastness and complexity of this universe or natural law and order unless some Power created it?

How to explain the evolution of man from beast to barbarian and from barbarian to Einstein? If we are only cells, blood and bone, how come we dream dreams and have visions . . . plan Utopias . . . compose music and poetry . . . become heroes . . . sacrifice ourselves for an ideal? What is the basis of conscience?

FOOLS HAVE all the answers. Wise men have few. Browning was one of the wise ones. He did not try to explain God. He accepted Him. He believed in the soul . . . in the spiritual force that permeated everything and everybody. He held that the ideal should be pursued in the face of hardship, scorn

and persecution that seeking was more important than grasping . . . that it is the motive that counts most . . . that sincerity and integrity are paramount.

He didn't fool himself about the world. He was a realist. When Pippa sings, "God's in His heaven / All's right with the world," he didn't necessarily imply that perfection was the norm, but he did feel that despite all the evil there was much good and that in the end the best will triumph and not the worst. Browning realized that we see only part of the arc and not the entire picture and that our faith must transcend our puny, empirical knowledge.

IF WE would incorporate more of Browning's thoughts in our daily lives we would have fewer social and political problems. There would be more contentment and peace of mind inside those sad skulls of ours. There would be less juvenile crime. The dope peddler would go out of business. There would be fewer beatniks. Men would dress like men and women like women. They would take a bath and get up and go to work in the morning instead of staying up all night listening to maudlin songs on a guitar by so-called reformers who sell a million disks.

They would have less dandruff on the outside and more stability on the inside of their heads.

Much of what passes for art today would be more wholesome and sensible and not permeated with existentialist despair, sneering at life and fearing death and insisting that we have no purpose for existence. Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan may be out of date with some people but the childlike quality to enjoy life, to laugh and to love are still to be appreciated by those who want to live before they die.

"ANDREA DEL SARTO" teaches the lesson that character and elevation of mind are more important to a truly great artist than mere technical knowledge. It is the message of idealism and self-respect.

"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" tells the story of the triumph of will power over almost insuperable obstacles. It defies fate and the malignant forces of life.

In "Fra Lippo Lippi" Browning depicts the joy of aesthetics . . . the appreciation of beauty which was one of the hallmarks of the Renaissance.

In "Pippa Passes" the songs of a simple country girl change the lives of people. Who knows just what influence any of us wield in this world?

In "Saul", David sings the song of immortality and eternal love.

"Sordello" reminds us that only by pursuing our best instincts do we attain real happiness.

And so it goes.

THUS WE see that Browning's philosophy was derived from the Judeo-Christian heritage which our Hebrew forefathers gave the world. His optimism was that of the Jew who has faced all obstacles and surmounted them . . . of David to whom God was very close . . . of Job who retained his belief in the midst of one terrible calamity after another.

All these thoughts are reflected in the following lines:

"God's in His Heaven / All's right with the world."

"Progress is the law of life / Man is not man as yet."

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for?"

"Tis not what man does that exalts him, but what man would do."

"Hope, love, fear, faith / These mark humanity."

"There's a heaven above, and night by night / I look right through its gorgeous roof; / For I intend to get to God."

"It's better being good than bad / It's safer being meek than fiercer. / It's fitter being sane than mad."

ROBERT, WHEN I stood at your grave with bowed head in Westminster Abbey I knew that you were not there . . . just your body. You are very much alive in the hearts of those who appreciate beauty and truth and hold them above the fallacious fads and foolish fashions of modern thought and thoughtlessness.

The years are creeping on. The days are growing shorter. And again I turn to you for comfort and for wisdom. After all you did say:

"Grow old along with me! / The best is yet to be, / The last of life, for which the first was made: / Our times are in his hand / Who said: 'A whole I planned, / Youth shows but half, trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'"

Magnin: passions with the alien winds, our tempers with Scylla and Charybdis, taking the middle path; the Cyclops, the one-eyed monster that's in all of us. I brought it all in with the Yom Kippur and home.

If you keep on talking about Abraham and Moses every week it gets to be boring. The people don't need it. And you've got educated people. So, you hold their interest. You don't talk abstracts. So, I started out with James Joyce's Ulysses, ran into Homer and then into a Jewish history that had something akin to it; then I came over to Eli Wiesel with the Chasidic stories that tied in with the whole darned business, and tied it together with Tennyson's Ulysses. And all on the spur of the moment, all from the stream of consciousness.

Chall: But you must have done quite a bit of reading to prepare that.

Magnin: Well, I do. I'll be reading all this afternoon. And digest what I read, and I read everything. Oh certainly. You can't hold people if you're going to talk the same damned nonsense. Every week the same thing. It's ridiculous.

Chall: Well, you have been giving a countless number of speeches and sermons in the last many years.

Magnin: Of course. But a sermon I never gave in my life. I never preached a sermon. Never. And I talk like I talk to you.

Training for the Rabbinate, 1907-1914

Decision to Become a Rabbi

Chall: Why did you decide to become a rabbi, and a Reform rabbi at that, when you had been brought up in the Conservative tradition?

Magnin: Oh. Well, I'll tell you. First of all, I was raised in a Conservative way but I already could

Magnin: see that there was more dignity to the Reform service. The class of people were more refined. At least, in those days.

What they call Reform today is a mixture. Most of these temples, don't know what they are. That's why they're coming to us now, those who want Reform; because they're a hodgepodge of everything.

I liked Hebrew and I sort of looked up to M. S. Levy; he was a character but a great personality. And then there was Aaron Sapiro who was not related directly but indirectly with the family; he later became an attorney. He's the one who sued Henry Ford, you know. Remember that--when Ford attacked the Jews? Well, anyhow he was studying at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati; he was a senior when I started. He never graduated; he quit as a senior and became a lawyer. But, he was there, and I'd always hear about Aaron, and about the Hebrew Union College.

Actually, I had a feeling that I wanted to be a rabbi. I can't analyze exactly why; maybe it was because I wanted to get away from my mother's apron strings. I don't know. I knew that I would go to Cincinnati and go into another world.

You see, in those days they had a preparatory department. I left when I was about sixteen, right after the earthquake and fire. I've forgotten exactly. I used to do high school in the morning and the Hebrew Union College in the afternoon, and then the university in the morning and the Hebrew Union College in the afternoon. That's how they used to do it.

Chall: So, that's how they did it. I couldn't understand why it took nine years.

Magnin: Well, I made it in seven. I skipped two years when I went in. I did enough studying on the side, and between that and bluff, I managed to skip two years. And so, I made it in seven years.

Cincinnati

- Magnin: It was a five day trip, four to five days. There were no planes. I came home in the summers, always. It was like a journey. It was like going to a foreign country. In those days how many people went from Cincinnati to San Francisco? And Cincinnati was fascinating. It was like a half-German and half-southern town. They had inclines that carried their little bitty street-cars. Very provincial. And they liked themselves and they said they were cultured and all this. It was a bunch of nonsense to me. See, they had a symphony when San Francisco never knew what a symphony orchestra was. It was all new to me. I remember the first symphony I went to and it made quite an impression. I went down to the Music Hall and heard the Unfinished Symphony.
- Chall: In Cincinnati?
- Magnin: Yes. And I once gave a talk on one of the holidays not many years ago on the Unfinished Symphony.
- Chall: So, there was a bit of culture there that you picked up?
- Magnin: Oh, it was a different type. And they liked themselves. It was mostly German Jews. And a Russian Jew or a descendant was like a barbarian to them. If their daughter married a Russian Jew, why this was like--I don't know--marrying out of the faith. As a matter of fact I once made a speech in Cincinnati and I told them, I said, "This will all stop if a few ugly Jewish girls from rich families meet some good looking poor Jewish boys that have ambition." That's exactly what happened. Now, they're the aristocracy.
- Chall: Yes, that happened all the time. It probably would have been a good place to have been in school.
- Magnin: Yes. There was no ghetto. How many Jews do you think there were? They may have had ten thousand Jews, or fifteen, and thought they had all the Jews. They used to call it the "Holy Land."

Magnin: They said that the ten lost tribes lived in Avondale which was the Jewish section. In Los Angeles there are over a half a million Jews in all, and in New York, even more.

Chall: What was the reason for setting up the school, the seminary in Cincinnati?

Magnin: Isaac M. Wise was a pioneer Reform rabbi. He didn't originate Reform, it started in Germany, but he was the pioneer in America and he organized it. And Cincinnati in those days was sort of a center. You know once Cincinnati was bigger than Chicago, but not in his day. It used to be called Porkopolis and also Losantaville. I don't know whether you know that or not. There was a big stockyard there.

Anyhow, Wise was an organizer. He wanted a college where you'd have American rabbis and Reform rabbis to meet the situation. And he wasn't as radical as people think. In some ways he would be conservative today, but he did want American-trained rabbis. And then he got the different congregations to join together to support the college.

That became the Union of American Hebrew Congregations which I detest. They were intended to get money for the college and that's all. Instead of that they paralleled it by keeping half of what they get and going into all sorts of silly things, that to me are nothing to do with Judaism, are negative and hurt our religion and the synagogues. That's a private vendetta of my own. I just have no use for them. This Temple gives them plenty money.

Hebrew Union College

Chall: Did anybody, when you were away from home at school, help you through some of the problems that a very young adolescent would have in facing the new experience?

Magnin: No, in those days--you're talking about Cincinnati then?

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: In those days they didn't have dormitories. We boarded. And I had a room and board; it cost me \$25 a month including three meals; that's the way it was. I walked to school--snow, ice--never had a thermometer in my mouth all the seven years I was in Cincinnati. Don't remember ever having any trouble. And I would walk in the snow and the slush and nothing would bother me.

When I went to the college, it was downtown on Sixth Street, between the brothels and the stockyards. The whores and the cows. I patronized neither one of them. Some of them did. It was in an old mansion downtown; this was before they had the fancy buildings up on Clifton. I finished in those new buildings. I think they turned out better rabbis down there than they do now. But anyhow it was a house converted into a school. The whole library there was one room. It was the dining room of the house. You can imagine it--the Hebrew Union College of that time contrasted with what it is today.

I liked the professors. I was very close to them. They were mostly characters. They were German scholars. They were very learned. That's all they did. They had nothing else to do. They read and they studied and they knew many languages. They were great people. But, they weren't the men to train rabbis. The president of the college, who was Kaufmann Kohler was a theologian with a beautiful white beard, but he was sitting up on cloud nine all the time. In fact, when I graduated he didn't even know my name. And there were only nine in the class and he got me mixed up with Elkan Voorsanger of San Francisco. He called me Voorsanger and called him Magnin.

But, when I used to go home at night, there was one professor, Moses Mannheimer, a cute little German man. He'd go and buy rye bread, and I'd go over with him. We'd take the same Avondale car and we'd ride up together. He was sweet. I liked

Magnin: him. He was a nice little man. And I liked Professor Gotthard Deutsch, he was a very colorful figure, historian. Whatever realism I had wasn't gotten through the college; it was by nature and observation.

I always had a way of liking older people when I was young. And today I like the young people when I'm old. I started playing golf with men who were much older than I am. They had an attraction to me because they had experience and they were mellowed and I really liked them. I also liked young people too, of course.

Some of the professors like Dr. Deutsch the historian, had a big beard; of course today that wouldn't be unusual. He wore a cape like an opera cape. When I got out to Clifton, to the new college, I used to walk home to Avondale with him after classes through Burnet Woods and talk with him. He was a great character, you know. So, it was a very colorful place in those days.

Chall: Did that faculty have a certain mission in preparing rabbis for the Reform movement?

Magnin: Not particularly. I'll tell you where I learned more than anything else; that was going to the synagogues. They had two Reform temples in Cincinnati. They were very Reform in those days. To me, they were almost like the Unitarian church.

[Interruption] I used to go to temple on Saturday mornings. And one of the rabbis, you knew what he said before he spoke, and the other one you didn't know what he said when he was all through. And all they had in the congregation were a few old ladies with bladder trouble and men with prostates. So, I would look around and say, "What the hell is wrong with this?"

Today we talk to more or less the same number of people in a week here--just on a Saturday morning--than they did in a year in Cincinnati in those days, in both of the synagogues. So, I wondered what was wrong. And I used to study these men to find out what not to do. I figured that if there's anything that I do that's the very opposite, then I can't go too wrong.

Chall: It was all that bad?

Magnin: Yeah, it was that bad. They were brilliant men in their own way. I mean, they were students, scholars, very nice people. Philipson [David], later on when I graduated, he loved me. He used to call me the "genius", which I'm not, but he used to say that. I never knew him when I was there. I never cared about him. I didn't like him. He was a cold personality. But, later on when I used to go to the Conference [Central Conference of American Rabbis], he wanted to sit with me and I'd tell him all kinds of stories. He loved them. He looked like a prude but he wasn't. And he really was a great guy. But, in those days I didn't know him. The other rabbi was a nice guy. They were all nice, but I wondered why it was that nobody came.

I used to officiate in Muncie, Indiana for the holidays, year after year--Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur. Then, my first position was in Stockton. I started out by just talking like I'm talking to you now. Just that simple. But, I wanted to have something to say. I tell the young rabbis, "Don't talk unless you have something to say, then say it. And when you get through sit down on your fannies, don't fool around." [Interruption]

Chall: What else do you recall about your student years at Hebrew Union College?

Magnin: Of course, as I said, we went through the same sturm and drang that every adolescent went through. Even with love affairs and everything else--everybody goes through this nonsense. You think you can change the world and you have all kinds of theories. The only difference between then and now is that we never insulted professors, or threw rocks, or burnt up buildings, or thought we were God's gift to the world. We weren't that conceited. We didn't live off the establishment and then criticize them while we're taking checks and eating off of it. But doubts, yes. For instance, I never liked the university. I thought it was pedantic, and I was way ahead of my time. I made up my mind that when I would teach, I would teach entirely differently. I didn't believe in the grade system except for medicine and engineering,

Magnin: where it's necessary. If anybody wants to learn French, then let him learn it. If not, who cares? Why should you have grades for this? Why should you be licensed unless you're going to teach French?

So, I had very liberal views about those things. Very free views. As a matter of fact, here's an example of the thing. Dr. Kohler, he was the professor of homiletics, that is the so-called art of preaching. He had a format, which they are still using: text, introduction, body, and conclusion. Generally, they talked an hour--one solid hour. [Thumps desk for emphasis.]

I had a different concept of the thing entirely. I never used a text in my life. I refer to the Bible, I refer to Dickens, too, you know, or Pascal or Montaigne, anybody I want to. In other words, I believe that when you have something to say, say it and then sit down on your behind, and that's it.

So I was supposed to write a sermon in college, a sort of test, a trial sermon. They had chapel there. This was the one I wrote [laughter]; you'll never believe it. And Kohler was German, you know, and living up on cloud nine. He said, "What is this?" And I said, "Oh, that's a mistake. That's a paper I was writing." And I brought another one to him. He wouldn't understand it.

Instead of starting in with Abraham moved to such and such a place, I started like this: "There were some geese who lived in a yard and this was a goose world, and all they knew was what was in that yard. Goose talk, and goose ideas, and goose concepts, and goose appearances, and goose styles. One day one of them looked through a knot-hole through the fence and he saw the world outside. He burrowed under and got out, and he came back and told his fellow geese about it. And they thought he was crazy, and they were going to pluck all his feathers out."

And Kohler said, "Vat is dat?" And I said, "Oh, this is something I wrote for school." I didn't want to argue with him, and told him I left my sermon home. And I wrote another thing

- Magnin: about Abraham. That was the first thing I wrote, so you see there already . . .
- Chall: You were trying to get out from under.
- Magnin: You see, what was I saying? That the college people live in a narrow world and it's much bigger than that.
- Chall: Did you ever talk about this to some of the professors when you were walking with them on your way home? Did you ever let them know how you felt?
- Magnin: No, I never did.
- Chall: How much preparation and concern was there in this Reform rabbinical school about ritual, Hebrew, these kinds of things? Were they sloughing it off?
- Magnin: No but in those days Reform was very radical.
- Chall: So, you were a part of the new radical group?
- Magnin: Yes. It was like a revolution. I didn't come in the beginning of it, but it was still radical. When I got to Cincinnati the first Rosh Hashonah service I attended was in Dr. Philipson's temple; it seemed to me like a Unitarian church. It was as cold as ice. I couldn't understand it. However, it didn't bother me. I accepted it. And to tell you the truth, I didn't think too much about it one way or the other. I wasn't in practice. I was just going to school. It didn't bother me.
- Chall: Did they have strict ideas there about intermarriage?
- Magnin: Well, intermarriage, when I first started, no rabbi would intermarry unless somebody converted. No, in those days nobody intermarried. If they did, they went to a judge or some other place.
- Chall: I see. And the use of Hebrew, was that being downplayed?
- Magnin: Well, in the Reform ritual there wasn't as much of it but they studied it. We had to study it.

Chall: What about Zionism?

Magnin: When I was in San Francisco as a boy, there were two women, two old maids, who were Zionists. Period. There wasn't another person in the whole city; I don't think so.

Chall: Do you remember their names?

Magnin: Until you asked me, I could. Really, these people were devoted to it.* You see, most of the Reform rabbis were anti-Zionistic.

Chall: What about the school?

Magnin: They never talked about it one way or the other.

Chall: Abba Hillel Silver was in the class that followed you, I guess.

Magnin: Yes, in the class that followed me.

Chall: What kind of a person was he?

Magnin: A very brilliant man. A very great speaker of the old school of oratory, but brilliant. A very learned man, outstanding. But, he took himself very seriously, very stiff, very severe, very dignified. He couldn't get down to people's level the way I can. See, half the time they call me by my first name.

Chall: These traits, like the one you just discussed about Silver, could you see these when they were students?

Magnin: Yes, you can see the type. You see, these boys were poor boys. They wanted to make themselves appear big. I never had that feeling of a poor boy. I never lived in the ghetto; I was myself, and I took people in a normal way.

*Leo Rabinowitz remembered them as the Nathan sisters. --M.C.

Chall: Do you think this was a way of gaining stature?

Magnin: Sure, of course.

Chall: I see, and they could gain it by going into the Reform movement?

Magnin: Falsetto voice, and all big words, and all this stuff. It's all part of the trappings.

Chall: What about some of the other students?

Magnin: [Looking at the picture of the 1914 graduating class.]
[Interruption] I don't know what's become of Charlie [Latz]. Lazon [Morris] is alive and he's retired long ago from ministry. Levinger [Lee] died. Magnin's still alive. Mann [Louis] died. Ransinsky [Marius], he changed his name later to Ranson, he's alive. Voorsanger [Elkan] died.

Chall: Did you know Elkan Voorsanger when you were in San Francisco?

Magnin: No. We went to another shul. But Elkan I knew later, he was my classmate. And the interesting thing is that Elkan was already a year in Cincinnati and I skipped two years and caught up with him. I jumped right into his class. And we were very very close friends all our lives. I loved Elkan. His father was quite a noted rabbi, but Elkan went into social service. He was the head of the Jewish Federation in Milwaukee.

Chall: Oh, he didn't keep a pulpit then?

Magnin: No, no. For a short time he was assistant to somebody. I think in St. Louis, and I think once in Grand Rapids, I'm not sure. Elkan had a very short career as a rabbi. But he was a nice guy. I loved him. After all we came from the West. We were the two San Francisco boys.

Chall: You had that in common.

Magnin: Yes. Harold Reinhart came from Portland, and Harold was a grade or two below me. He went to London and died in London.

Chall: Is that where he took up his pulpit?

Magnin: Yes, in London. And he stayed there during the blitz. I spoke for him once in London: and members of his congregation came up, they're charming people. "Oh, so delightful." One man came up to me--I'll never forget--after the services he said, "You're not a bore." [Laughter] It was very funny.

The Rabbis Who Influenced Edgar Magnin: M. S. Levy and Emil G. Hirsch

Chall: You talked earlier of being influenced by your college teachers negatively. That is to say, they taught you how not to be a rabbi. Did any of them have any positive influences?

Magnin: Two rabbis had an influence on my life. One was Levy, of course, with his bigness with people. He'd buy a whole box of chewing gum from the kids selling chewing gum on the streets. He'd buy all the newspapers left from a newsboy toward dusk. This was the way he was. And I admired him for his ability to reach people, his charisma. Those people weren't so fancy in that shul. Most shuls like that, they fight like hell with the rabbis and themselves; but no, he had the leadership. You know, he was a big fellow and he talked like this [speaks with exaggerated voice]. So, the presence and the ability to make friends with people I learned from Levy.

The man who influenced my life most was a man I never knew until I graduated, and then I became very close to him. And that was Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago. There he is up there [pointing to picture on wall]. He was Julius Rosenwald's rabbi. He was a genius. He not only knew seventeen languages, but he was a genius. The man was brilliant, and direct, and blunt, and didn't give a damn for anybody, including the richest members in his congregation.

He was German born, came here to live, went back to study in Germany. His father was a rabbi.

Magnin: He was a radical reformer. In those days there was a revolution. He had no Torah for a while in his temple in Chicago. Then, later on he restored it.

But, Hirsch came down to the college to speak. And he said, "Nine turns of the crank and every sausage comes out alike." That's what he said. And I said, "That's my man."

Later on, I got to meet him. He disliked rabbis. He looked down on people who were stupid. I do the same thing except that I like people, stupid or not. He didn't like them. So, I didn't get that from him.

But, one time he was sick and he came out here and stayed at a hotel in Pasadena. I was just a youngster, and I was an associate rabbi with Rabbi Hecht, whose family are very near to me, even now. I was to speak that Saturday morning. Hecht and I used to take turns. And a rabbi came to me and said, "How can you talk before Hirsch?" I said, "To hell with Hirsch. I say what I want to say. That's what Hirsch does, exactly."

He came up to me afterwards--he had never seen me--and he said, "Magnin, do you always speak that well?" From him--you can't imagine--that was like getting the Nobel Prize! Here's a man that I had admired all this time. So, we got to be friends.

And then in the summer my wife's folks had a place up in Michigan, and he'd go up to Michigan also, and we got together and I got to be very close to him.

Chall: Can you recall what you talked about? Did he proffer advice on managing an institution like yours?

Magnin: No, we never talked those things. He was a friend. I was a kid, and he was an old man, and we'd go to some dinners together, and I suppose I cracked jokes then as I do now. I don't know. He had a great sense of humor. And I don't know what we talked about. Nobody could have a long conversation with him.


 Sisson
 LAKE MICHIGAN AT FIFTY-THIRD STREET
 CHICAGO

HARRY W. Sisson, President

JOHN E. FEE, Manager

May 2^d 1919

My dear Rabbi Magnin: -

I was very happy to learn - and that too directly from you - of your election to the Rabbinate of your congreg'n and of Hecht's so honorable retirement. - I arrived home not very much fatigued from the trip and so did wife and daughter. We brought back many very pleasant recollections of the golden state, and among them the most pleasant, those of the hours spent with you and Mrs. Magnin. We hope we may soon have the chance to reciprocate your generous hospitality. We have sold our house and are for the present quartered in the above hotel. In the meantime I have dined again the harness. I was welcomed last Sunday by a congregational numbering over 2000 adults. I was told at the conclusion of the services that I had been in good time.

Generals, too have kept me busy. But I shall suit close
to shore as far as possible hereafter.

Let me hear from you from time to time.
I shall be very happy to remain in touch with
you. Mr. H. asks me to send you and
in Rabbi best regards.

With many thanks and cordial
felicitations upon your well
merited recognition by your people

I am sincerely yours

Ernest Herch

To Rabbi Edgar Nagrin.
Pasadena Cal.

- Magnin: Actually, I should have been his successor. One of my classmates was. In temperament I was like Hirsch. Not in the scoffing, but in the directness and in the no-bull-con, no monkey-business. Hit the target straight. I didn't copy him. It was my own nature and I found a kindred soul. So, my classmate went there and he was just the opposite.
- Chall: Which classmate?
- Magnin: Louis Mann.
- Chall: Hirsch, you said, was a great influence. But he became an influence simply because you heard him once?
- Magnin: Well, I heard him several times, but the first time--the fact was that he was himself, he was natural, he had something to say and he said it. He had an abundance of knowledge. His articles in the Jewish Encyclopedia are still the best, one after another. He was a scholar, much more of a scholar than I am, because in those days they had more time and they'd sit and dig. I mean, a Semitics scholar.
- I taught down at the University of Southern California for twenty-five years or more, Jewish history a big class, and also Judaism. But I never was interested in pedantry, in the pursuit of scholarship, per se. I read everything, devour everything, and use everything; but in the sense of becoming a specialist in some field--that never occurred to me. I'm too active for this and my mind goes over too much of a range. I couldn't confine myself. If I did that, I'd quit and go to a university and just be a professor, see.
- Chall: And you felt, even at that early age, that you were not destined to be a scholar?
- Magnin: No, I didn't want to be a professor, no. I had thought of being a lawyer, a newspaper writer, different things. You know, you have doubts all the way through college. You're a kid. You have doubts all the way through life, at times. And so, I went through this sturm and drang that everybody else goes through, and the only thing

Magnin: is that I had sense enough to see the total picture and not be deceived by one angle. That's the trouble with the young people today.

II STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA: TEMPLE ISRAEL, 1914-1916
(Interview 2, September 20, 1972)

Reminiscing

Chall: Well now I want to find out about your own beginning as a rabbi, in Stockton.

Magnin: I was there a year and a half. [From September, 1914 to December, 1915.]

Chall: How did you happen to get into Stockton?

Magnin: Well, first of all I wanted to come back to California. Then, Aaron Sapiro had friends in Stockton, Mr. and Mrs. Arndt. I think he went there once or twice for the holidays. He married their daughter by the way.

So I went there. I used to go every other week down to Fresno. I started that congregation. I had the first seder down there, the first Sunday school. Then, I would take the Owl back to San Francisco, to Berkeley. I was working for a master's degree. And when I was in Stockton I used to give lectures at the public library every Saturday afternoon to the kids, tell them stories. And I talked to the women's clubs and I was into everything.

My predecessor was a very nice gentleman, a friend of Aaron Sapiro, Louis Kopald, who later went to Buffalo. He was a different type of man. He didn't mingle with as many members of the congregation as I did. We used to have a little group called Dirty Dozen. They would come to temple and afterwards we'd go out and eat tamales.

Magnin: I used to go to Arndt's store and sit on Pete's table while he was sewing and talk with Pete the tailor. I figured I could learn something from Pete about life. And it was always my way. And Shragge, who later on became a big man in San Francisco, was the head of the store--Columbia Outfitting or something like that--in Stockton. He was a small man in those days. And I was there about a year and a half; a cute little temple.

Every week on the pulpit they had a little copper pot, a little thing with six carnations. So, I put it on the floor; it was in my way and I couldn't talk. I came back after several years and here's the same damned thing: [dramatizing the scene] "Here you are again; on the floor." "Here he is again, he hasn't changed, the old boy." [Laughter]

But I've always had a nice feeling about Stockton. Some of the people are still in Stockton that I knew. But most of them, of course, have died off or moved.

Chall: Now, what kind of a town was Stockton in 1914?

Magnin: Stockton was a sleepy town, very conservative. You know they had a fight once with the Southern Pacific Railroad and Southern Pacific said they would kill them, that they would have weeds growing on the street. Well, they didn't, but they were very conservative, very slow to move. It was a typical California town, with a few palms and streets with grass. Except Main Street that had stores.

Chall: Were these people--Mr. Coblantz, Mr. Frankenheimer, the Safferhills, Arndts--were they merchants, all of them?

Magnin: There were two families of Frankenheimer. One was related to the Weinstocks. I was particularly close to the Arndts. Safferhills--it was Ida Safferhill and her brother Sylvan. Ida was secretary, she was organist, she was everything. [Quietly recollecting.] The first wedding I ever had was the daughter of the Kattens. Well, I was friendly with all of them. I always mixed

- Magnin: with people. I had no problem. I always went to their homes for dinner. It was a provincial life, but I liked it.
- Chall: You were a young bachelor too.
- Magnin: Certainly. You know what I did when I went to Stockton last year? I wanted to see the Santa Fe railroad tracks, the Santa Fe station. Because I still remember the night I left for Los Angeles. I took the train called the Angel. Beautiful train. They used to have violets in the dining car. And they all went down to see me off.
- Chall: The little congregation?
- Magnin: So what did I do this time? Fifty-six years later I wanted to see those tracks. The station isn't used much but it's there. I saw it: the green lights, the red lights--they went on and off; and the block system; I went all through it again.
- Chall: Was this a Reform congregation?
- Magnin: Yes, it was Reform.
- Chall: I understand there were two others. [Orthodox] There were three congregations.
- Magnin: To tell you the truth, I don't remember one of them. I don't think they amounted to anything.
- Chall: But the little Reform one seemed to have its own identity?
- Magnin: Oh yes. We were on Hunter Street. It's a cute little building. I have a picture of it in that album somewhere.
- Chall: I don't recall seeing that. Why is it that in Fresno there were so many more members? Is that because there were no other synagogues in Fresno? Was that the first one going?
- Magnin: Fresno didn't have a real organization. I went there and started them off with the first seder, and then I used to speak at the Woman's Club. On Sunday afternoon I would conduct a little

Magnin: service and talk. Part of the time in Sunday school. Maybe I talked in the evenings, I don't remember.

Chall: I think it was generally evenings.

Magnin: Yes, Sunday. They had no synagogue.

Chall: So did they then continue?

Magnin: A lot of that grew later on, the temple with the building and everything else. But that's later.

Chall: Now this was your very first congregation. Did you feel a sense of joy about it? A sort of relief? Here you are, a rabbi at last.

From the Very Beginning--Always Myself

Magnin: Certainly I was very serious. I wanted to be a rabbi and there I was. And I used to have articles in the Stockton paper every week and excerpts of the talks. You've seen some of them in the scrapbooks.

Chall: But you started immediately mixing with the community, like the children's story hour in the library.

Magnin: Everything. Always. All the Christians and everybody.

Chall: But this was your personality from the very beginning and it wasn't a conscious thing. You just did it because you wanted to?

Magnin: No, I was myself always. I like people and I believe in what I'm doing. I try to use common sense and this is all. I never had any problems.

You wouldn't believe in fifty-six years here that I've never had a real problem. Either with the board or fellow rabbis, or with members, never.

One member here, he almost kissed me the other

Magnin: day. One day he wrote a letter; he didn't like one of the other rabbis. So, I rang him up and I said to him, "Have you got a bellyache?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, you might have a cancer or tumor or something bad to worry about. What are you worried about?" I said, "Look. You know what I want you to do? I want you to be a happy man. Get outta here and go to a shul where they do these things, where they pick on people. I can name you a dozen of them. I want you to be happy. You're a nice man." He had been coming to every service and he was afraid to talk to me. Now, he comes up, throws his arms around me. That's the way you handle people. You get rid of them like a tooth or fix it. You don't fool around. That's one in ten years. I don't have anybody who does those things. What troubles you have come from people who don't belong. It's not your own people that do that. I have almost twenty-six hundred families. And I signed a lot of new ones today.

Chall: Do you have anything else to say about Stockton? Or your first pulpit?

Magnin: Well, what can I tell you? Everything went smooth. It was only a year and a half, and I spoke to the women's clubs and the community. You see the clippings there, most of them. There was nothing-- I didn't make an earthquake there.

Chall: Oh, I suspect you were getting started.

Magnin: I was learning.

Chall: You made speeches on the woman's movement, on general purposes of life, on the need for good education to develop the character of our youth.

Magnin: Oh sure. The funny thing is some of them would be good today. They're better than what many of these rabbis are giving today. I can tell you.

III LOS ANGELES: TEMPLE B'NAI B'RITH, 1915-1929
 (Interviews 2 and 3, September 29, 1972,
 January 31, 1973)

The Move to Los Angeles: Appointment as Associate
 Rabbi

Chall: I'd like to know how you came here to Los Angeles.

Magnin: Rabbi Sigmund Hecht was here and he was a nice man. We got along beautifully. But somehow or other he was getting old, or at least it seemed old to them. And there was a group of the congregation who wanted an associate for Hecht. And there was another group of people, prominent people, who fought it. And I didn't know that before I came they had considered having an associate rabbi, and that a number had applied. I didn't even know it.

You can't trace it entirely. There were other things too. But there was a man by the name of John Kahn. He and his wife were very prominent people. He was on the board. And he heard about me, either through Dr. Zeimer, who was related to him in Stockton, or somebody else. I can't tell exactly. That was part of it. (Incidentally, I saw Zeimer's son when I was up there.) He heard about me.

Now, here's another aspect of the story. The Jewish Chautauqua then was different than now. There was a small organization of a couple of rabbis from the East, Rosenau from Baltimore and Berkowitz from Philadelphia. And they used to come out every so often and they'd have a meeting on Jewish subjects. They would meet generally in Martin Meyer's temple [Emanu-El in San Francisco]

Magnin:

or down here at our old place at Ninth and Hope that I came to. And they'd put people on the program. There weren't very many rabbis. And I was in Stockton. How many rabbis were up there? There were a few in San Francisco, Meyer, and Voorsanger, and Levy and a few others.

So, they had the meetings and they gave me a subject--"The Renaissance of Hebrew Literature"--which to me was as interesting as eating a snake. I mean, that's not my type of mind. I'm not interested. I read it and I knew about it but I didn't care. I didn't argue with them. Who the hell was I to argue with them? But instead of reading a paper, even then I got up and I spoke simply and naturally.

And there was a little man there by the name of Newmark [Max]--he used to live across the street--who was sent up to watch me. He came up to me afterwards and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Down to the hotel." I think it was the Palace. He said, "Can I walk down with you?" I said, "Fine." He said, "We're interested in an associate rabbi for Dr. Hecht. I was sent up here and I like you. You know why?" I said, "Why?" And he said, "Any man that can make that subject interesting is my man." Now here are the insights in this man. He was sent up here realizing he didn't want a pedantic idiot to kill them, that he wanted life and vitality.

Then, I came down here and made a speech. Of course, Dr. Hecht didn't like it. But I didn't know then about this business that he'd been fighting them. And then they elected me and I came down; I think it was around December. By the way, the first subject I ever spoke on down here was Tolstoy. Would you believe that?

We had the installation and it was downtown on Ninth and Hope Streets. You can see the picture of the temple in Jerry Burg's office. They filled the place. And of course Dr. Hecht was terribly hurt. And he made a remark--mind you, his family and our family are like one family--he made a remark something about the new broom sweeps clean, or something like that. I forgot how he put it.

Magnin: Instead of fighting him I got up and paid no attention to it, and said, "I'm a young man and there's a lot to learn. I'm not going to stay here anyhow." I had my eye on New York. In fact, I could have gone with Stephen Wise. I don't know if I mentioned New York, but I said I would probably not stay here all my life. "I have a lot to learn and Dr. Hecht can teach it to me. I have the vitality and the energy. I'm the youth. He has the experience."

Relationship with Rabbi Hecht

Magnin: Then I spoke to Hecht and I said, "Look Dr. Hecht," (I was a kid), I said, "Never worry about me. You'll never find me doing anything but what's decent. I know human nature, I know how you feel. I don't give a damn what other people say, they can't say anything against you to me. Don't you believe that I would listen to it. I may have different ideas than you, different ways; it may shock you sometimes, but one thing is for sure, there'll be no monkey-business, no dirt. Please believe it." His family loved me. Sam Newmark was an aristocrat, a very wealthy man. He loved me.

Chall: Was Sam Newmark related to the rabbi?

Magnin: He was the son-in-law. Then, Mrs. Baruh, who gave \$100,000 to the Hebrew Union College in my honor not so long ago, was another one of the sisters [Rabbi Hecht's daughter]; she is now pretty weak. She's almost ninety. For years we had lunch together at the club every Saturday. Lately she hasn't been coming to lunch. They never had a celebration in the family that Evelyn and I were not invited.

But about a few years after I was here, the pulpit of Isaac M. Wise Temple opened in Cincinnati. Now today I wouldn't give you five cents for them. In those days this was Isaac Wise's temple. This was a big deal. This was a great honor to go there. So, one Saturday morning I get a call from Mr.

Magnin: Ottenheimer of Cincinnati. He comes to Temple. Would I take lunch with him? I said sure. "What do you want?" "We want you in Cincinnati." Incidentally, that used to be my father-in-law's temple. I said, "You don't want me in Cincinnati." "Yes, we do." I said, "I'll tell you why you don't want me. It's a stuffy town, with a stuffy temple, and stuffy people." He said, "That's why we want you. We've had enough of this." He said, "We want you. We want someone who knows how to speak out and talk refreshingly."

So, we phoned Cincinnati. I didn't want to go. Evelyn didn't want to go. Although my parents-in-law lived there--but they came out every winter. And I said, "We don't want to go." And Evelyn's parents said, "Oh, that's all right. Don't come."

I went up to Dr. Hecht Saturday afternoon. He was playing dominoes or something and he looked old. He wasn't as old as I am now but he was twice as old--stiff shirts, stiff cuffs, stiff collars, and dignified. He was sitting there and I said, "Pal, you can get rid of me." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, Ottenheimer was out here and he wants me to come to Cincinnati." And he looked at me and I saw a tear coming down his face.

Now this man never showed any emotions except once a year when he would read the story of Joseph, because he had a brother by the name of Joseph who died. He'd break up for a few seconds, but he never showed a tear. I said, "You love me don't you?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "You know I feel that way toward you. As different as we are in our ways you're a prince . . . You're like my father." He said, "You're not going are you?" And I said, "No. I am not going." He said, "I'm so happy."

Chall: And you'd been here only just a few years.

Magnin: I saw the names of the men who would have wanted to come here. There isn't a damned one of them that would have gotten along with that man. Tactless, stupid people; they couldn't have gotten

- Magnin: along with him. I knew exactly how to handle him, and do anything he wanted, and yet go my own way without hurting him.
- Chall: And what kind of a person, actually, was he?
- Magnin: Well, he was a Hungarian by birth. He didn't talk with an accent and you could hardly tell it. He was a very proper, prim-appearing person. For instance, we used to get this annual out and he would write--[reaching for one]. This is 1915. That's the year before I came here. You know, it was a small town. He would write about the people he buried. And this was typical. I mean, take any one of them. It's a style that nobody uses today, very florid.
- Chall: It was a style that was common in those days though? Was it an M. S. Levy style?
- Magnin: No. [Looking through the annual report.] Membership of the Congregation. How many did they have then? I don't know. Not too many. Marriages. See these annual reports are really the story of the Temple before I came here, and after I came here for many years. And Temple Sewing Circles, Chautauquas. Now, let me see--Confirmation Class. Do you know how many they had in the confirmation class the year before I came here? Eighteen. And I'm going tonight to a dinner party given by one who was confirmed about a year after I came here, or something like that. Marriages. [Chuckles] He's got them all on one page here, the marriages. Now, let's see the funerals. I want to show you how he wrote. It's very funny. Funny, not sad, really funny the way he wrote. Necrological--this is typical. "Inasmuch as these pages are to contain records of important events . . . " and so on, "I deem it proper to give room here to the names of those who in life labored faithfully and well for the benefit of mankind. Death has garnered a rich harvest of men and women . . . " We never use that kind of language. "Men and women who have been great in the various fields of human endeavor, men and women whose lives entitle the grateful remembrance beyond the grave; we must confine ourselves to a personal mention. . . ." These are really valuable, really valuable. This is 1916-1917. Magnin is here already.

Chall: But you didn't change his style?

Magnin: No, I couldn't change him. [Reading segments] I wrote this. "Just a word or two to the officers, members, friends of this congregation. This is the seventeenth annual. . . . It sprung out of the mind and heart of its senior rabbi. The annual has always been his pride and legitimately so. It were almost sacrilegious to step in on the line. This shall be his number, like all the rest." You see the consideration I had for this man? "Thanks for your kindness and acts of love. Another year of labor. . . ."

Here it is. In Memorium. This shows the florid style best. "Solomon Lazard, pioneer patriarch, who had almost reached his ninetieth landmark of his pilgrimage on earth. His last years on earth were darkened by the frailty that came as a natural consequence" That's the way they used to write. This gives you a sample of it.

Chall: How were you accepted, in general, by the board members, and the congregation?

Magnin: Once I got here, there was no trouble, either with Dr. Hecht or his family, who were very prominent in the community. And perhaps that was one reason why there was some opposition to having anybody else.

Although, as I told you, when I came here I didn't know about any of that opposition. The moment I got here there were no problems. First of all, although I was a youngster I always liked older people. I went with older people. And I have a little imagination. I knew their feelings and understood them.

I always considered his feelings. I said and did what I wanted. What I had to say didn't seem to bother him any because I tried to make sense. So, there was never any friction in the congregation. As a matter of fact, I united the whole congregation. And Hecht with them. This is what happened.

Chall: What was the disunity that you found?

Magnin: There was no disunity, except when they first considered having anybody with him, his friends and the friends of the family didn't want this. But once they decided to have someone the problem ceased.

I never felt insecure or downtrodden, or anything of the sort. I always acted normally and that's all you have to do.

[Interruption]

Freedom of the Pulpit

Chall: When you came to the Temple in 1915, by that time almost a decade had passed since Stephen Wise had issued his freedom of the pulpit open letter. And I was wondering what effect that had on you, and on your approach to the rabbinate?

Magnin: Stephen Wise didn't effect me at all, except that I thought he was a very brilliant, colorful, magnetic personality. I didn't take him too seriously.

I don't want to get into that. The man that influenced my life was a genius. His name was Emil G. Hirsch. That's his picture up there. I've talked about him.

As far as freedom is concerned, there is no such thing as perfect freedom, in or out of the pulpit or any other place in this world. Freedom means responsibility. Every word you say does harm as well as good. And that's the reason that I've always tried to see the many sides of a question.

I'm not a crusader or an activist in the sense of jumping in and telling people they shouldn't eat lettuce, or they shouldn't eat grapes because of a boycott. There are too many angles in all these things. And what is more, if you polarize the congregation, if you fragment a congregation, it's a bad thing. There are all kinds of opinions.

Magnin: Republicans, Democrats, liberals, reactionaries, conservatives, radicals, all sorts of people.

And we're not prophets. These rabbis who compare themselves to prophets are idiots, they're phonies. Prophets never received a salary, they never had a pension, they never lived in nice homes, they never ate at Perinos or the Bistro out in Beverly Hills. Elijah was fed by ravens according to the story. Moses never got a salary check, as far as I know. Amos never had a pension. It's ridiculous. Yes, the social message of the prophets is one thing--to teach the message.

And there are occasions when you have to take a stand, but you have to be very careful, lest you get yourself into things that you know very little about, into personal quarrels, and political quarrels. And a lot of these things are political quarrels, too.

Chall: So, you weren't asking this congregation for the opportunity to speak . . .

Magnin: I never asked them for anything. I just went about my business. We had no contracts. We had no speeches, no ifs, ands, or buts, or anything. I was myself, and that was it, period.

Assuming Responsibility

Chall: At the time that you came in I assume that you did bring in some fresh ideas.

Magnin: Well, of course.

Chall: And how did you work these out with the rabbi?

Magnin: He never bothered about anything I did.

Chall: Did you discuss them with him?

Magnin: No, of course not.

- Chall: You didn't discuss things with Rabbi Hecht?
- Magnin: No.
- Chall: For example, none of these, at the moment, seem like extraordinary things, but--
- Magnin: If you know how to say things and you use common sense, you don't need many explanations. That's the whole thing.
- Chall: You didn't have to discuss with him the fact that you were organizing--I understand you organized the Sanhedrin Club during the first year.
- Magnin: Oh, he was glad that I got up clubs for the kids and everybody else. Oh no, he wanted me to do things. There was no problem. He was getting older and tired. He didn't care about that.
- Chall: How did you divide your work?
- Magnin: There was no division. We alternated speaking, and I've done that with my men ever since. The youngest of them, it wouldn't make any difference. They're all treated the same.
- Chall: How did you establish your pastoral duties?
- Magnin: Oh, in the old days I used to call on the sick. It was a smaller congregation, a smaller community. There were very few hospitals. It isn't like today where you have a dozen or two dozen hospitals, private, public, and everything else.
- And, I used to call on people. Of course, today that is physically impossible. And I don't think they want to be bothered. In the old days the women were home, but if you called on them today they may be playing bridge or sitting around without makeup.
- Chall: In those days, however, it was expected that the rabbi would call?
- Magnin: Well, they didn't say it was. I think they liked it. I never worried about what they expected. But it was sort of customary. Even then, it was getting pretty big. It was possible to be a pastor in the sense of a little congregation.

Chall: Did people come to you for assistance and counseling at all?

Magnin: Mostly non-members. Your own members never bother you. It's always the fellow who doesn't contribute anything that always wants your time whether he has a real problem or an imaginary one.

Chall: Was this true in your first years?

Magnin: I never refused anybody I could help. It didn't make any difference to me, member or not a member. If I could help someone, I helped him.

Chall: This information I got out of a newspaper article: that when you came here the chairman of the choir committee was deaf.

Magnin: Well, she wasn't stone deaf. This was more humor on my part. She wasn't stone deaf, but she didn't hear too well, and I have my doubts about her knowledge of music, anyhow. A darling lady. I loved her. A nice old lady. She knew nothing, really, about music.

Chall: The point of this is, I think, the fact that you don't particularly care to work through committees.

Magnin: We have some committees today, of course, but not too many. And very small committees, and generally with people who know what they're doing. But they've ruined many a congregation. They've ruined the architecture, created many problems.

Of course, they may be nice, well-meaning people, but just because somebody makes a lot of money out of selling chickens, or in a department store, or otherwise, doesn't make him an authority on art, architecture, music, or anything else, and certainly not religion.

[Interruption]

Chall: From the very beginning, I take it, you had a lot of self-confidence, so that you could cut through this kind of customary practice like the committee structure if you felt it was necessary?

Magnin: Right. I didn't have to fight. If you know how to reason with people, most of them are reasonable.

Chall: This is the only example I have, maybe you can give me another one, but in the case of the choir director, do you wait until he's ready to retire?

Magnin: We very rarely let anybody go out of here. In all these years. Most of them are good people. There was a time when we had an organist who wasn't up to par with all the others we had, but he wasn't bad or we wouldn't have kept him. He was a nice man and he was more than adequate.

We've had great geniuses on the organ like Edouard nies-Berger; we had Alexander Shriner, who for many years has been the head of the Salt Lake Mormon Choir. And, by the way, he was at Washington when I spoke at the White House. They had thirty members of the choir singing. And he waved to me while he was conducting. It was very funny.

No, we keep people here. We've been lucky with the people we've had.

Chall: But you didn't come full-fledged into the pulpit. Could you say that you came to this Temple in 1915 pretty well developed in your ways of dealing with people, administering the organization as you have done it up to now?

Magnin: Well, of course, naturally, experience and years of leadership and prestige do something for you. I tell you, I always had natural common sense, I think, a feeling of knowing people and how to deal with them. See, the rabbinate is a leadership job, not just learning Hebrew and making a speech. [Interruption] Yes. It's an insight I've had since I can remember.

Chall: Were you at all apprehensive, though, coming in? This was not a big congregation?

Magnin: Oh, it was big. It wasn't as big as some of the eastern, but it was already a good-sized congregation for those days.

- Chall: It had a major reputation in the city among the congregations?
- Magnin: Oh sure. It wasn't a small town. We were already almost a million in Los Angeles.
- Chall: How did you feel about assuming this post?
- Magnin: I never think about such things. I assumed it. That's the way I eat my breakfast, it's my job. I don't think about how I feel or don't feel.

The Members of the Board

- Chall: I'd like to ask you something about the early members of the board with whom you first associated. You said they all accepted you.
- Magnin: Oh, they were lovely men.
- Chall: Was it a social situation, that is, did they invite the young new rabbi into their homes socially?
- Magnin: Oh yes. We mingled. I married about six months later, went back to Cincinnati, got married, brought my wife out here. Oh yes, we were immediately accepted socially in the whole community.
- Chall: They were men of substance at that time?
- Magnin: Most of them, yes. They were prominent people.
- Chall: Can you tell me something about David Edelman?
- Magnin: Yes. He was a wonderful man. He was, at one time, the head of the Democratic party in Los Angeles. He was one of the few Jewish physicians in those days. Incidentally, he was the first chief of staff at the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. I don't know just when.

He was a very smart, sensible man. A lot of good common sense. Very religious at heart. His

Magnin: father was the first rabbi here. He had a great affection for me, and we were very close. In fact, I named my son Henry David Magnin after David Edelman.

And Dr. Edelman once showed me the people who wanted to come. He kept a list, and those who recommended them. He did it in a scientific way. I was the only one who wasn't on the list. I never thought of this job. It's very funny.

Chall: Now, can you tell me anything else about Dr. Edelman that you can recall?

Magnin: A man of great common sense. He was one of the doctors of the old school. A home doctor. You know, you could confide in him. He was like a father confessor to his patients. It was a different world.

Chall: Yes. He certainly was a president of the Temple here for a long time.

Magnin: All the presidents remained in until they died. And then they passed a rule a few years ago that would limit the years. But we always had it that way, and it all worked out very well. They were all fine men. Wonderful men.

Chall: When you say that you passed a rule a few years ago to limit, does that mean to limit the tenure of the board of directors?

Magnin: Yes, and also the president after so many years.

Chall: But they elect their officers among themselves, don't they?

Magnin: Yes. The president is elected by the board of trustees.

Chall: Now, there are other names on your 1916 board. If I call them out to you and you have anything that you want to add or talk to me about, we'll put it on the record. There was Benjamin Schwab, who was the vice-president.

Magnin: A nice man.

Chall: And John Kahn, the treasurer.

Magnin: He was the man who indirectly brought me here. He had a relative in Stockton who heard about me. His wife was quite a character. She was way ahead of the times. She entertained theatrical people and musical artists, and had a salon where some of the women, including my wife, went to lectures and things.

Chall: I see. In those days the culture was taken up by women.

Magnin: Yes. Women's clubs mostly. I used to talk at all these women's clubs, Stockton, San Joaquin Valley, and when I came down here. The women's clubs used to have the lectures.

Chall: W. T. Barnett was your secretary.

Magnin: Yes. He was a brother-in-law of Dr. Edelman. He was a nice man.

Chall: Louis Cole.

Magnin: Louie Cole was a son-in-law of the Hellmans. And he was a potentate of the Shrine. A very prominent man in the community, a very nice man.

Chall: He was the son-in-law of James Hellman?

Magnin: No, no, no. James was another branch. He was the son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hellman. Herman had died.

Chall: Adolph Fleishman.

Magnin: He was German born. Very nice man. Sort of related to the Hellmans, I think. In those days they were either related, or they came from Bavaria. A little German crowd.

Chall: Was it primarily a German group?

Magnin: German Jews in those days ran all the Reform temples.

Chall: There was Max Newmark on your first board.

Magnin: He differed from all the others. The other Newmarks didn't want an assistant or an associate. Max was the one who fought them all. He wanted me. He wanted someone. He was the one who came up to San Francisco to see me. Very nice man.

Chall: Jules Kauffman.

Magnin: I think he was an Alsatian; a very nice man. They were all nice people.

Chall: Some of them, of course, we'll probably talk about in other relationships because they were on different boards. But I want to see the pattern here in the first years.

How about George Mosbacher?

Magnin: He was a great person. He was a European, but he came from Oakland to Los Angeles because his daughter, Mrs. Sam Behrendt lived here. He was the chairman of the building committee, and then became president.

And one reason that we have the wonderful building that we have is because he allowed myself and a few people to design it. He kept the control so we didn't have everybody potchkeeing around with the building.

Chall: What was his business?

Magnin: Originally he was in the dress business, cloak and suit, in Oakland. But he was retired when he came. I think he was president of the Federation of Jewish Welfare Agencies here for years, charities; he was a fine man. He lived into the eighties.

Chall: As you recall these men about what ages were they?

Magnin: Well, they all seemed old to me at the time. I'm sure some were in their sixties, seventies, maybe some of them were younger.

Chall: They definitely were well established in their businesses?

Magnin: Oh yes. They were respected people in the community. They weren't all retired.

Chall: There were others who were prominent members of your congregation, not on the board: Solomon Lazard.

Magnin: He died when I came here, but his son, Edmond, was a gynecologist; he brought our children into the world. He was famous in his day and a very outstanding Jewish gynecologist. The Lazards were of French descent.

Edmond's wife, Ida, was a clubwoman--the Council of Jewish Women. A very prominent woman. Quite a figure in those days.

Chall: Mr. S. G. Marschutz.

Magnin: He was a German, but a very nice man. He really helped to establish the orphan's home which is now Vista Del Mar. Very active. Very nice man. Typical German.

Chall: Were these people who were Germans--were they different from the people you had grown up with, your family, in outlook and methods of working?

Magnin: I didn't see much of a foreign element. See, I never thought of them as such. I was brought up in San Francisco. And I went to the Geary Street shul. I never thought of them as foreigners. They're just people.

Chall: But you didn't see them in their, perhaps, German ways as different from the ways in which your people were raised?

Magnin: No. Well, they stand out as European. They're not different in any basic way, it's just their mannerisms and their accent.

Chall: What about the relationship between and among the various foreign Jewish groups in the community at that time? The Russians, the Poles, the Germans?

Magnin: Well, in those days, you see, the community was smaller. Roughly speaking, some of them that we called German Jews weren't German at all, but they were the old accepted wealthy crowd. We

Magnin: speak of them as the German Jews, meaning those who had become Americanized in their way, and were more conservative--not religiously--but in their manners and habits; and all this in contrast with the ghetto type.

Now, they ran the Jewish communities in the early days. They were the benefactors, they had the money. The Russian Jews who were the East European Jews were on the periphery. Later on they became more numerous and then began taking over institutions. In every city it's the same.

Chall: Was there an attitude of distaste?

Magnin: Well, there always was an attitude of condescension. In every city, New York and all of them. There's a book out now called Poor Cousins. They always looked down their nose on the fellow who came late. He's a little crude, and sometimes a lot crude in language, manners, dress, everything about him. He's a poor relative, you know.

But the German Jews were nice to him in the sense that they helped him get established.

Chall: Was there a need for a person in your position to mediate between the two groups at all?

Magnin: There was no quarrel at all. In those days the others who had ambitions for their children, would come into the Reform temple, everywhere, because they wanted the contacts.

Chall: Contacts meant for them to step up?

Magnin: Yes. Later on Conservatism became stronger.

The Function of the Board

Chall: Now let's talk for a few minutes about the evolution, if there was such a thing, of the board of trustees. Somebody has said that there were thirteen on the board.

- Magnin: I don't remember if there were thirteen or fifteen.
[Counting] Fifteen.
- Chall: So, it's always been a small board.
- Magnin: Oh yes. This is what has ruined these congregations.
Putting forty potchkeh Jews on there fighting with
each other, and crazy ideas. Who needs them?
- Chall: So, it was small when you came in and you never
changed it, and you never wanted to.
- Magnin: We put a woman on lately, a lady. We've never
had one. But that goes into a long, long story.
In the early days there was one woman with a big
mouth who wanted to be on. Not only that, men deal
with big affairs and big business. But there's a
lovely lady on there now, Mrs. Henry L. Melczer.
- Chall: Was that a recent recognition of woman's role in
society?
- Magnin: No, we don't make deals and causes out of every-
thing. We liked her and felt that there should
be some woman on it; it was about time. So, we
put her on. There's no real rule that we have
to, or we have to have ten or none.
- Chall: Has there ever been, that you can recall, a contest
for the board? I know that people have an oppor-
tunity to nominate other board members.
- Magnin: No. We have a committee and the committee report
is accepted. We never have any deals. There's
no excitement.
- Chall: How about the meetings at which they're elected?
Are they well attended?
- Magnin: Fairly. They know everything is run right.
- Chall: In terms of the business of the board, is some of
it conducted at the monthly meetings? Some in
committees?
- Magnin: Yes. Committees come back with their reports.
- Chall: Is some of it conducted over dinner in one
another's homes?

- Magnin: No. Generally down here in the Lerner conference room. I'm at the meetings and I have the other rabbis there too.
- Chall: What's the relationship in terms of policy formation between the rabbis and the board?
- Magnin: There's no definite thing. I may just sit there and say nothing. If I think there's something that ought to be said, I say it. Then it's discussed and generally it works. Sometimes there's a difference of opinion. I never open my mouth unless there's something to say.
- Chall: What's your opinion then about the organization of the Temple here, with respect to the role of the board and its relationship to the rabbis?
- Magnin: Well, it's perfectly clear.* But I wouldn't suggest that to all temples, that the rabbis be on the board. And I wouldn't suggest that their boards be made up of forty to fifty people. If the rabbi is on the board he has to have their respect. He's not a businessman as a rule, and much of the board business deals with details about the house, the building, different things, you know, budgets.
- But the rabbi that has that combination of business and something more spiritual--it's a good thing for him to be on the board. But very few have it. You see I came from a business family. I've been executor on four big estates, the Laemmle estate and others, so I know something about this. I can talk figures with them.
- Chall: Otherwise, if you couldn't, what would your relationship be?
- Magnin: I wouldn't want to be there.
- Chall: Are there committees that deal with Sunday school and other matters?
- Magnin: Yes, but they're purely pro forma. You know, I run that school. I let Wolf run it. But they can make suggestions. We have a committee and we ask them sometimes. But unless they have something to say I close them up. If you don't know what you're doing you shouldn't be there.

*Rabbis should never be on boards of trustees.

I was talking about rabbis being present at board meetings. E.F.M.

- Magnin: If you get a plumber, he knows how to be a plumber; kick him out otherwise. Don't stand over the plumber and tell him what tools to use.
- Chall: In other words, you like to have the board deal with the management, the physical and capital management of the organization?
- Magnin: That's right. All the spiritual--the cultural, the music, and all that has to do with it belongs to the rabbi, if he has any sense. If not, he doesn't belong there.
- Chall: I see. And the board, generally speaking, has not tried to interfere?
- Magnin: Never. And if anyone did he wouldn't be doing it very long, I'll tell you.
- Chall: Why wouldn't he be doing it very long?
- Magnin: Because he'd soon find out that he would have to stop it.
- Chall: In short, the rabbi is in control up here. You let him know.
- Magnin: Not in the tyrannical sense, by any means. I happen to be very close to the officers, always have been. But there's no one who steps out and tries to tell me how to run my business. I'm not telling him how to run his business, see. But we've had no problems.
- Chall: Has the fact that the board members have retained their positions over long periods of time, and there was no set limit on their terms, until recently, made for continuity in the relationships?
- Magnin: Yes, that's been one of the advantages of keeping them longer. They know what it's all about.
- Chall: And they can establish a relationship of confidence in you and your fellow rabbis.
- Magnin: That's right.
- Chall: So, it does have advantages.

Magnin: Oh, sure.

Chall: The small board and the long terms, and the fact that they know you socially.

Magnin: Right.

Mrs. Magnin

Chall: According to a little news clipping I have here, in 1916 you surprised your friends in the congregation by marrying Evelyn Rosenthal.

Magnin: I didn't surprise them. That's newspaper rot.

Chall: "Society belle of Cincinnati and daughter of one of the leading merchants of that city . . . "

Magnin: He wasn't a merchant. He had a big publishing house, printing and publishing of magazines.*

Chall: The newspaper article also says that she attended Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Magnin: She never did at any time. I think they're all wrong. She attended the University of Cincinnati where I attended, that's where I met her. She had intended to go to Wellesley, but her mother wasn't feeling well at the time, so she stayed in Cincinnati. But no, no, she never went to the Hebrew Union College. They had one woman there who was an impossible person.

Chall: At the time you were there, there was a woman?

*Henry S. Rosenthal was one of the founders of the building and loan movement. He published the first encyclopedia for the building and loan industry and edited their newsletter. His biography appears in White's Encyclopedia of Prominent Americans.

Magnin: Yes.

Chall: Did she become a rabbi?

Magnin: She lives in this town. No, she married one.

Chall: In terms of your marriage, first of all, if your wife was planning to go to college, and did that mean she was ahead of time for young women of that day?

Magnin: No, they went to college. The girls from good families, they all went.

Chall: Did you have any ideas about the role of the rabbi's wife?

Magnin: No! I never had a rabbi's wife. Never wanted a rabbi's wife! She's a lady. Minds and lives her life, but she's always had a religious feeling, and always has been cooperative with people. They like her and respect her, but I've never wanted a rabbi's wife. No two pair of pants with this suit.

Chall: In most congregations is there considered a place, a role, for the rebbitsin?

Magnin: There's a certain type of cheap congregation with a cheap rabbi, but otherwise it shouldn't be. They sit together and talk about such things, the women.

My wife was never part of it. We never had to do this in this Temple. It's nonsense.

Chall: So, she was free to do what she wanted to.

Magnin: I installed one rabbi who had a wife with a big mouth, and I said, "They're getting one suit and two pair of pants." We don't do this here. She's a person in her own rights.

Chall: Has she been of great help to you?

Magnin: Boss.

Chall: She's your boss?

Meet Mrs. Magnin

By WANDA SUE PARROTT

Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

If there is righteousness in the heart there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home there will be order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation there will be peace in the world.

Helping bring peace to the world—as outlined in the above Chinese proverb—has been the lifelong mission of a gentle little woman with blue-gray eyes, dark hair flecked with gray and an inner radiance which extends outward, invisibly touching everyone she meets.

Her name is Evelyn.

To many she looks like a lovable Jewish Mama or "boboleh," a Hebrew term of affection meaning "little grandmother." To the women of the Sisterhood of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, however, Evelyn is "First Lady."

Evelyn is Mrs. Edgar F. Magnin. For almost 55 years her husband has been Rabbi of one of the nation's largest temples. Rabbi Magnin's inspirational messages of peace and goodwill to all men are known the world over—through his lectures as well as his writings.

At a recent interview in the Magnins' two-story Spanish-style home in Beverly Hills—a home Evelyn and Edgar designed and had built 43 years ago—Evelyn was asked, "How does it feel to know thousands of people share your love for your husband?"

Without pausing, Evelyn smiled and said, "Oh, I always say 'the more the merrier.' He likes people and they like him."

Evelyn met her future husband more than half a century ago when he was a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Evelyn's birthplace.

Her family was in the publishing business. Evelyn was a student at University of Cincinnati. She recalled, "As a child I had no special ambitions." Nor did she ever dream she would marry a rabbi (a Hebrew word meaning teacher).

She laughed, adding, "They used to say 'the girl in Cincinnati has the choice of rabbis,' so I had the choice."

The young couple moved into their new seven-bedroom home when Beverly Hills was acres of orchards and tomato fields.

Religious art and stained glass windows in the Magnin home are Christian as well as Jewish in origin. Evelyn's favorite pieces include a long Monk's table used in the dining room, several menorahs (brass candelabra) and oil lamps suspended from the walls.

In the front room the Magnin children, Mae and Henry, grew up. "We don't have a parlor," Evelyn explained.

"Our living room is for living."

There the family congregated for the many special holidays of the year. Today the family still gathers there occasionally. Included are the Magnins' seven grandchildren.

Memorabilia is everywhere. Photographs behind glass frames line the wall near the floor-to-ceiling book shelves.

"We've met so many wonderful people," Evelyn said softly, producing one of her favorite photos, Professor Albert Einstein smiling from the saddle of a bicycle.

Another favorite photograph, enclosed in plastic, serves as a paper-weight. Evelyn, Rabbi Magnin, Richard and Pat Nixon are standing side-by-side, talking with a high-ranking member of the Catholic church.

Though Evelyn is Jewish, she does not keep a Kosher kitchen. That is, she does not observe the orthodox dietary laws which require separate dishes for meat and milk products, foods which, by old Jewish tradition, must not be mixed.

Her actual "duties" as a rabbi's wife are not spelled out, but Evelyn said, "I take interest in everything my husband does . . . In a large congregation there aren't the pressures or duties some rabbis' wives have in a small community . . ."

Despite modesty about her own activities and accomplishments, Evelyn Magnin's record of humanitarian service speaks for itself. In fact, she will be honored at a testimonial dinner Nov. 25 given by the Sisterhood of Wilshire Blvd. Temple.

She has been founder and board member of many organizations in Los Angeles and Beverly Hills, including First Hadassah Chapter, Los Angeles; United Order of True Sisters; Julia Ann Singer Preschool Psychiatric Center; Hamburger Home; and, Helping Hand of Los Angeles.

Also, Women's Associates of University Religious Conference; Gateways; Girl Scouts of Beverly Hills; Assistance-League Branch in Beverly Hills; Chaplain's Service Corps; PTA; Women's Division, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce; and, Jewish Women's Guild.

Evelyn's concern for people of all races and religions has motivated her to lend a helping hand wherever possible, and for many years she has been active in the United Way.

The quiet, happy grandmother looked back on World War II, at which time Mayor Erb of Beverly Hills appointed her as one of three women to coordinate war activities. At that time, Evelyn headed 500 women in carrying out Civilian Defense orders.

Evelyn is a wife and mother who has helped bring harmony to the world by attaining it, first, in the home. "We always had a nice family life together," she said. "We celebrated all the little holidays together, and when we traveled we always took the children."

She was even successful in having two other women living in her home. "I had my husband's mother living with me for 22 years, and my own mother for six years until she died," Evelyn said.



Evelyn Magnin in the family living room. Rabbi and Mrs. Magnin built their Beverly Hills home 43 years ago, when the area was orchards and tomato fields.

—Herald-Examiner Photo by Herald Toutjian

Magnin: Of course. I guess she's the boss, I don't know. She's a lady, and she has good common sense, and refinement, and sincerity. And she's kind and likes people. She's respected. And that's all you can expect of anyone.

Chall: And in your life here you've had a great deal of social life and mingling with all kinds of people.

Magnin: Jews and Christians. Some Christians--the Jews don't get into their backyards even. We go into their homes.

Chall: And she was able to meet anyone.

Magnin: Oh, she could meet anybody. Her father and mother knew a number of Gentile people in Cincinnati, even though they belonged to a temple and went to temple every week. We've always mingled with other people.

Chall: In the days when your children were growing up and you were very very busy and active, as you still are, was she the person who stayed at home and kept things running smoothly?

Magnin: Well, we had a cook, sort of a housekeeper, for forty-two years. She was an American girl, and she had a lot of ability. That took a lot off of her. But she took care of her kids, and watched them and did everything for them.

[While editing the transcript of his interviews, Rabbi Magnin wrote the following information about his family.

"On June 15, 1916, I married Evelyn Rosenthal, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry S. Rosenthal, in Cincinnati, where I first met her while we were students at the university.

"She comes from an outstanding family. Her father was one of the pioneers in the savings and loan movement, then called building and loan. He believed that the average citizen remains patriotic and law-abiding when he owns his home.

"Evelyn's brother is George W. Rosenthal. The family owned a large printing and pub-

Magnin:

lishing plant which was founded by their grandfather.

"We have been happily married. Evelyn is a sensible person with plenty of compassion. She is a lady.

"We have two children: Our daughter, Mae Brussell, who lives in Carmel Valley, and Henry, who is a member of the Beverly Hills branch of E. F. Hutton and Company. Mae has been interested in helping people who are in trouble. Henry is on the executive board of the Los Angeles Chapter of the American National Red Cross, is a board member of the Jewish Federation-Council of Greater Los Angeles and active in raising funds for the United Jewish Appeal. He is also active with the Jewish Big Brothers of Los Angeles County.

"We have six grandchildren. Mae's sons, Marvin and David, by Dr. Marvin Goodwin, and two daughters, Barbara and Diane by Mr. A. William Brussell. A third daughter, Bonnie, was killed in an automobile accident.

"Henry has two sons--Edgar, who teaches the deaf in the Los Angeles Public School System, and Dale, who is a student at the University of Nevada."

April 24, 1974

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin]

Chall:

Since you've been a celebrity in so many ways in the community here have you ever thought that there was a conflict between your role as a celebrity and your role as a parent?

Magnin:

No. I have a son who is a very successful businessman and an idealist. He's on the executive board of the Red Cross. He gives blood regularly. He's that kind of a guy. He has been a Big Brother to boys. He's a broker that has to get up early in the morning. He's active in the United Jewish Appeal--all these things. He's very fine.

My daughter is an idealist. She's a very fine person. She has her own ideas about many

Magnin: things--that aren't mine--but nothing that I could say against her. She's bright. She's very much of an individualist. She helps get people out of jail. She's working on theories of assassinations some of which may be correct or incorrect. She's up in Carmel, and she lives her life. I have no conflict with her. I see more of my son. He lives here.

Chall: So your children are both idealists, but they're marching to different drummers.

Magnin: The difference is that Henry not only has ideals in a general way, but he does something for individuals. Well, she does too, but he's more practical. He's more down-to-earth, I think, in many ways.

Relationships with Other Jewish Congregations

Chall: I want to ask you something again about your first years here. [Interruption] In 1917 and 1918, your early years here, you proposed a normal school for the training of religious school teachers, thinking they weren't educated well enough.

Magnin: That's right.

Chall: And you and Rabbi Hecht and Rabbi Liknaitz [David] alternated in the teaching of the school.

Magnin: Yes, sure.

Chall: Did this come as kind of a surprise to other people that anybody would care that much about the Sunday school teachers?

Magnin: Everything came normally, never any explosions about anything.

Chall: Why were you concerned about this?

Magnin: Because the teachers didn't know what they were doing.

- Chall: What did you think was important about Sunday school?
- Magnin: What do I think? I haven't changed. I'm the same old guy I always was. There's no change.
- Chall: At first yours was the only Reform congregation.
- Magnin: Still is. [Laughs] One of the rabbis said that at one of the meetings. [Laughs] He said, "Still is." [Laughs]
- Chall: I guess it must have been about 1918 or so, Temple Emmanuel was founded. In 1921 you installed a man named Ernest Trattner as rabbi.
- Magnin: I don't want to talk about him, forget it.
- Chall: You don't want to talk about him?
- Magnin: No. [Laughs]
- Chall: He seemed to be a colorful individual.
- Magnin: I'll let somebody else talk about him. He didn't bother me. It's nothing personal about him. There's just some people I prefer not to talk about.
- Chall: All right.
- Magnin: But I never had any trouble with any of my colleagues. In the early days I used to study Talmud and Midrash together with some of the Orthodox rabbis. I always tried to help out some of the synagogues.

Funny thing is that the Orthodox rabbis have always had a very warm feeling toward me. Rabbi Zilberstein [Osher] was buried the other day. He was a real Orthodox, over on Breed Street. I guess they had a hundred eulogies. I gave the first one and had to get out.

But the Messenger had an editorial this week about it. We were very close friends. The very Orthodox have respected me, because while I'm not Orthodox, they knew I not only respected them, but understood their position. When you're honest and

Magnin: say what you have to say, you have no problems.

Developing Harmonious Community Relationships

Chall: And did they feel, as you went around explaining the meaning of Judaism to the community at large, that you were helping them?

Magnin: I think so. They realized I've given the Jew a certain position in this community. At least, so people say anyhow. I think that's perhaps correct. Given them a little respectability, so they can stand up.

Chall: When you say respectability, does it mean that in and of themselves they aren't respectable people?

Magnin: No, no, no. They don't know how to deal with non-Jews. Whatever they do, they do clumsily. Most of them don't understand the psychology of non-Jews at all.

Chall: Is the psychology of non-Jews the same psychology? Are all non-Jews the same?

Magnin: No, of course not. It ranges all the way from real friends to real enemies, and from very mild social anti-Semitism to a more vicious attitude. Everybody is different, no. We've so far had very little trouble in this community. Thank God.

I think the Jewish community in Los Angeles, due to this Temple, has a different position than in any community in the whole United States, as a matter of fact.

Chall: When you say due to this Temple . . .

Magnin: Well, here you get a letter from the chief of staff of the whole Army and Navy; he doesn't even know me.

Chall: But then, although you're saying that you have had little anti-Semitism in this community due to this Temple, in that context this means due to Rabbi Magnin.

Magnin: Yes. To put it in plain English, it's been my contact with these people. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist or couldn't break out, but so far there's been an absence of it.

See, there isn't a big event here but that the cardinal and I are invited. They don't even ask the Protestants most of the time. To everything. And I've been a part of everything in the whole community. You can see from the albums the contacts.

Chall: Yes I do. Has that meant that over the years you've had to accept a certain type of caution in your role?

Magnin: No. Whatever caution I would take, I would take for common sense purposes, consideration of other people's feelings. No, I know how to nobody.

One night I was at a very very prominent person's house for dinner. He said, "You know our crowd loves you." And I said, "Well, a lot of my people you'd love too, if you knew them." So, I don't mince words.

Chall: When they say that to you, and when you answer as you do, do you have a feeling, that for them, you are a token Jew and that they don't really care about the other Jews?

Magnin: Well, they don't necessarily dislike Jews. Some may, some may not.

Chall: But do they mingle with others?

Magnin: There are people that some Jews would say are anti-Semitic; I don't know why. They don't really know. One of my very closest friends has given thousands of dollars to Jewish things because of my friendship, and I didn't even ask him.

A group of Gentiles just raised, I think, a quarter of a million dollars for the Hebrew Union College graduate school in my name. I didn't bring them together. I didn't ask for it.

Chall: But they're doing it for you.

Magnin: Right.

Chall: Would they be willing to mingle with other Jews besides you?

Magnin: They might some, but they don't ordinarily; in business, yes. Not socially.

When Howard Ahmanson died, his wife had a Catholic, and a Jewish, and a Protestant service. She wanted a real Jewish service, and I conducted it. She's Catholic. He was Protestant. I was an honorary pallbearer at the regular service. It was on a Saturday, so I couldn't go. But when they dedicated the big tomb out at Forest Lawn I was there with the Protestant minister, nobody else.

Those are relationships you can't lay your finger on. I can go into a meeting and Carol [Ahmanson] comes up and kisses me. Norma Boles the same way. Buff Chandler, in front of a million people, comes up and kisses me. How do you figure that out?

Chall: I figure that it's because of your personality. But I think that in terms of what it means to the Jewish community in general that may be another question.

Magnin: When I got off the elevator at the White House the other day, Pat put her arm around me and started to talk about something right away.

Well, I don't see how I can make them like Jews. That would be foolish. Or that anti-Semitism is going to go away. All I'm saying is that, at least, I've become a symbol to them of what a Jew can be in their minds. It doesn't mean that they hate all Jews or they like all Jews. Nobody can change that. They must have a little different feelings toward our people. I don't know. Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't been useful. I don't know.

Chall: Well, it's better that they know one like you than none.

Magnin: Right. Well, they know others too.

Hillcrest Country Club

Chall: I wanted to ask you about the organization of the Hillcrest Country Club. You must have been a member for a long while.

Magnin: I've been an honorary member from the beginning.

Chall: Are there any other rabbis who are members?

Magnin: No. Some of the rich members of another temple bought their rabbi a membership because they thought he'd get some members through it. I imagine that was the reason. I don't know otherwise. Then some began to complain that he was a playboy when he went out there.

No, it was a little crowd in those days. The Jews who did things came out of this Temple. They couldn't get into certain clubs. Some man was insulted in some club. So they decided to have a Jewish club.

Today we have a few non-Jews. Leonard Firestone, Walter O'Malley, a few friends of Jews who wanted to come in. But they're very limited. Danny Thomas has been a member for many years.

Chall: Did anybody at the time--this is 1920 when they began to set it up--talk to you about the advisability of setting up a separate club?

Magnin: There was nothing to talk about. The money paid for it and built it. Through the period of the Depression they lost a lot of members, and I helped to keep some of them in. In that way I was rather useful to them.

Chall: Perhaps, not paying dues for a while would help.

Magnin: No, I think I kind of prevented them from getting out. I think they relaxed on the dues for some time; I don't know.

Chall: Isn't this considered the wealthiest club?

Magnin: Yes! Brentwood is also a fine club. My niece and nephew are members at Brentwood. There are

Magnin: some very fine members of our Temple there. They can't all get into Hillcrest. They have a lot of picture people at Hillcrest, quite a few.

Chall: Are the dues higher than at any other country club?

Magnin: They wouldn't be much different because Brentwood is an expensive deal today. I think Hillcrest is higher. It's considered to be the club. It's known all over the world. Everybody knows the Hillcrest.

Chall: It's interesting to look at the names of the eleven directors and trustees who formed it in 1920. S. M. Newmark, J. Y. Baruh . . .

Magnin: They were Dr. Hecht's sons-in-law.

Chall: Louis Isaacs.

Magnin: He was a prominent Jew.

Chall: M. S. Hellman.

Magnin: Hellman banking family.

Chall: Ben Meyer.

Magnin: President of Union Bank.

Chall: Joseph P. Loeb.

Magnin: One of founders of Loeb and Loeb law firm.

Chall: Louis S. Nordlinger.

Magnin: He was a jeweler.

Chall: Irving H. Hellman.

Magnin: Still alive. Irving was one of the big Hellman family bankers.

Chall: S. M. Loew; is that film?

Magnin: No, no, no. The old pioneer family.

Chall: Morris Cohen.

Magnin: Old pioneers. He died. Their family died off.

Chall: And A. Brownstein.

Magnin: Another prominent man. Well, these were all the aristocrats and Jewish bigshots at the time.

Chall: Yes. Then they were also associated with the Temple and the Jewish Welfare Federation.

Magnin: Certainly. There was only one Temple that amounted to anything.

IV TEMPLE WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, 1929-1973
(Interview 4, February 26, 1973)

Building the New Temple

The Committee

Chall: I'd like to get down some of your knowledge about the building of this Temple.

Magnin: Yes. About four or five of us built this Temple. The chairman of the building committee was Mr. George Mosbacher, who later became president. He was a very very wise and understanding man.

Instead of having a large committee of dummies--because committees generally contain so many dummies, with bad taste--there were only about four or five of us, including (maybe including, I don't remember) the architect himself, D. C. Allison from Allison and Allison, the architects, and the artist, Hugo Ballin, who did the Warner Memorial paintings. Hugo studied in Europe for many years, although he was an American Jew. He had seen the greatest pieces of architecture, throughout Europe and the whole world, and he had good taste.

So, there were really only a few of us. Then, one of the men, Meyer Elsasser, I don't recall whether or not he was on the committee, or even on the board, but he was interested in the Temple. He had done business down in Central, South America, Mexico, for many years. And he was very earthquake conscious. And after we had a set of plans already approved, practically, he

Magnin: asked us to send them to Berkeley to a man who was an engineer dealing with the problems of seismology. I don't think he was an architect. He sent back the plans with additions for special girding of the dome.

The dome was moveable. You couldn't move it with your hands, but it's like a cup on top of a saucer. If there's an earthquake, unless it's an up and down earthquake, it can shift a little bit. It's flexible.

So we girded and regirded the dome so as to make it at least as reasonably safe as we could. And it's paid dividends. We've had hardly any damage in the building through several very big earthquakes. It hasn't bothered it so far, thank God.

Chall: I was under the impression that Mr. A. M. Edelman was the architect.

Magnin: No, A. M. Edelman was the original architect. He was the brother of the president, Dr. Edelman. He made one set of plans, but then the Temple went to the firm of Allison and Allison, which was building a lot of churches around town, including the First Congregational, the Unitarian, and the Wilshire Methodist Church--the one out here on Plymouth and Wilshire.

Allison and Allison took and redrew the plans, and we accepted the amended plans. Then, we had an architect who later became president of the Temple. Mr. S. Tilden Norton. He didn't take too active a part in it, but he did make a few valuable suggestions. For instance, the ark originally was carved wood. And now we have bronze.

Chall: Was the change from wood to bronze done before it was made?

Magnin: No, that was afterwards. We did very little in the main sanctuary. Hardly anything has been touched, except the original Ten Commandments, which are of black marble. We gave that to the temple in Long Beach and in its place we put in this other pinkish marble of the Ten Commandments over the ark.

- Magnin: And, then, of course, we put in the bronze ark. Aside from that there's been no tampering with the building, thank God. They never could reproduce it. It would cost (not including the expensive land) just for that one main sanctuary with the basement, including the engineering, all the paintings, and mosaics, and the dome, the solid walnut, in these original rooms--to replace that one building today would be close to eight million. No question about it.
- Chall: The cost at that time was a million and a half?
- Magnin: The whole business was a little over that. Certainly, because the dollar was worth more. There was a Depression. Labor was cheap. The paintings today would probably cost a million or a million and a half, if you could get the artist to do them. At the present levels you couldn't do it for less.
- Chall: Did you tell me that this building had no mortgage when it was finished?
- Magnin: It has none now.
- Chall: But it didn't start out without one?
- Magnin: No, it started out with a mortgage. It was gradually paid off. Partly by our cemetery, Home of Peace, and partly by donations. But Home of Peace did a lot toward it.
- Chall: Let me give you the names of some of the people who were listed as members of the committee besides George Mosbacher. Louis Cole.
- Magnin: Yes. He was a very prominent man, who, at one time, was potentate of the Shrine. He was part of the Hellman family, and a very prominent man.
- Chall: Why would he have been chosen among such a small group?
- Magnin: Well, the Hellmans were big contributors to the Temple, originally. They gave the land for the Temple on Ninth and Hope Streets. And they were prominent. He was a very prominent citizen around

Magnin: town; a representative of the Jews, so were the Hellmans. That was the reason he was on it. And he was on the board, I believe, at the time. He also had brains and was a fine gentleman.

Chall: And Marco Newmark?

Magnin: Marco Newmark came from another distinguished family, the Newmark family. Marco, while he was in the grocery business, might have been a professor. He loved history, and he loved to keep the old records of the Jewish community. His brother wrote Jews of Southern California. Marco re-edited it.

Marco was like a little professor. He was quite a character. A beautiful man. A really beautiful man. One of my dearest friends from the very beginning. But he was interested in cultural things. He was one of the first to help the Zionist movement here, too. He wasn't rabid, but he was interested. He got the prominent Jews a little more interested. He was very nice, and a loveable man.

Chall: Mrs. Florine Wolfstein.

Magnin: Mrs. Florine Wolfstein was a Hellman, another branch of the family [James]. Was she on the committee?

Chall: Well, she was on some list I saw. I think I checked out the right names.

Magnin: I suppose they felt there's some things women should know--kitchen and so on. Florine was very active as a clubwoman around that time.

Chall: And Mr. Elsasser?

Magnin: He's the one that wanted us to send the plans up to the seismologist, on the earthquake business. A very fine and cultivated gentleman.

Chall: So that these few people really designed the building?

Magnin: Well, they did. I had a lot to do with it. For instance, the paintings. I would go out to Hugo Ballin's studio and we would talk about the themes. He made the cartoons in watercolor first. I'm sorry we lost the original cartoons. I would do anything to get them back.

First the rough sketches in pencil; then the watercolors; then, of course, oils on canvas. They're all on canvas, put on with white lead. They're not painted on the walls. They were written up in the London Studio Magazine. Oh, they're famous all over the world.

Chall: And you worked out with him what it was to be?

Magnin: The themes, yes. I didn't bother too much about the details. But we outlined them. We discussed them.

Selecting the Site

Chall: What else in terms of the building, it's architectural plans, did you have anything to do with?

Magnin: Well, the whole thing at that time. Whatever there was. What they now call the Magnin Building was the old Sunday School building. See, we tore down some more property and did some remodeling, and by attaching the new building to the old, made the Magnin Building.

As a matter of fact, I helped to pick out the property there. Some of the board discussed going on Sixth Street, Eighth Street, Ninth Street. And I said, "Look, Wilshire Boulevard (which only had mansions at that time) can only get better. It never can get cheap."

So, we got the first lot, which was only half the block. The man on the other half wouldn't sell it. Later on with a much greater price we bought the second half. These lots today are worth two or three million. I don't know what--they're putting up skyscrapers. All around; you can imagine.

Religion

Jews Play Important Role In History of Los Angeles

This is the first of two articles on Judaism in Greater Los Angeles and the Southland. The three different branches of the Jewish faith will be explained. The articles are part of a continuing series on religion appearing each Saturday and Sunday in The Herald-Examiner.

By **CLIFF BLACKBURN**
Herald-Examiner Staff Writer

In 1849, San Francisco was the center of population for the State of California with 35,000 people on its 49 hills. Sacramento—the heart of the gold diggings—had about 7000 residents, all determined to get wealthy just as fast as possible.

But the small adobe pueblo with the long name of La Ciudad de la Nuestra Senora La Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula had several thousand inhabitants who dozed their days away in the hot sun and the city didn't appear to have much of a future.

Yet in that year, a handful of German Jews bypassed the riches of Sacramento and the comforts of San Francisco to settle here.

The history of Los Angeles as a major city is so tightly woven with that of the Jews in the Southland, that the two are practically inseparable.

FIRST SERVICES

These first settlers, many with packs of merchandise upon their backs, blended rapidly with the easy-going residents of the drowsy little adobe town. The Los Angelenos admired the industry and honesty of their new neighbors.

When Joseph Newmarl, an ordained rabbi, arrived in Los Angeles in 1834, he became a Jewish leader and organizer and conducted the first Holy Day services in the adobe home of Juan Temple.

The residents of Los Angeles, now all citizens of the United States of America since Sept. 9, 1850, when California became the 31st state of the Union, saw the tempo of their town increase and its population grow.

And the Jews who had fled to this new land to escape the tyranny and persecution of Germany, Russia and Poland, were a strong part of the cornerstone of the new city.

The Hebrew Benevolent So-

ciety was founded with Jacob Elias its first president. A Jewish cemetery had been acquired. The first Confirmation Class was held at Lawlor's Institute on Second and Main Streets.

In 1862, the Congregation B'nai B'rith was founded and Rabbi Abraham Wolf Edelman, its first spiritual leader, came to Los Angeles.

Services were held at Stearns' Hall on North Los Angeles Street, at Leck's Hall on Main Street, between Second and Third Streets, and even in the court room of Judge Ygnacio Sepulveda.

The Jewish congregation in the early days of Los Angeles was small but solid. In April, 1865, the congregation participated in the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Procession. In 1884, the congregation decided to put aside some of the ritual and accoutrements of its orthodox belief and became reform.

FIRST TEMPLES

The first synagogue building was erected on Fort Street, now Broadway, between Second and Third Streets. In 1899 a new temple was built at Ninth and Hope Streets and Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, now spiritual leader of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple,

came 16 years later to succeed Rabbi Sigmund Hecht.

Wilshire Boulevard Temple at Wilshire Boulevard and Hobart Street was purchased in 1922. In those days, Wilshire Boulevard started west of what was then Westlake (now MacArthur) Park and terminated in a wheat field past the Miracle Mile.

Today, the \$14 million Temple is recognized as one of the world's largest. In many ways, the temple is the "heart" of the 500,000 Jewish people in Greater Los Angeles. And Rabbi Magnin, at 77, is internationally known and respected as a Jewish spiritual leader.

From the small handful of hardy Jewish pioneers who first came to Los Angeles in 1849, today exists as a strong and ever-growing body vital to the community. There are now more than 100 congregations here.

ALL WALKS OF LIFE

And while these first pioneers were primarily storekeepers, today there is no such thing in Los Angeles as a Jewish occupation.

"Unless, of course, it would be the job of rabbi," Rabbi Magnin said. "And I'm not even sure about that anymore."

Jews can be found in every walk of life. They were the pioneers of the motion picture industry, builders, judges, lawyers, doctors, and work today in space-age industries as scientists and technicians.

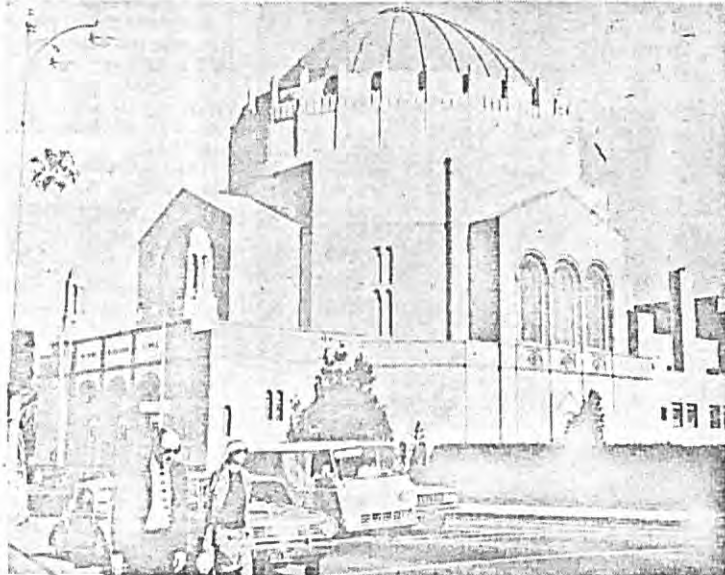
And yet these Jews of Los Angeles are closer together today perhaps than they were on the warm day more than a century ago when they first arrived at the adobe village of Los Angeles on the verdant coastal plain of California.

COMMON FEELING

"When Hitler destroyed six million Jews, he guaranteed our religion many, many centuries of vigor and life," Rabbi Magnin said. "He woke up Jews all over the world to the knowledge that they must link hands to survive."

"The pressures of the outside world give Jews a common feeling of identity and loyalty to Judaism which is stronger today than it has ever been."

Sunday's final article on Judaism in Greater Los Angeles will show the three distinct but overlapping branches of the Jewish congregation here. The Orthodox, Conservative and Reform or Liberal make up the structure of Jewish worship.



—Herald-Examiner Photo

REFORM CONGREGATION AND OLDEST SYNAGOGUE IN L.A.
The Wilshire Blvd. Temple at 3663 Wilshire Blvd.

Chall: I noticed that the first site had been chosen in 1922. And that was quite a while before you built.

Magnin: Yes. Well, Western Avenue was western. That's why it was called Western Avenue. No buses went out any farther. Some people suggested going out as far as Rimpau, which is a few blocks west of Western. Where that big insurance building is out there. But that was too far out. Most of the people in those days lived in the Westlake district, a few of them out between Western Avenue in the Westlake district. But a few had begun to build in Hancock Park, which is west of Western.

It's still mostly a Gentile, high-class neighborhood. Those homes today are occupied, most of them, by some of society's top people. The Chandlers live out there, Norman and Buff Chandler. That had all just begun to be developed, as I came in. But they put up some beautiful homes around there. I knew a few who lived out there.

Chall: So, you were really looking far ahead.

Magnin: Well, I looked far ahead. I would have gone out still farther west, but who the hell would know that? No way of telling that. But when we moved out to our home, there were only two houses on the other side of the street on the block, and none on our side at all, or west in Beverly Hills.

There were three big Jewish families. The May family, Ben Meyer, who was the president of the Union Bank, and his brother-in-law, Milton Getz, was in the bank. They had three big homes.

Maybe there were a few other Jews out there, but I didn't know of any. They thought we were crazy. We were. We should have bought the whole damned block.

My wife had good judgment. I'll tell you, we didn't want to go into Hancock Park. And the next jump would have been Carthay Circle and we didn't care about that. The kids needed schools, and we knew exactly where the school was going to be. We had a map of the whole thing. We've lived in the same house for . . . My son is now fifty-

Magnin: two, he was five years old--forty-seven years in one home.

Chall: That's a good record.

Magnin: Yes, we love it. You could put your feet up on anything. It's like a Mexican hacienda--tile floors. And we used to have old lamps. We've changed some of that. It's another-world house. It's away from everything. It's not a Barker Brothers house.

Chall: You designed it yourself?

Magnin: Yes. We didn't even get an architect. We had one check it. We had a builder, a Swede and his father, who were wonderful men. And they built a house near there that we liked, so it wasn't too dissimilar. And the man who did the fixtures used to work in the circus. He became an electrical fixture engineer. And he was an artist. He took a pencil and could draw anything.

They had old lamps out there, and he did some very interesting designs in wrought iron that you couldn't get today. Parchment shades and all this stuff. These in the office here are new. These are not real parchment, although they resemble it.

Chall: Were you alone at the beginning in wanting the Temple site here on Wilshire Boulevard?

Magnin: I can't trust my memory that far back. I'm sure others would have wanted it or they wouldn't have bought it. But I know that I was the one who urged it. I don't think there was any opposition to speak of.

The Plan

Chall: What about the selection of the architect? The decision to work with Mr. Edelman and then bring in the consultants?

Magnin: They felt that Allison and Allison might add some

Magnin: things to it, make a few changes that they preferred, that's all.

Chall: I really had in mind the imposing structure of it, the dome.

Magnin: Well, as I remember that plan of Mr. Edelman's wasn't too far off. It wasn't too different. There was a dome, but I think the proportions of the dome were a little bit different. I don't remember exactly.

It didn't have these finials around. In fact, we chopped part of them down on account of the earthquake laws. They used to be higher. If you look at the original pictures, you can see it. But it was not too dissimilar. It was the dome type of building.

Chall: I see. It was Romanesque. That was the plan you had in mind?

Magnin: Yes. Well, the dome was copied after the Pantheon in Rome. Have you ever been to the Pantheon?

Chall: No, but I've seen pictures of it.

Magnin: Well, it's open-air. The rain comes in. It's a dome within a dome. We covered ours naturally. Some of the pillars were suggested by St. Sophia in Constantinople. These architects take one thing or another and piece it together. But there's a real European feeling.

Chall: At least that's what the committee wanted?

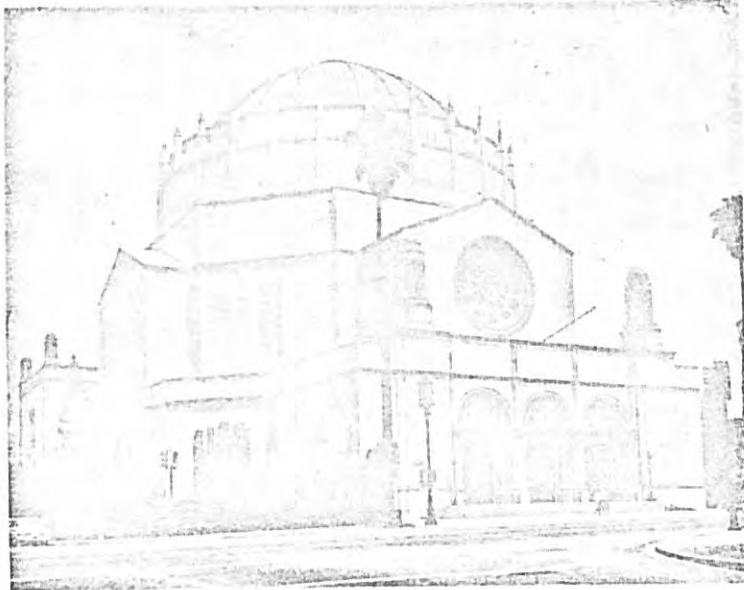
Magnin: Oh yes. And then again the pews are individual, comfortable, plush seats, yet with pew backs. And the proportions are theater proportions. There's no center aisle. You don't talk down a subway.

See, I wanted proportions like a theater so I can talk with people, not at them. The purpose of the aisle in a church is for people to come down for sacrament. So, they all come down and kneel. We don't need that.

And we had Knudsen [Professor Vern O.] down

- Magnin: at UCLA; a wonderful man; a physicist who was one of the fathers of acoustics. He took care of all the acoustics.
- Chall: And they've been good?
- Magnin: Oh yes. Since then we've put in the public address system which makes it easier on us and on everybody else.
- Chall: I saw the little booklet--it must have been a commemorative pamphlet that was put out when the building was finished--and it listed the names of people who had donated substantial gifts.
- Magnin: Yes. Well, in those days they were very substantial. Today we would do better. When we put up the Magnin Building, we didn't even have what you would call a regular drive at all, and we raised the money in a year and a half. A few telephone calls.
- Chall: How were the gifts and the money raised at that time? Did anybody in particular have responsibility for this?
- Magnin: We simply asked them. We didn't have to have any heavy drive. I guess they had some committees out here; some people rang up others, and spoke personally to them. We sent out literature. We had no problem, naturally. We had a mortgage, but we had no real problems. John J. Preis, chairman of the Building Committee, played a very important part.
- Chall: But some very special things, I suppose, had to be ordered or made to order.
- Magnin: Oh, everything. All the carving and everything was made to order. This room, as an example, used to have a Florentine ceiling here, stencilled in Florentine colors. I wanted it light, and finally I changed it. It was very Italian. I've made a few changes lately.
- Chall: Well, I was impressed with the fact that so much of the interior features of the building had been paid for already [at the time it was completed].
- Magnin: Oh yes. We don't owe money.

Wilshire Boulevard Temple



Los Angeles' first Jewish settlers arrived about 1849 and began holding religious services not long afterward to carry on the teachings of their forefathers. Beautiful Wilshire Boulevard Temple (above) is the third home of Congregation B'nai B'rith, the city's first, founded in 1862 by those early-day migrants.

(This is the 21th in a Mirror series of picture-stories on houses of worship in the Los Angeles area.)

BY KEN ELLIOTT

The beginnings of the Jewish faith in Los Angeles are rooted deep in the history of Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

Behind the imposing edifice at Wilshire and Hobart Blvds. is a story of pioneers who banded together in a young community of a few thousand population to preserve the traditions of their religion.

From their efforts in 1862, arose Congregation B'nai B'rith, which continues actively and strongly today with the largest temple west of Chicago and a ranking among the world's greatest.

Noted Spiritual Leader

Tied in prominently with its history since 1915 has been Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, a well-known figure in Los Angeles civic and charitable affairs and one of the city's most beloved spiritual leaders.

His associates at the temple are Rabbi Maxwell H. Dubin and Rabbi Alfred Wolf.

Congregation B'nai B'rith (the original name, but little used

now to avoid confusion with other organizations) built its first temple in 1872 between 2nd and 3rd St. on Fort St., which is now Broadway.

Its second home, remembered by many oldtimers of the city, was erected in 1896 at 9th and Hope Sts.

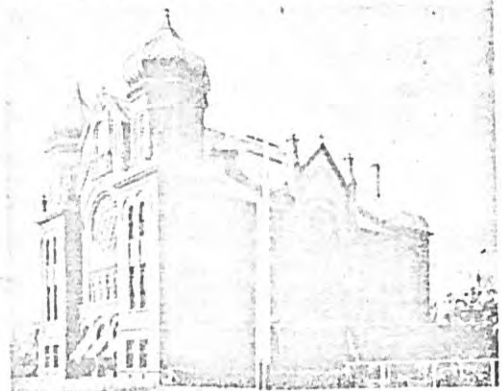
Magnificent Structure

And in 1929 the congregation built the magnificent Wilshire Boulevard Temple it occupies today—a massive-domed structure with an interior strikingly finished in dull gold, black marble and dark walnut.

Enriching this splendor are the memorial murals executed by Hugo Ballin and donated to the congregation by moviedom's Warner brothers.

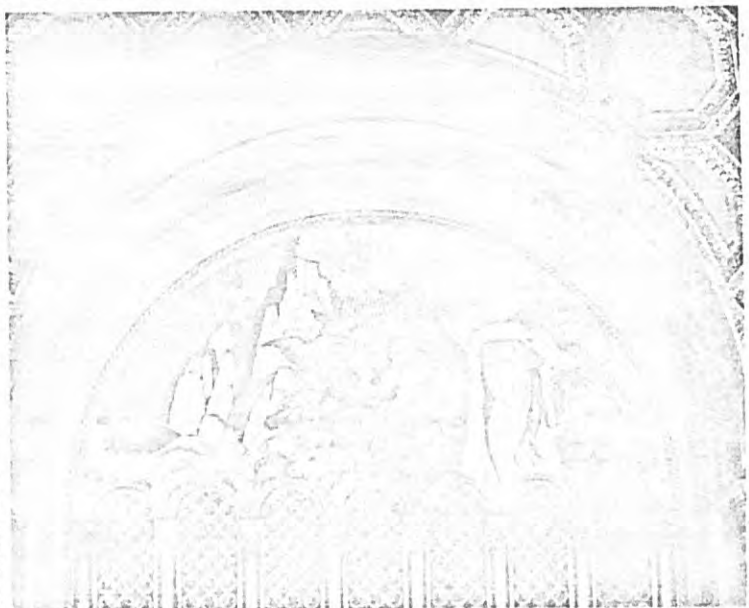


Ten years after its founding the congregation moved into its first synagogue (top) on Fort St. (Broadway) between 2nd and 3rd Sts. The second temple at 9th and Hope Sts. (lower photo) was occupied in 1896.



TEMPLE'S SPIRITUAL LEADER

The name of Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin (left) is well known in Los Angeles for his civic and humanitarian work. His philosophy is expressed in a book, "How to Live a Richer and Fuller Life," to be released on Monday. Rabbi Magnin came to the congregation in 1915.



"The Days of Creation," one of a series of colorful murals by Hugo Ballin, decorates the temple's north wall above the altar. "Great religious edifices seem incomplete and entirely too cold without great works of art," Rabbi Magnin says. The congregation's religious school classrooms border on a quiet patio (left).

The Dedication and Subsequent Celebrations

Chall: It must have been exciting and stimulating those several days of commemorative services?

Magnin: Oh yes. Well, you saw some of the copy in the L. A. Times and other papers?

Chall: Yes. And then you do have celebrations, every so many years.

Magnin: No, only when it's a hundred years, or a hundred and ten years, or a hundred and fifty years. [Laughter] We don't make too much fuss over those things. Everything comes in order. We go day by day and year by year.

Chall: I think you've forgotten some of those exciting anniversary celebrations. They also commemorate your years of service at approximately the same time.

Magnin: If you have any details and you want to remind me, I would be glad to tell you as far as I remember.

Chall: I don't know whether you want to go into this or not, but before the 1933 anniversary celebration there was some correspondence (which I saw) from Marco Hellman.

Magnin: Marco was a banker.

Chall: He felt he should not attend this anniversary celebration because of some problems he had with the board of trustees, which caused him to leave the Temple.

Magnin: He never left the Temple. He never left the Temple. He was always a member of the Temple. He lost his money around that time. See, they had about fifteen million, I understand. I never counted it.

His brother, Irving, is still alive and a member of the Temple. But very old, and not too well. I must call Irving. That reminds me.

Magnin: But Marco had promised for the family, I think it was twenty-five thousand for the altar, and they couldn't pay it. And we never said anything about it. I think we still used the name. It didn't make any difference. There are no labels on it. We don't have labels all over the place here.

There are a few in the Magnin Building, for instance. Here and there's a little something in the Sunday School rooms. But we don't have labels and those tablets all over the place. On the windows there's no mark of who gave what. No, we don't go in for those. We may have something very artistic sometimes because some people seem to want something. But we don't want a place to look like a cemetery.

Chall: This is a conscious position on your part? On the part of the board?

Magnin: Oh yes. We don't ask them. We just don't do it. Who asks anybody; [laughter] the less you ask, the better. You tell them, you don't ask them. That's the trouble with the rabbinate. They're not leaders; people don't respect them. They act like they're halfway between us and another world. They're more interested in boycotting lettuce than in Judaism.

Chall: All right. Well, I just wanted to finish up with the Hellman matter because I found it in the scrapbook. He just felt he wouldn't be able to come to the seventieth anniversary because of what had transpired between himself and the trustees.

Magnin: There was nothing unpleasant, as I can remember. If it was anything at all, it was the fact that he couldn't meet the obligation. Maybe he felt embarrassed, I don't know. But I know that he was never criticized and never reprimanded because he lost his money. And the family had always been nice.

The first money to buy the first lot here was raised in Marco Hellman's mother's home. Mr. and Mrs. Louis Cole lived in that home. That's where the first money was raised. So, we wouldn't

Magnin: have any bad feelings toward him. Quite the contrary, we've been nice to members of the family, nephews, nieces and so on, just because of this. They did so much in the old days.

Selecting the Name; Other Facts

Chall: When and how did the Temple's name get changed from B'nai B'rith to Wilshire Boulevard?

Magnin: I changed that when we came here, although it wasn't legally changed until somewhat later. When we came out here the first few years, they would refer to it as Magnin's Temple. The reason I changed it to Wilshire Boulevard Temple was because it gave, in a sense, the location. Another reason I didn't retain B'nai B'rith was because I wanted to avoid the confusion between the lodge and the Temple.

Chall: Why didn't you change the name to one more traditional, in Hebrew?

Magnin: I wanted people to know the location.

Chall: Now I heard that at some time in the Temple's history, a collection plate was passed.

Magnin: No, never at any time in the history of this Temple, certainly not in the sixty years, more or less, that I've been here. No. What we do at the end of the services (except on the holidays) is to have a few people holding baskets. I tell the people at the services that, as they go out, if they put anything in the baskets, the donations will all go to outside worthy causes--not a cent to the Temple. We don't have any collections in the Temple during the services, at all.

Chall: What worthy causes, and who makes the decision about what's done with the money in that basket?

Magnin: Whom do you think?

Chall: The rabbi. [Hearty laughter--Chall and Rabbi]

Magnin: You must confess you've had a lot of interviews, Malca, but you've never had this kind.

Chall: That's a confession. I've enjoyed it. Now down in the hall somewhere there's a large portrait of you.

Magnin: Oh, in the vestibule in the Temple. Well, there's another one; there are two great big portraits of me. One which you see when you come up the stairs in the Magnin Building, was the original one done by Schoenberg and which I liked. I've sort of grown into it. A few people didn't like it. So for a while we had it hanging elsewhere. But I think it's a pretty good portrait.

The other one was done later by Charles Cross. People seemed to like it a little better. Personally I don't think it's as good in some ways; it's better in other ways. In it I'm leaning over the pulpit very naturally. So we have two of them.

Chall: That's not usual either having the rabbi's portrait in the temple.

Magnin: Of course not. You have to die first, then they hide it.

Chall: So this is unique.

Magnin: Well, this position is unique. Who in the devil do you know in the rabbinate who's been on the job for sixty years and is still as active as I am?

Chall: I don't know any.

Magnin: Some rabbis they're glad to get rid of in sixty days. [Laughs]

The Rabbis: Maxwell Dubin, Alfred Wolf, Lawrence Goldmark

Chall: Now, in the course of time you've been working for many years with two rabbis.

Magnin: When I brought Rabbi Dubin here, he was down in San Diego [1925]. And I brought him to Los Angeles to be the executive of the Jewish Committee for Personal Services in State Institutions. That's what it used to be called. Martin Meyer started it in San Francisco.

Then, I had him teach, take care of our Sunday school. By degrees, I put him in the pulpit and had him assume the position of a rabbi. He was a rabbi in San Diego, but he didn't have his degree then. In those days they weren't so particular.

He wanted to go back to Cincinnati part-time, but later on he got his honorary rabbinical degree, and he also now has an honorary doctor's degree from the Hebrew Union College. He's a very fine and faithful gentleman.

For years we were together, just the two of us. He's like my own family. Very close. Now he's emeritus and he's taken good care of. But he still attends to funerals, and weddings, and reads a bit of the service. I try to give him enough to keep up his morale. He's a nice person. A fine gentleman.

Chall: Yes he is. I've talked to him.

Magnin: And Rabbi Wolf came about--how many years ago?

Chall: 1949.

Magnin: He was with that Union of American Hebrew Congregations that I despise, that horrible organization. You can quote me on that. Sometime I'll tell you why.

He was with them, but he was one of the few

Chartered 1862

RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN
D.D., L.H.D., S.T.D., LL.D.

RABBI ALFRED WOLF
M.H.L., Ph.D., D.D.

RABBI LAWRENCE J. GOLDMARK
B.A., M.H.L.

RABBI MAXWELL H. DUBIN
LL.B., D.D., Emeritus

BULLETIN of the

WILSHIRE BOULEVARD TEMPLE

3663 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90010

Telephone 388-2401

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SABBATH SERVICES

Friday Evening, November 3 at 8:00 o'clock

RABBI WOLF

"REMAINING HUMAN IN THE COMPUTER AGE"

BAT MITZVAH OF

OLIVIA RUTH PILOSOFF, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin L. Pilosoff

Carolyn Feldstein and Darlene Greer, members of TAG, will
participate in the Service.

Dinner for students of the Confirmation Class, their parents and teachers,
will precede the Service. The Confirmation Class will be blessed during the Service.

Saturday Morning, November 4 at 10:30 o'clock

RABBI GOLDMARK

"WHO ARE WE?"

BAR MITZVAH OF

DAVID ARTHUR SIMON, son of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney M. Simon

PAGE ONE OF FOUR PAGES



DR. MAGNIN SAYS . .

We are all passengers on the same ship, yet each one of us is alone. The streets teem with people like ants and we know them not. We pass each other along the freeway with the speed of lightning. There is no time to nod or say hello. This is the tragedy of loneliness amid the crowd.



Unless we are twins or triplets, we come into this life all by ourselves and that's the way most of us leave it. Yet we are all one family, one flesh, one soul . . . Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Afro-Americans, Indians, Caucasians . . . What difference?

One nose, two eyes, one heart that feels . . . one brain that thinks . . . the same laughter . . . the same tears.

No need to be cold like the concrete pavements or suspicious like a frightened rabbit. Underneath the masks are people, like you and me, who come and go.

While we're alive, let's move, sing, laugh, cry, pray, love, live . . . enjoy today and build for tomorrow . . . and all together.

Magnin: good men they had. In those days he helped to found a lot of new congregations here. Actually, some of them did very well, most of them. Some of them went out of business. Some should or will go out of business. But he did a good job.

And Alfred is a hard worker, fine student, very conscientious man. And I brought him in here. He's the one who initiated and developed Camp Hess Kramer--our camp. He's been great for that kind of thing.

I don't want to talk about the one rabbi we had here only for a year.

And then we got recently, about two years ago, Rabbi Goldmark. He's a very nice young man. He seems to be doing a good job with the young people. How he will develop depends on his brains, and his will, and his energy with these people. He seems to be pretty good. So, he answers the purpose very well.

Chall: Of course, with Rabbi Dubin you brought him in to do a particular job.

Magnin: Well, I got him in the pulpit talking, you know, professionally. He was the rabbi in San Diego.

Chall: Yes. At the time did you feel that because you were working so much outside the congregation within the community that you needed some assistance here?

Magnin: Well, the congregation was growing, the city was growing too.

Chall: And to bring in, after another twenty-five years or so, another rabbi meant what--that your congregation was still growing?

Magnin: Well, it's gotten much bigger yet. Dubin is getting older, and Wolf was then young.

Chall: I have talked to the three rabbis and they have one strong point in common in talking about you. And that is that you have a remarkable facility for giving leadership and leaving them alone to carry on.

Magnin: As long as they do what's right I never have interfered with them. When Dubin and I were here alone, I went to Europe, around the world. I left him to take charge and nothing ever happened. And he went away for many months at a time. I gave each a chance to travel. I alternate in the pulpit with them. In some places they won't let the young man speak in the big temple, and all that nonsense. They treat him like dirty brooms.

You know, they all talk the social justice nonsense; a bunch of phonies. And those who talk the greatest about the social justice, and want to boycott the lettuce growers, those are the ones who treat their own assistants like dogs, like pigs. They're only for anything that sounds socialistic or communistic. When it comes to being decent mensch, they haven't got it.

But our men have always been treated with respectability--every person who works here, from the janitor on up. Of all the maintenance people there isn't one that I don't bid a good morning and a good afternoon, and for whom I wouldn't do something if they needed it. It's the only way to live. How do you get up and talk to people, if you're supposed to be a minister, and treat people like dogs? And act like a snob? It's ridiculous! And it pays dividends because people will do things for you. They like you and they enjoy their work and that's what you want.

Chall: Your staff has stayed on for long, long years, and your rabbis too.

Magnin: Oh yes. We have no contracts. I don't want any contracts. If a man is good he stays forever, unless he wants to go. If he wants to go he can go, and if we don't like him we can always tell him to go. We don't have any contracts with anybody. They trust us and we trust them.

Chall: Over the years in dealing with your staff, and particularly in dividing responsibilities with the rabbis as they came in, was there any conscious decision on your part as to how you would make the division of responsibilities?

Magnin: No. It's flexible. I would say, for instance, that right now Wolf likes to run the school. Larry

Magnin: someday will, but he helps with the young people, you see. Theoretically, Rabbi Wolf runs the school under me, of course.

They all speak from the pulpit. They can take any weddings or funerals they please. Nobody ever interferes. Some congregations--especially when people are rich--they are dealt with by the senior rabbi. I don't say senior and junior, none of that nonsense. People are people and you treat them like people. If somebody--he could be Onassis--if he wants them for a wedding, I don't say, "I want that wedding." He goes and that's it. That's the way I treat them. And that's a very unusual thing, if I have to say it myself. Because the men are not treated that way in other congregations.

They are very insecure. The older ones are insecure. They're afraid, jealous, petty. So, they hold them down. I don't believe in this.

Chall: Apparently there's been none of that here.

Magnin: None of that. It's known all through the rabbinate for that. We have a reputation for it. See, after all I guess I'm the freak among the whole bunch. I'm the only one who says what I think, the way I want, and the only one who does what I want. I'm the only one who treats people who work for me like human beings. It's a record. They can put that on my tombstone. "He didn't treat his juniors like a pig." That would be a nice beautiful one. [Laughter] It isn't kosher.

Other Staff Members

Chall: There have been other people added to the staff.

Magnin: Oh, we have loads and loads.

Chall: I'm thinking particularly of those who preceeded Mr. Burg [Gerald] as office manager or executive. Mr. Samuel Tierman.

Magnin: Tierman. The man is dead. He was here for ten years [1945-1955]. Well, first of all there was Nathan Malinow's father. He used to be the sexton. He was the shamus. That was way back in the old Temple.

Then Nathan came along and started like that, and he became a kind of a secretary. Of course, when I came here William Barnett was secretary. He was the brother-in-law of Dr. Edelman, the president. He had an office in a building on either Third or Fourth Street downtown. He was in the insurance business. He kept everything of the Temple in his office. There was nothing but a filing cabinet. There were maybe five hundred members.

It's a different story. Today it's a tremendous job. The executive has to do the hiring and firing. Mr. Burg came [1955], and he's a remarkable man. He could get any job, anywhere. He's a wonderful person. He has a head, he has a heart; he is wonderful in handling people. He's flexible, and understanding, and tactful, and pleasant. He loves me dearly. This man would sacrifice his life, that's the kind of fellow he is.

Chall: I was interested that Mr. Malinow had stayed on from 1915 to 1944. That was a long record.

Magnin: Then he went into the undertaking business. Well, in the old days there was only one Jewish undertaker, and our people didn't go there. There were two undertakers, goyim, that the Jews used to use. And Malinow's job going back to the rather early days--when there was a death in the family, he would go to the undertaker's and look over things.

As a matter of fact his mother used to sit up with the dead. They used to have the custom of sitting up with the dead. Well Nathan was around death so much that he came to Dr. Edelman and me to ask if we would object to his going into the undertaking business. I said, "No. You're half an undertaker now, go ahead. What's the difference?"

And that's how Malinow, now Malinow and Silverman--(used to be Malinow and Simon) that's

Magnin: how Nathan got into the mortuary business.

Chall: So, that was one of his jobs. And the other job was to help set up chairs before the meetings and things of this kind?

Magnin: Well, when I came to Los Angeles we were down on Ninth and Hope Streets. It was a nice building but it was nothing compared to this. And the Temple was upstairs, and downstairs was like a hall and a place where the Malinows lived. It was, compared with this, a very crude place.

Chall: That was how it all started.

Magnin: That's right. And out of that one came the biggest in the whole world.

Chall: It's always interesting to go back and see the changes.

Magnin: Yes it is. It was a charming building. I think Edelman built that building. It was a red brick thing with two big towers. They used to copy the Byzantine. Like Russian Byzantine towers. The old Temple Emmanu-El in New York had something similar. They had these funny things. That's the way they used to build them.

And then they had a little Sunday school building next to it. It was a little brick building, one story. It just had little classes. They built on. That's before I came here.

Chall: So, the job that Mr. Burg now has, has come through a variety of changes?

Magnin: Well, he's a temple administrator. It's a little different than being secretary. He has secretaries under him. Charlotte [Barr], you know. And we have the bookkeepers, and we have camp people. You've been around to see it.

Chall: A tremendous staff, yes.

Magnin: It will be like the Standard Oil Company pretty soon. The salary checks come from the bank through computers. This is big business. This isn't the Temple Emmanu-El in San Francisco. We

Magnin: don't potchkeh around with a few old women.
[Laughter]

I remember the time when that looked awfully big to me, and important. It was once a great . . . Today, I don't know.

Chall: In terms of the way you work, and the fact that Mr. Burg is dealing with the so-called business end of the Temple, what kind of interaction do you have?

Magnin: As a matter of fact, I don't run the business. It is not necessary. We have a good board. We have Mr. Burg. But I'm not a bit bashful either about some of those things, because I'm at every board meeting, and every once in a while they'll ask for my opinion.

After all, I come from a family of business people. I'm an executive in Mr. Carl Laemmle's estate. I'm not exactly a boob when it comes to those things either. But, as a rule, unless there's some real reason for it, I never interfere and try to tell them what to do. And things go very well like that.

Chall: How do you account for that?

Magnin: The business sense?

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: I. Magnin was my grandfather. Mrs. Magnin was the businesswoman. He didn't care. He was artistic. I got some from my mother's folks, too, naturally, but I got a certain artistic flair from my grandfather.

He used to go to Paris and he'd have a libretto in one pocket. Opera, yes. My grandmother was a business genius until the boys grew up. So, I suppose I've inherited a certain amount of that.

Chall: Even though you weren't ever associated with them, you never watched them work at all.

Magnin: No, never.

Chall: Did you get any of the business sense from your own grandfather with whom you lived?

Magnin: No. He wasn't a businessman. He was a very sweet loveable man. A very simple man. He was a doll. I loved him very very deeply. And I owe a lot of my life's career to him. Because I started out to do things to give him a sense of pride.

He had a big family, and, really, I was the apple of his eye. He saw more coming from me than from his own children. This meant a lot to him. So, I loved him very deeply. I have a big painting of him in my hall here. You wouldn't notice it.

No, he wasn't a businessman. He owned a simple little store down on the waterfront. If he had any of that he had no opportunity to show it. He used to deal with the captains who came in off the ships. And I met those people with their wrinkled hands, and their gnarled faces, you know. We'd sit there on the real captains' chairs and talk to them as a kid and hear about Bora Bora and Siam and Singapore.

Chall: When you say that some of it rubbed off on you from the I. Magnins, you're not saying that it's genetic?

Magnin: You see why San Francisco means a lot to me. I wouldn't ever want to live there. I don't care for it that way. I think I've grown too far away from it in many ways. But my roots are there.

But much of what I am resulted from that; Fisherman's Wharf. I made my first trip to Italy and was deeply touched by the emotions of the Italians who had left their country many years before and were visiting it again for the first time. See, there's an awful lot of Golden Gate Park in me. There used to be a place called Land's End, way out in the end, beyond the Presidio, just where you overlook the Pacific, and you look over the Golden Gate. All these things are part of my life.

Magnin: See, I once wrote that I learned my first philosophy lesson at Land's End watching a sunset. So, what little business there is in me, I suppose may be inherited, I don't know. It's just plain common sense. That's all business is anyway. That's all anything is.

Chall: Some people have it, and some people don't.

Magnin: Like anything else.

Chall: But you usually don't find it in the rabbinate.

Magnin: No, and you don't find much of anything in the rabbinate except well meaning jerks. I mean it. They're nice people, but they don't seem to have any . . . I don't know whether it's bad luck, or whether they're damned fools. I don't know what it is. I can't deal with them.

See, I started all the organizations and I don't go to them because they talk nonsense. I want to do something to help them. I don't need it. They haven't got enough sense to get out of their own way.

They want to solve all the world's social and economic and political problems. They don't know a damned thing. They can't solve their own problems. Every synagogue has a sign, "Save the Soviet Union", and they can't save the shul. They have to save themselves first. They don't know how to save anything.

Ritual and Prayer

Chall: I wanted to ask you some questions about the ritual in the Temple. Now, you've been here since 1916 and things have changed.

Magnin: Yes. The ritual has changed very little. See, they're getting out a new prayer book which is a mistake. First of all, I don't like it. It's too big. And secondly, they don't know how to read

Magnin:

the old one. The average rabbi never took the right kind of voice training and they aren't equipped naturally to do it.

They talk through the adenoids. And you can imagine what this does to people, so people don't come. They say, "We need a new ritual." They don't need a new ritual, they need a new rabbi. And they haven't got them, and that's the tragedy. But I'm very serious about it.

You see, what I do is this. I take the Union Prayer Book and I make emendations. I keep the traditional prayers. But some of those prayers which were written in the first period of Reform Judaism I think are corny--I consider it third-rate poetry, typical of the early twentieth century.

It's a matter of temperament. Some things strike me as being stultified, pompous, inane, and I won't stoop to read such unaesthetic material. So I cut that all out. We don't read it. We read the principal prayers.

Then, I interject something original here and there, to give it life. On Friday night before the Kiddush, I will give them a little message no matter who's speaking. Something generally current. It might be from the Bible and tied in with something current. For instance, last week it happened to be about Washington's birthday. And how the whole American system is inspired by our Bible. And I mentioned Washington. I said, "Don't think he was a fool. He was a very smart man." That's the way I talk to them; you know me.

And I mentioned a few things from his Farewell Address. Then I say, "Now we say Kiddush and we're grateful we had men like this who really gave us America." That makes the Kiddush different.

The same way with the Kaddish. It's never twice the same. I may read something which strikes me from the Book of Ecclesiastes, or it may come from Walt Whitman, or from anything I'm reading. And then I go into the Kaddish. And the benediction the same way. You haven't been to our service have you?

Chall: No.

Magnin: Then you don't know. You see, I have the lights dimmed at the Kaddish. Comes the benediction I always say, "Now, let's have silence for a few seconds. Let's do some thinking. An awful lot can happen in a week. Here we are in this beautiful place, alive. It's something to be grateful for."

All of a sudden I'll be turning a book--I'll start to read from the Book of Job, some poetry. You know [reading softly and with feeling], "Where is wisdom found? It's not in the land of the living . . ." and so on. "Death says it is, I've heard a rumor thereof with my ears." See? It's spontaneous, and yet it's like a piece of poetry.

You don't need another prayer book. You have to know how to read the old one, and add or subtract or leave it alone. Now, they're going to spend a fortune and get a prayer book that isn't worth reading. Really, it's terrible.

Chall: You brought in the new edition of the Union Prayer Book in 1920, according to something I've read here. Have there been many revisions of the Union Prayer Book since then?

Magnin: No, not since. That's why they're getting this new one out. See, the rabbis have no sense of perspective. They have an idea that the synagogue has failed, and they think that by getting out stunts, and gimmicks, and new prayer books they can remedy the situation. We get more people on one Friday than they got in seven weeks during the year I was in Cincinnati. And yet they talk about the synagogue failing.

Nobody ever goes every single week to one institution. So what? Why should they? They have television. They have radios. Now they're afraid to go out at night. We may someday have to stop the Friday night services. People don't want to go out at night. They don't go to theaters anymore, most of them. They're scared. They get hit over the head and they don't want to go out.

Magnin: People used to stay down here at the Gaylord and walk up. They won't walk up anymore. They can't. They'll get killed or mugged. So, it makes a difference. But to say that we're failing because everybody doesn't go to services every single week is nonsense.

That's what I have against that damned Union. They are constantly giving the negative side instead of the positive side of Reform Judaism, which is bad. That's been one of the things I've been protesting. Sooner or later we'll probably get out of that Union, because they're negative and hypercritical, and they don't do any good for Reform Judaism. I think they're a menace. They're more interested in socialism than they are in Judaism.

Chall: There's a new Sabbath manual coming out I hear.

Magnin: That's another silly thing. They're going to tell people how to spend the Sabbath. Do you think the people that go out to the Hillcrest on Saturday and play golf in the daytime, and have lunch, and eat bacon and eggs, and play cards all afternoon, are going to read that book?

Chall: You don't think that that's necessary?

Magnin: I don't think most things are necessary.

Chall: Yet in your lifetime the Reform has gone from very, very extreme Reform to the candles, and the Bar Mitzvah. There's been a change in the fifty years.

Magnin: Well, that's because of the state of Israel and the holocaust.

Chall: But you don't disapprove of this?

Magnin: Not at all. I brought Bar Mitzvah here. It wasn't here.

Chall: You brought it back on your own or because there was a call for it?

Magnin: No, I did it before there was anything of that sort. I was raised that way.

Chall: There was a push for it at one time.

Magnin: Yes, but I never brought the hat and the tallis back. Cantors--even in Reform temples--I never wanted one. They're politicians, and third-rate singers. I don't want them around.

Chall: Can you understand or deal with the fact that maybe there's a generation coming up that seems to want these new prayers and traditional observances?

Magnin: Yes. It's very simple. They also want yoga and Zen and every kind of nonsense because they're searching for something. Many Christians are becoming fundamentalists. See, rationalism is too cold and they're fed up. It hasn't made them happy. Personally, I think it's wrong. I think you have to keep your head, too, as well as your heart for a balance. People don't do this.

Chall: But if it's within the Jewish framework . . .

Magnin: There's no harm in it. If they want to be more Jewish, God bless them. That's all right with me. I'm certainly not opposed to that. I've encouraged it.

See, I'm a funny duck. I worked for Zionism, and yet I won't have a Zionist flag in this Temple. And I explained it to the kids, also the Temple. Last Friday here we had sort of a Zionist celebration. The Israeli consul was here Saturday. It was the Israeli state's twenty-fifth anniversary. I said, "We don't have a national flag here because we are Americans. These are my people. This is my flesh and blood. But for the grace of God I would have been in the camps too. I'm for them one hundred percent, and honor them, and work for them and give, but it's not my nation. I only have one nation at a time."

So, I've taken a very strenuous point of view on this. I don't fool around with it.

It's funny. We had a Bat Mitzvah here last Friday night. They had a reception upstairs and some girl came over to me. She was a homely girl; she looked like an oriental, but not a beautiful oriental.

Magnin: You could see why she'd be sour. She said, "I don't like this." I said, "Well, who the hell asked you? What don't you like?" "They're smoking on Shabbos." I said, "Where do you go?" She said, "Beth Jacob." I said, "When I go to Beth Jacob I don't smoke. I don't even smoke here. I don't smoke at all. But I wouldn't smoke at Beth Jacob. If you don't like it here there are plenty of exits. Go."

I said, "Were you invited in the first place?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well then, you can stay. Otherwise I'd tell you to get the hell out." That's right. That's the way to talk to people.

Chall: Even if rabbis aren't as capable of reading the prayers as you are, do you think they can still use the same edition?

Magnin: Many of them don't read very well so they don't need a new book.

Chall: You say they haven't learned to read, and you talked to me a little while ago about being able to project your voice--have you had some training?

Magnin: Yes. I have had definite training. I married a very wise woman. A girl of class, and culture, and refinement, who was used to things. I was here about six months when I got married. I brought her out here from Cincinnati. She said one day, "I don't like your reading." I said, "What do you mean? I was born in San Francisco. I know English . . . "

She couldn't quite define what she meant. That was the time that pictures were being changed from silent to spoken words. And the finest artists were learning how to read. So, I found out where these people were going.

There was a woman teaching voice and I went to her and she said, "Read the Twenty-Third Psalm." So, I said, "All right." I read it. She said, "Read the Ninetieth." So I read it. I've told this to many young rabbinical students. It won't do them any good.

Magnin:

So, she said, "Read this." I read it. She said, "Do you know what you read?" I said, "What do you mean? I read it in Hebrew?" She said, "Do you know what you read?" I said, "What are you talking about?"

She said, "What kind of poetry is the Twenty-Third Psalm?" I said, "Lyric." She said, "You're smart. What is the Ninetieth?" I said, "Elegiac." She said, "You read them all alike." I said, "You've earned your money already." Absolutely, just as simple as that. I took about eight lessons and quit.

I had the voice, I had the timing, I had the feeling, but I didn't know how to use it. And in those few lessons I learned to read so that when you say [recites with feeling--slowly] "Break Break Break on thy cold gray stones oh sea; break break break . . ." there's tragedy in it. I didn't say [recites poorly to indicate how someone without feeling or training might read] "Break,Break,Break . . ."

In addition to the voice, you must be a natural poet. You must know how to interject certain things that are timeless, yet up-to-date and appropriate, and punctuate the service with little things.

When I take the Torah out, for instance, I don't say what it says there. I get up, and I may recite the Creation story and say, "This is the light . . ." And sometimes I'll start out with the Ten Commandments and say, "These are the words . . . They are written down here on parchment, on the heart of the Jew, in blood." Then, the Shema. So, I change the prayer book around a bit.

But the basic things like the Shema, the Borechu, they remain the same.

Chall:

I see. What rituals have you brought back? Bar Mitzvah for example, you have mentioned.

Magnin:

Yes, I brought back Bar Mitzvah. I brought back the shofar. They used to have a trumpet.

Magnin: See, this Temple went from what you would call a sort of Conservative-Orthodox, originally, to the extreme Reform of the early nineteenth century. It was extreme Reform. And then I brought back a little more Hebrew; but I never brought back the tallis or the yarmulke. I didn't need that.

They weren't used to it, and I think there should be one real Reform Temple. Most of them are potchkeeking around now. They don't know what they belong to. I don't think it's a necessity. I was brought up in a Conservative shul, Geary Street shul in San Francisco. And I liked it. After all, I'm a Jew. I'm a rabbi. But I think the early Reform movement went a little too far.

Cling to the Fundamentals. Ignore the Fads.

Chall: I noticed that you wrote something many years ago about crazes and fads. I think this must have been in the twenties.

Magnin: Yeah. Already they had fads.

Chall: You warned against fads in religion.

Magnin: What would I say today?

Chall: One of your statements was, "Let us cling to the fundamentals and pay less heed to the fads which are ephemeral."

Magnin: See? I was how many years ahead of the times? Fifty years ahead of the times. Think of that. It's amazing. I sometimes wonder how I thought of those things. I don't know. The world doesn't change overnight.

Chall: You have been saying for a number of years that there should be a certain amount of flexibility, but you wanted to retain the fundamentals and the basics.

Magnin: Right.

Chall: And I was interested in what you did consider fundamental and basic?

Magnin: Well, I think, for instance, the service should have some dignity. It should have some of the traditional prayers. I don't believe in having banjos and guitars. If the kids want to have a little something on the side out at the camp like that, or a little service of their own someplace, this is one thing.

I think it should have dignity and solemnity and be the kind of service that people recognize who come from all over the world. And not just potchkeh around with the hopping, and dances, and having the rabbis come in with Salome's seven veils, and all this nonsense.

Chall: You're talking about the dignity of the service. But I'm interested also in what you consider the fundamental rituals?

Magnin: The fundamental rituals are the Borechu, the Shema, the Michomocho, the Kiddush, the Kaddish, the Adoration. These are the basic things. You'll find them in an Orthodox service.

Chall: And you don't believe in leaving them out? Is that it?

Magnin: Most of them. They only take a few minutes. What I don't like is what I call the Cincinnati prayers, written by the first Reform rabbis.

Chall: There was a movement underway at one time, I don't think it got very far, to have temple services on Sunday.

Magnin: Well, that was never here. We never had that. It was in the East.

Chall: In Chicago.

Magnin: Well, they couldn't get anybody on Friday and Saturday, so they figured that on Sunday they would get more people. It was more of a lecture service than anything else. It wasn't supposed to supplant

Magnin: Saturday. It was supposed to add to it. Actually, it supplanted it.

The truth of the matter is that they have snow and ice, and they can't play tennis on Sunday mornings. But out here our people could. There was no necessity for this. And once more, we always have pretty good crowds. We're not going to pack it every week, but we never have an empty sanctuary.

Oh, it's a tremendous Temple. Some part of it is roped off. But what we have in here would fill a small temple or more. So, we never suffered from that. Especially with the Bar Mitzvahs, it gets to be big. All their friends come. Some with tallisem and yarmulkes.

Chall: The whole idea, the whole problem of how to reform and change the Jewish service and still retain the fundamentals, apparently has been an argument going on since the days when Reform was organized, and maybe long before then. And it hasn't come to any kind of conclusion yet, is that it? That is, what the rituals will be in Reform tradition is still being argued.

Magnin: Oh, they have nothing else to talk about. They have to have meetings. And they have to have something to say. They're professional Jews. So, one argues, "What is a Jew? What is Reform? And what is that . . ." I don't go to those meetings. I have nothing to do with them. They're a waste of time. I only go when things are positive. I don't want to sit there and listen to a bunch of rabbis fussing. Nobody wants to hear them.

Chall: In the American Israelite in 1921, you wrote a very long article about "When is a Jew not a Jew?" It was one of the few long articles that you have written. And this was about the problem of changes, not only in rituals but other things as well. One of them had to do with changing the service to Sunday.

And you made a few points there that I thought were rather interesting. You felt that by changing the ritual to Sunday, the Reform Jew would be creating even a greater gap

Chall: between himself and his Orthodox brother.

Magnin: Right.

Chall: A gap which was, you claimed, already too wide. And then you went on to discuss the reason why Sunday was an observance of the Christian world, rather than Saturday.

Aside from that particular matter, you felt that Saturday was the day for Jews to observe the Sabbath and there was no particular reason to change it. I think the article that you were answering was a paper read by Isaac W. Bernheim of Louisville, Kentucky.

Magnin: He talked like an assimilationist Jew. Although he gave the library to the Hebrew Union College, he was ultra Reform. He didn't like garlic in his pickles, you see. He didn't like that.

Chall: You were concerned about it enough to write a very long article.

Magnin: Yeah, in those days I had nothing else to do, I guess. I don't know.

Chall: Then he makes another point which you answered. The final statement that you made is related to our present discussion: "Shall we reform and reform and reform until there is little or nothing left? Or shall we conserve and preserve what has outlived all nations, civilizations, and cultures?"

Magnin: That was damned good. I don't believe I wrote it.

Chall: Did you have a ghost writer in 1921?

Magnin: I have never used a ghost writer.

Chall: I was interested in the fact that, over the years, as I look through your scrapbooks, I see a general continuity in the way you think.

Magnin: There's a conservative streak. I'm middle of the road, but leaning a little more to the right. I'm a little right of the center of the road.

- Chall: But you've always been a conservationist, particularly in terms of the ritual?
- Magnin: Right.
- Chall: Even though you were the head of one of the largest Reform congregations in the United States?
- Magnin: That's right. It didn't bother me.

Pastoral, Counseling and other Rabbinical Duties

- Chall: Now when I was here last month, there was a special consecration of a young Jewish boy who had no formal Jewish training, but wanted to be somewhat formally taken into the Jewish community. His family brought him in, and the grandparents.
- Magnin: Yes.
- Chall: I don't know whether this was an unusual kind of thing. What about your pastoral activities, your counseling services?
- Magnin: This wouldn't be pastoral. By pastoral you generally mean going out and visiting the homes, which is a thing of the past. Unless people are sick and want to see you by appointment. But counseling in the sense that you can help people with a problem directly--if you can help them then I'm glad to do it. This is another thing.
- Chall: You call pastoral duties going out and seeing people?
- Magnin: Well, in the old days the rabbi made calls. A pastor is a shepherd of the sheep. Guide your sheep. That's not my concept of a rabbi at all. It's all right for a dumb cluck who has no imagination and nothing else to do, and just wants people to like him. But who has time for that today?

How are you going to read a book, and do anything, and represent your people? You don't have enough time.

Chall: What about marriages and funerals?

Magnin: What about them?

Chall: You don't call those pastoral?

Magnin: Oh, if you're using a term in the general sense, yes. I don't like to go to too many weddings and funerals today, but I've been to hundreds of them, and I don't refuse our own members or somebody I like, or somebody close to a member.

But I don't make it a custom because they take an awful lot of time. First of all, funerals are depressing. But aside from that they take a great deal of time. And weddings are a nuisance. You have to go out to these rotten hotel meals and spend hours while they take drinks and stand around. Only for my very dear friends.

Anybody who wants to come here to the office when I'm not too busy, I'll marry any two people. I ask nothing of them. I don't care. I'll be very nice to them. But to go out to these big deals--it's only when they're real members of the Temple.

Chall: Do you take fees for marriages?

Magnin: Not fees. Fees assume that there's a charge. First of all some few rabbis have been bad enough to send bills out, which we've never done.

Now, our policy is that we don't ask for anything. Most of them send you something, not all, but most of them. In the old days I used to turn it all back. They sent fountain pens, and vases, and things I don't want. So, what I do is this: We have what we call the rabbis' discretionary fund. It goes out to different charities and we generally put money given us in that. Sometimes we keep it. It just depends. When people say, "I want you to get something for yourself." And if they want it, and it means something to them I don't refuse.

But we don't solicit any fees and we don't give a damn whether they give or not. We don't go for that kind of stuff. I call those tips. A few rabbis in town just make a business of weddings

Magnin: at \$100 apiece, and they pull off some cheap gimmicks. Some of the kids like it. They dress up like freaks. But this is bad. It's terrible.

And they have no jobs, so they need it. They teach.

Conversion, Intermarriage, and Jewish Survival

Chall: What have your actions and views been on conversion?

Magnin: Well, generally conversion-- In some cases they come because they want to be Jews. In others because they want to please their parents. The others because they want to marry. This is generally the reason.

My conversions are very brief. People are either sincere or they're not. And if they don't belong to another church and if they don't believe in Christianity it's a very simple matter to me. In a very short time I can tell them the essentials of Judaism. Give them a book or two to read and call it that. Where either party is a strong believer of another faith we suggest a judge or justice of the peace.

Anyhow, to make a long story short, I can't monkey with personal conversions, go into a lot of detail. Secondly, as I say, people are either sincere or they're not. If they are, then you don't need all that. And if they're not then it won't do any good.

Then, about marriages. Originally I wouldn't marry unless it was a conversion. I changed my mind. For instance, in the First World War the boys would go away and they wanted to get married. You couldn't make them wait indefinitely. Then again, some rabbis will marry any two Jews whether they belong to a temple or not. They may be atheists. To me people are people. Say a boy is going to marry a girl, and this girl doesn't belong to any Christian church at all, isn't interested. She doesn't know anything about

Magnin: Christianity. She believes in God and being decent and that's all. She wants to be Jewish. In a very short time I can convert her. If she doesn't want to be I'm not going to force her. Because you have no guarantee of this sticking.

But with the promise to bring up the children as Jews I would do it. I don't even ask that any-more. I think two human beings are two human beings. Unless, as I say, if they're Christological I don't do it, because they'll bring up their children to be Christians. I don't want to encourage that.

But aside from that I think I've saved more people for Judaism this way than throwing them out into the hands of a Christian minister or justice of the peace. So, I try to use my head. In every case it's a different case.

Chall: I see. In the early days there was a famous conversion of Norma Shearer.

Magnin: Yes. I converted Norma. That was one of these very fast things too. Norma was very nice. And Norma, as long as Irving [Thalberg] was alive came to Temple on the holidays. And after Irving died she still came to Temple on the holidays and occasionally at other times. Then she married-- I think he's a ski professor. He's Christian. I don't think she said she wasn't going to be Jewish. But I never expected her to be really Jewish except out of respect for Irving while Irving was alive. I understand people.

Although, I've met others. There's one widow who travelled in our group once. She was really a convert in the Orthodox way. She was a lovely lady, and she was a member of the Temple. And some very rich man wanted to marry her on a trip. She wouldn't take him. She wouldn't marry anybody but a Jew. She took her conversion very seriously. There are all kinds of people.

Chall: Are you far out, in a sense, away from your fellow rabbis in your attitude?

Magnin: I think half of them do the same thing, and don't talk about it, and try to get away with it. Rabbi

Magnin: Dubin still won't marry without a conversion. I don't know about Goldmark. He's a little more oriented to the Conservative idea, I think.

But Wolf will now. I don't know how many. Maybe they're not quite as free as I am, but I think a lot of them find excuses and don't want to talk. The statistics--I forget. They had some study at the conference. Quite a few under certain conditions would do it.

I don't care about that. I don't care what they did in the sixteenth century, we're living today.

Chall: Was it something that you had to work out in your mind for quite a while?

Magnin: Well, as I told you, it started with the World War where couples had to be separated and wanted to get married before he went away and maybe got killed. And then later on I began thinking, "Isn't it better to keep them in than it is to kick them out?"

Many rabbis are worried about the survival of the Jewish people. Actually, the Book of Ezra in the Bible is the whole story of Ezra coming back from Babylon, with the Hebrews and all their Babylonian wives. He tried to get them to divorce their wives. Whether they did or not, I don't know, but it didn't kill Jews anyhow. We've gone on. The Bible contains stories about Hebrews that didn't marry Hebrews. Solomon had concubines--a thousand of them. I think one of his favorites was an Egyptian. The point is that we've gone for two thousand years in what they call the galut and there have been intermarriages--people leaving, becoming Christians, everything else--and still we're going on.

I'm not worried about the survival of the Jewish people. The Jewish people will survive because there'll always be enough who have that inherent feeling of sort of a divine destiny and want to be Jews; and anti-Semites will see that we're kept alive, too. There'll be enough of them to do it. So for all these various reasons I have felt that the decent thing is to marry people and not to push them out; to try to hold both of them in and their children if I can.

Magnin: What I won't do is to marry a couple together with a minister of another religion. One very prominent person and a very dear friend of mine wanted me to marry his daughter. She was married on a Saturday, which no rabbi will do anyhow, or should do, and by a Catholic priest in a church. The rabbi (of the town where the groom was from and who had known him all his life) came up. This rabbi, from what I understand, after the priest got through went up and gave the couple a Jewish blessing. This I would not do.

In fact, I went to the reception and was invited to the dinner, although we couldn't stay. But I made it quite clear to the family I couldn't officiate at that kind of wedding for anybody but least of all for one so prominent, because people would be thinking I'm doing it just because of their prominence.

Chall: In a case of a marriage like that, is there any expectation on the part of either the rabbi or the priest about how the children will be reared?

Magnin: Well, we've always asked them--in the case of an intermarriage--if they would bring up children as Jews. The last few years I haven't done that, because they're going to do what they're going to do anyhow. I have no right to bind people. As I say I won't marry them if they have a tendency to belong to another faith. I think I've answered your question.

Chall: Is there much counseling in the Temple? That is, with people who have some kind of problems?

Magnin: Oh, the rabbis get some. Not too much among our own members. There are always some people who have problems. It's generally when some kid goes wrong or something, or they don't get along with their husbands. There's not much of that. Today they run to psychiatrists and ask Dear Abby. I tell them, "I'm your rabee, not Dear Abby. Don't bother me." [Laughter]

Friday Night Services

Guest Speakers

- Chall: I noticed that occasionally you have guests on Friday nights.
- Magnin: Very rarely.
- Chall: In January you had Ariel and Will Durant.
- Magnin: That's because we have a Forum. But the Durants won't speak anymore. We like the Durants and we carry some of their books in our shop. They're friends of mine personally. They wrote two beautiful letters. I don't know if you read the letters yet.
- Chall: No, I haven't.
- Magnin: After I honored them they gave nice little speeches. Esther, my secretary, has copies.
- Chall: Now, you say that having such guests as the Durants on Friday night is unusual?
- Magnin: Very unusual. I don't ask most rabbis to speak here. Once in a while, a visitor, but rarely. They have nothing to say. Why should I ask them?
- Chall: So, you don't really bring in outside speakers?
- Magnin: No, we run our own show. [Laughter]
- Chall: I thought that the Durants were one of a series of speakers.
- Magnin: They were special. Incidentally, Ariel was Jewish, you know. Yes, he mentioned it. He said something-- I forget how he put it, but he intimated it. But she was originally. I don't know what she is now.
- Chall: So, that was part of your Forum?

Magnin:

Well, we had them on Friday night. On one or two Friday nights we did have a Forum speaker instead of having him on Sunday. And then he spoke after I gave the benediction.

The Sermon

Chall:

Could you give me your opinion about what is it you try to get into a sermon?

Magnin:

I don't preach. I hate that word preach. First of all, rabbis never gave sermons, originally. They were judges and gave opinions on the Talmud, and helped solve questions relating to divorces, weddings, and things like that.

There used to be a maged who went around from town to town telling little Jewish stories. The rabbi, about two or three times a year, before the holidays, would explain each holiday with something on the law.

The preaching idea came from the Christians. From the Catholics, to the Protestants, to the Jews. Preaching sermons. They took a text and then twisted it and contorted it and put in three parts. I never used that from the very beginning. I didn't like it. It was boring. It was stupid. It was cliches. I never did that. I either took a book and discussed it, or some idea in a book, or ideas and discussed them. Something pertinent to people's lives.

In other words, you want to give them a certain amount of information on some Biblical material. Actually when people come to a temple they're not going to an academic course. They're coming because they have a certain religious feeling or they wouldn't be there as a rule. So, they must go away with a religious feeling. And that's emotional.

See, when you go to a theater, if you don't come out laughing or crying there is something wrong with the show. And this is called take home pay among the theatrical people. You chew it

Magnin: over on the way home. Say you're thinking of the Death of a Salesman. You think, "Poor fool, it could have been me."

See, this is it. So, when you give a talk from a pulpit you use different material. It's not only that you want to give them information. It's not a study course. You want them to say, "I'm glad I'm a human being, I'm glad I'm a Jew. Life has some meaning to it." Unless you can convey that emotionally . . . I don't mean to be sloppy, but unless they can be touched with laughter and tears somewhere along that line, you've just missed out.

Last week--What did I talk on last Saturday? Oh yes, A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever. I discussed Bezalel who is mentioned in the passage of the week, the great artist who got up things for the tabernacle in the wilderness. I said, "God filled him with the spirit. That's genius. Talent and genius are two different things. Only the genius has that God-given thing."

And then I mentioned the art of the Jews during the Biblical period, the Hellenic period, the Middle Ages. And why they weren't in the plastic arts. And then when they did get in we got Modigliani, Ballin, who did our paintings, Auerbach Levy; I mentioned all the moderns. Then I said, "The greatest art is the art of living and teaching people how to live." And then I read from Heinrich Heine, who said that Moses, who had lived in Egypt, didn't build obelisks or pyramids, but he built a nation out of a few shepherds, and made them a civilized people. And I said, "Before I close, there's another man who taught the art of living, which is a great art. And that's George Washington. He was a brilliant man. He had a lot of plain horse sense. Just read his addresses, particularly his farewell, see how smart he was." And I said, "When I was in the White House I saw the Washington Monument. That's no monument. That's a piece of granite. The monument was his life. Your liberty is his monument." That's what Kosciusko said. "Your freedom is his monument. Your prosperity is his monument." See, A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever. That's the way I talk. That's not the usual sermonic type.

Gerald Heard in *THE HUMAN VENTURE* poses three questions which every man and woman ought to ask themselves. They are: Where are we? What are we? Who are we?

The first question is easier to answer than the other two, which are really one and the same thing.

Where are we? We are on the planet Earth . . . a mere speck of dust, rolling around in space . . . the tiniest among all the billions of heavenly bodies. This would seem to make us feel unimportant, but it doesn't. Actually, in imagination and poetry, the mind can expand to embrace the entire cosmos. And we who believe in God and wonder at the miracle of birth and the miracle of creation and the human mind are not lonesome or insignificant.

We inhabit a little spot of that small planet called the United States. We feel blessed to be able to live here with all its faults. It is still the best place. Our grandparents came over here with nothing but hopes. They fled from foreign lands where persecution and discrimination raised their ugly heads. We live like kings, compared with people in most other countries, and enjoy the fruits of freedom and the right to pursue our several interests unimpeded.

But even with a deep appreciation of our citizenship, we should not be chauvinistic and narrow. Our hearts reach out all over the world. We should appreciate the gifts of all races and nations to civilization and work for universal peace.

The questions—who and what are we?—are not so easily defined. For man is a paradox and a riddle. He is homo sapiens and homo ferociens. He is wise and simple, ingenious and stupid, kind and cruel, heroic and cowardly, moral, immoral and amoral. No two of us are exactly alike. No one of us is the same from one moment to the next. We are complex personalities, a mass of contradictions . . . I am Jekyll and Mr. Hyde . . . the sophisticate and the Cro-Magnon man whose fangs have only one cavity and whose claws are manicured.

If we are to achieve a greater measure of happiness and peace of mind, we have to know ourselves and our fellow men and accordingly. We must be realists, as well as idealists. As Alexander Pope puts it, "The proper study of mankind is man." This is more important than mere book knowledge.

The study of man may be gleaned in various ways. The best way is by experience, in which we exercise observation. Insight and introspection are valuable aids. There are also books on psychology that can be helpful. One of the most valuable is "SPEAKING OF MAN" by Abraham Myerson, a famous psychiatrist, who passed away a number of years ago. In this book, which I have read over and over again, he reminds us of certain pertinent facts.

One is that while we have made progress in many fields, especially the scientific, our minds are limited and we can never know the answers to the eternal mysteries. But we are endowed with intuition, as well as our five senses. We feel what we cannot always demonstrate empirically. This is akin to instinct in animals by which they do things necessary for survival without being able to give reasons.

Our religion is not based on what we know empirically, but what we feel and know without being able to explain as we do in scientific experiments. Our faith in God is based on something far down deep within us. We reach for God as a flower lifts its head to kiss the sun.

This faith adds to our comfort and confidence in life and affords us a meaning for existence. We don't hesitate to use drugs during surgery or crutches when our leg is broken. Why should we turn our backs on any reasonable help in time of trouble? Myerson suggests that man is an emotional being and lives by his feelings. To try to live by cold intellect is to deny a great portion of our very makeup and can result in a lack of mental health.

He also reminds us that we are imperfect beings and Utopia is an impossible dream. It is a challenge . . . a goal. Therefore, we should not expect too much of people. We should try to understand human failings and be tolerant.

On Pesach, we leave an empty chair for Elijah. The door is opened. The cup of wine is ready for him to imbibe. So far he hasn't shown up and probably won't, but the custom is symbolic of a hope for a better society.

Since much of the basic animal instincts remain in man, we must subject ourselves to disciplines. Engines must have brakes. We need laws but we also need inner controls.

Religion furnishes a set of principles, as well as inspiration. That is one of its paramount functions.

Myerson says that we should control our instincts but not crucify them. This is good Jewish philosophy. Our people were never ascetics, barring a few exceptions. We believe that all physical functions are there for a purpose. Sex is not dirty unless we make it so. Adultery, incest, perversion and pornography are the distortions of sex, not the normal or decent expressions.

The secret of a full, rich life is to harmoniously blend the various contradictory sides of our nature. We must use our brains and our hearts. We must be practical and poetic . . . pragmatists and dreamers . . . logical and sensitive . . . realistic and imaginative. As Heine put it, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I?"

Myerson points out the three dimensions of life. The first is length. We can measure our lives by years, but this doesn't say who we are and what we are. The second dimension is satisfaction . . . what we get out of it. The third, and most important, is what we GIVE. ACCOMPLISH AND LOVE. Without these, life is an empty shell. It is meaningless.

Viktor Frankl in *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING* says that he was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp and learned of human nature the hard way. He points out that sometimes struggle can ennoble a person. He underscores the fact that those who had the courage to survive and hold their heads up high had something and somebody to LIVE FOR . . . a job to be finished . . . someone to embrace . . . to love.

He says that when one of the prisoners was released at the advent of the American army, he was wandering down the road and heard a bird singing. This music was a hymn of freedom and praise of God. He knelt down and prayed.

This single act affords us the clue to who we are and what we are . . . also to what we can be and should be.

Chall: Well, you are an unusual man on the pulpit.

Magnin: Well, I'm myself. That's what it is. Well, they don't know how to do this. These fools are still insecure people. They don't know. They learn a routine. That's the difference between originality and being a stuffed shirt.

World War II - USO Chaplain

Chall: I understand that you were a chaplain during World War II?

Magnin: No, I was not in the army. I acted as chaplain for the Jewish Welfare Board during World War I. I was too old for the army in World War II. And though I talked occasionally to army men and navy men, I was not an official chaplain in the army or navy. Never was. In the first World War my son was just about to be born. So at that time I didn't enlist, but I was about to. And then the war was over so that was the end of that.

Chall: What was your work with the Jewish Welfare Board?

Magnin: Well, first of all, I'm on their board even now. In the USO. Oh, I took part in planning and working with them on all sorts of things. I would occasionally go out to the army too and speak there to the boys.

My wife was interested. The University Religious Conference had a group of women who sent presents to the soldiers on Chanukah and Christmas.

And I went up to the Aleutians during the second World War with a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister. That was under the auspices of the Conference of Jews and Christians. We were in the ice and the snow up in the Aleutian Islands. And we talked to thousands of men. They had to come out to hear us, and we had a lot of fun with them.

Magnin:

I wined and dined with the generals and the heads of the navy, the commanders. We were their guests. We had quite a time! It was really beautiful in that country. We used to bounce around in those planes in the wind. I got airsick. I used to take medication for it and go to sleep. I slept on the mail bags, and got all their secrets.

V THE RABBI'S ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE LOS ANGELES
JEWISH COMMUNITY
(Interview 5, March 1, 1973)

Relationships with the Other Rabbis

Chall: I wanted to know something about your relationship with other rabbis in the community.

Magnin: Well, I helped found all the organizations--the Board of Rabbis and the Reform group, but I don't attend their meetings now, and yet I'm friendly with all of them. I have no quarrels and no bad feelings. I think they all like me. Some may be a little jealous.

I told them once, years ago, "I wouldn't blame you for being jealous, but have the good taste not to show it publicly." But they're nice men. They mean well. They're mostly insecure and unhappy men, a lot of them. They do the best they can.

If they ever need me or want me I'm here. As a rule I don't go to their meetings. I'm sick and tired of the things they talk about; it doesn't interest me. I get weary of talk.

I'll tell you a funny thing that happened this week. Did you see the article in Time Magazine in which I was supposed to have criticized the rabbi [Siegel] for reading a particular prayer at the inaugural ceremony?

Chall: What about that prayer?

Magnin: Now here's the story. At Mr. Nixon's first inauguration I gave the prayer. At the second

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NIXON GIVES HIS VICTORY GESTURE AS HE AND PAT MOVE DOWN PARADE ROUTE IN OPEN LIMOUSINE

THE NATION

AMERICAN NOTES

A Kingly Prayer

The prayers at the Presidential Inauguration are meant to be mildly inspiring, a celebration of national virtues. At President Nixon's Inauguration, the Baptist, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox prayers all fitted snugly into this tradition, but the Jewish prayer strayed into unfamiliar terrain. Rabbi Seymour Siegel, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and an ardent Nixon campaign worker, delivered a prayer that is customarily reserved for the presence of kings. Its text: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast given us of thy glory and flesh and blood."

The unusual use of the prayer troubled Reform Rabbi Edgar Magnin, who also participated in the Inaugural celebration. "This blessing," the rabbi commented, "reflects the age of monarchy, when a king was high and mighty and you kowtowed to him. There's nothing in it that could apply to an elected official." Nobody is ever high and mighty in a democracy, of course, and nobody ever kowtows in Washington.

Aside from its intimations of monarchy, though, Rabbi Siegel's prayer was appropriate to Inaugural traditions. Said he: "We need harmony, vision, peace to be able to fulfill our responsibilities to You and to our fellow men."

Alienation Revisited

Is the American worker—blue-collar and white-collar alike—bored with his job and alienated? So it is often said, most recently by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, which reported that only 25% of the workers it polled were satisfied and would choose the same kind of job again.

Actually, both the polls and the interpretation are misleading, according to Irving Kristol, Henry R. Luce Professor of Urban Values at New York University. "About 85% of American workers, when asked whether they are satisfied with their jobs, answer in the affirmative," he wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*. "[HEW] tries to show that they don't mean what they say. Thus if an employee tells an interviewer that he finds his work satisfying but also that he would like to change his job for something better, [HEW] concludes that he is 'alienated' from his work. One gets the firm impression that the authors of this study believe that to have unfulfilled aspirations, to daydream, to engage in wishful thinking, or to express regret for lost opportunities (real or imaginary) is less than human. It also apparently never occurs to them that it is utopian to expect ordinary working people to be as content as the most successful surgeon or lawyer. Why should they be? How could they be? Where and when have they ever been?"

En Garde!

The French last week declared war on the English language. Worried about the incursions of terms like *le whisky* and *le weekend*, the government banned 350 offenders from official usage and urged the French to drop them from everyday currency as well. In place of the Anglicisms, the government proposed French substitutes. *Flashback*, for example, can be replaced by *rétrospectif*; *hit parade* will succumb to *palmarès* (literally, prize list); *one-man show* will be rendered *spectacle solo*; *tanker* will become *navire citerne*.

Frenchmen sincerely believe that their language, logical and precise, is the foundation of their civilization. They are especially worried, now that Britain has joined the Common Market, that English, rather than French, will become the primary language of European commerce and technology.

But the French may forget that the Anglo-Americans could engage in that traditional tactic known as *la riposte*. Comfortably embedded in the English language are many French phrases that could be driven out. In the art of politics, *coup d'état* might be replaced by *kayo*, *laissez-faire* by *leave it alone* and *chauvinist* by *superpatriot*. In the art of love, *soirée* would give way to the *bash*, *rendezvous* to *date* and *femme fatale* to *sexpot*. As for *savoir-faire*—cool, man. But then, *plus ça change...*

Magnin:

inauguration I spoke at a prayer service in the White House with Billy Graham and the Most Reverend Joseph L. Bernardin, Archbishop of Cincinnati. Now at this second inauguration, Rabbi Seymour Siegel, whom I don't know personally, is supposed to have quoted a prayer that Jews recited when they met a king or when a king came on the throne. I forget which. And at the prayer service, one of the press--I think he was from Time Magazine--asked me what I thought about Rabbi Siegel's remark. Well, I hadn't heard it. So when they told me that he mentioned the prayer about a king, I said, "Well, we have no kings, and we don't have to kowtow to a king." The way it was written up in Time, it looked as though I had criticized him, which really I hadn't.

He never said anything about it although I had intended to write and explain when the article came out. Meanwhile another rabbi whom I don't know--never heard of him, probably never will again--criticized me in one of the letters to Time Magazine, and he said that it's just like Rabbi Magnin He made it seem as though I had wanted to insult Rabbi Siegel. And just recently Rabbi Siegel wrote a very nice letter to me, so in answering him I could explain my position.

[Esther Lewis reads correspondence between Rabbi Siegel and Rabbi Magnin.]

"Dear Rabbi Magnin, I read your speech at the White House, and I thought that your words were very apt. Congratulations"

"Dear Rabbi Siegel, Thanks so much for your gracious note. I had intended to write you and explain the misunderstanding due to the exaggeration of the reporter of Time Magazine. Regretfully, I didn't get to hear your prayer as we were tied up in traffic and couldn't arrive on time at the Inauguration. I have a vague recollection of one of the many reporters at the White House asking me about a prayer for a king; and my saying something to the effect that we don't have any king. Thereupon he made a big tsimmes out of it and pictured me as being troubled by your remarks. Even if I had disagreed with what you said, I would not embarrass a colleague, especially since I occupied the same position at President Nixon's

- Magnin: first inauguration. I do hope to have the pleasure of meeting you sometime. If you come by this way again, be my guest at lunch if we can possibly arrange it."
- Chall: You were the first president, and the only president for almost twenty years, of the Board of Rabbis in Southern California. Could you tell me why this was organized? This was a board of all the rabbis in all the denominations?
- Magnin: Yes, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox. See, in those days we had maybe ten rabbis. Today you've got a hundred. It's a different thing entirely. And we all knew each other. We used to meet here in the old board room of the Temple.
- And I stayed on as president to keep it under control. Then I thought, why should I keep it forever? So I said to Rabbi Jacob Kohn of Sinai who was Conservative, "Jacob, you take it."
- Chall: What was the purpose of the meetings while you were there? Why did you help found it? Why did you stay in it as president?
- Magnin: Probably because they wanted me. They wanted me to lead it, being the most prominent rabbi. In the old days sometimes we would just talk about some of the events that were happening like when the King of Kings came, and we discussed it. Nothing much to talk about; to get together more than anything.
- Chall: Did you air any kinds of concerns that might be coming up?
- Magnin: There wasn't much. We didn't have many problems in those days.

Critique of the Rabbinical Conference

- Chall: What about the organizations of Reform rabbis here in the Los Angeles area?

Magnin: I started some of them. At first I took a little interest in them, and then I got away from them.

First of all they have meetings when they have a convention, generally out of town, and I used to like to let Rabbi Wolf go. Let the younger man go to their meetings.

But, frankly, I'm not interested in the subjects they talk about. It seems to me that they're not down to earth. I can't quite make them out. They pick up what I call religious fads. That's been my criticism of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. They're fads. They're transient.

They don't deal with the vitals, with the guts. This is what I can't take. They're good people. They mean well, I suppose. It gives them an excuse to get away from the congregations and get a free ride to Portland, or Los Angeles, or something. That's what most of those conventions are about anyhow.

Chall: I noted in your scrapbook that you did speak before two conferences of the Central Conference of American Rabbis--one in 1951, and one in 1956. The programs were quite lengthy; several days of all kinds of forums and speeches. What did they accomplish?

Magnin: They never accomplish very much, except for the men to get together. The Atlantic City Conference in 1956 was a little bit unusual. They had four or five of us speak. One on the Sunday services, one on the Friday services, one on this, and one on that. I remember. I had them all laughing. I'm trying to think what the subject was.

Chall: You spoke on the use of the radio.

Magnin: Oh yes, the use of the radio. I was on radio network year after year. I had a tremendous audience. People still say, "Why don't you go back?" The oldtimers. But radio today has so many programs. In Bakersfield, they used to hold back the show in the picture theater because people wanted to hear this broadcast.

Chall: They were staying home to hear it?

Magnin: Yes. The porters on the trains and the black people in the boxcars, they would tell me. It was a tremendous audience.

And I used to talk on everything. Essentially to me everything is religious. Everything comes under the head of religion. It's like everything comes under the head of art, anyway you want to look at it, or philosophy.

So, I would sometimes take biblical themes, talmudic themes, speak on Socrates, on Plato, on Aristotle, on anything I felt like talking about. Because that's all grist to the mill. You can't just bring Noah out on that gangplank every week. You've got to give people something different.

And I, myself, wanted to grow intellectually. I didn't just want to stay and poke my nose in one Book all the time. Incidentally, speaking about the Book. I'll show you something. Shut that off for a second. [Rabbi takes down from the shelf a leather-bound copy of the Torah, autographed and sent to him by President Nixon to thank him for his participation at the inaugural prayer breakfast, January, 1973.]

Chall: Now, you say that these conferences don't really serve much of a purpose except to let the rabbis get away and visit with each other. What purpose are they supposed to serve?

Magnin: That's true of all conventions. When the lawyers have a convention they talk about changing laws. And when the plumbers or morticians meet, they figure on techniques and how to do more business. Well, rabbis don't do that. It's either a theological subject they're talking about, or will the Jews survive, and intermarriage, and all this business. All this is a lot of talk because if we're going to survive we'll survive. Their talk isn't going to help it or stop it.

I don't know. Anything that happens to be au courant in Jewish religion, of course, they manage to drag in. Well, I read all that in the Jewish press. I'm not interested in going to any

Magnin: so-called learned talks of pedantic nonsense. I mean, they don't say anything.

I'll show you what fools they are. Here, I've been a very fortunate person. I haven't been successful because I'm so wonderful; I've just been lucky. And here I've been at one pulpit for fifty-seven years; most congregations try to get rid of their rabbis in fifty-seven months. And you'd think that when they do have a meeting they would say, "Why don't you come and tell us how you do it?"

Not that I could tell them, or necessarily would tell them everything. But they might say, "Here's a man that's as alive at eighty-two as he was at forty-five, let's get the secret of this thing. What do you do to achieve this tremendous success?" Never would occur to them. See, either they're petty, or they think they're perfect, or they don't want to admit that they're not. I don't know what it is.

I read a paper years and years ago in Detroit at a conference. Funny how I saw far ahead. You can see it in the conference record. I said then that the function of the conference was to say how you could improve the synagogue, and the rabbinate, and make it effective and beautiful and interesting. These were the things you should touch on rather than matters on the periphery. See, even then I said that.

So, I get a little bit disgusted about it and I don't go. But I like them. They're nice men, most of them.

Some Thoughts About Success in the Rabbinate

Chall: If you were to be asked the question that you just posed, what do you think you would tell them?

Magnin: Whatever they would want me to talk about.

Chall: I mean about your success. About the reasons why you have been successful.

Magnin: Well, first of all, you can't tell everybody everything; you have to be gifted with certain things; let's face it. I could study the violin for twenty-five years and never be a Heifitz. See, this is a gifted man. You have to have certain natural born gifts.

But with what you have you can develop. For one thing, it's my common theme all through life-- plain common sense has a lot to do with things. Take people as they are, and deal with them as they are, and try to understand them, and try to give them something they can feel. When they go to a temple, to a service, they must come out touched. If they don't come out laughing or crying, then there's something wrong. The pulpit is a work of art, just like making a painting, or sculpture, or dancing, or anything in music. It's an art. And you have to be born to it. And every generation has its great men. Men like Silver, and Stephen Wise, and Emil Hirsch who inspired me. In every generation there are one or two.

Chall: But there are Jewish communities all over the country and they have their little organizations, and they need rabbis. So, even the ungifted ones need to work in ways in which they feel satisfaction.

Magnin: Many of them are adequate. Possibly because they're not artists they resort to this activist philosophy, trying to stick their nose into every type of labor union and everything else. Sometimes they may be right and sometimes they may not be right. But the point is that this is a substitute, I'm sure, for a deep faith and the ability to transmit it, and make the people feel it when you give it. So, they have no satisfaction.

They get up in the pulpit to empty houses. But there were always empty houses. The synagogue isn't getting worse. It's always been that way. Who's going to go every single week to listen to the same person? Why would you go see the same picture show every week?

So, they get discouraged, and they want to get their names in the paper, and they feel they

Magnin: have a job to do. And so, becoming a prophet--what they call this prophetic thing--becomes the surrogate. Well, actually they're not prophets.

One of the men who is one of the greatest activists--he's in all the stuff, parades and everything--he's a terrific snob. Even among Jewish people. He goes with a little set. Most of these rabbis are not even kind to the men who work for them.

So, what do they mean by justice? For the miner and not for the man who works for you? Why not for both? So, that's why I say that they're phonies. They don't mean to be. They don't think. They don't analyze.

Rabbis Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver

Chall: What about your relationship with other rabbis around the country like Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver?

Magnin: I knew Stephen Wise very well, and he was very fond of me. I liked Stephen. He had a little demagogic touch in him, but he was brilliant, and in the main forthright. I liked him very much. I admired him.

I helped him get some money for his college, which was then rivaling my own. He came out here and he said [imitating Wise's deep voice], "How do you like the Jewish Institute?" And I told him, "I'll tell you the truth. The only trouble with your college is that you're going to graduate men who are going to imitate your voice and your chutzpa without your charm, without your ability." This is exactly what happened, with some exceptions.

Silver was a contemporary. He came out a year later than I did. We used to take some courses together in the Hebrew Union College. Abba was a most exceptional man. We were very good friends. But nobody could be really close to Abba. He took himself too seriously. He put himself on

Magnin: a pedestal and was always doing an act. He was an orator of the old type, but a good one. And he was more than an orator. It wasn't just his voice, or vocabulary. He had something to say.

Of course, he was a dedicated Zionist and he gave a lot of time and energy to that. But he was very capable. I respected Silver.

Chall: Can you tell me more about Stephen Wise?

Magnin: Stephen was a very human man, very human. You know, he used to be a rabbi in Portland first, then he went to New York. And I spoke for him at Carnegie Hall. While the choir was playing he turned to me and said, "Edgar, how do you like the Free Synagogue?" [Imitates his voice.] I said, "It isn't free and it isn't a synagogue. It's like the Holy Roman Empire; it wasn't holy, it wasn't Roman and it wasn't . . . " And he said, "Shah, shah, shah, shah, shah." But I never was under his spell like other people.

Chall: What did he have in mind with his separate college?

Magnin: Well, he hated the other bunch. He was going to be the president of a college, too.

I'll tell you where he did wrong. You see, his theory was you go to a college and you can be any kind of rabbi you want when you get out--Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, anything you want. And it was all Zionistic. So, his men got out. That's why you've got so much of these monkeyshines today. One wants guitars on the pulpit, and the other one wants a dance with seven veils. You see, he should have had either Reform, or Orthodox, or Conservative; he didn't. His theory was, you become a rabbi and go wherever you can get a job.

Later on, he got old, and they needed money and he couldn't go around anymore; that's when he had a lot of alumni who were fighting with the HUC alumni and the conference [of rabbis]--at least there was tension. So, the two colleges became one and we took it over.

Chall: But, do you think that during the period that it was an active college, and graduating rabbis, that

Chall: there was an uncertain sense of where they were going?

Magnin: Yes. He turned out some very fine men like Philip Bernstein in Rochester, like Louis Newman. Oh, I guess he maybe turned out a lot of others; I can't think of them. But, there was a certain looseness about it that I don't think was good. And now our college is getting the same way. They run around with yarmulkes on and anything they want. You don't need two colleges anymore. Actually, we could band together; there's only one Jewish history.

Mordecai Kaplan and Reconstruction

Chall: What were your relationships, if any, with Mordecai Kaplan?

Magnin: Mordecai Kaplan I've seen very little of. First of all, he's in another group. It's such a big city, and I have so much to do to keep up with my own commitments. You can't get close to too many people too long.

But once one of the Jewish magazines of the more intellectual type had a series of articles on Reconstruction. And they wanted me to write. And I said, "If you let me put it in one sentence, I will."

Chall: I have seen the sentence. Can you repeat what you said?

Magnin: Yes. It was sandwiched right in between all the articles. It said, "Reconstructionism is ghettoism without God."

Chall: What do you mean by that?

Magnin: I mean this: that he wants an emphasis on everything that is Jewish--not only religious, but what they would call a Jewish culture, a Jewish life, this ethnic emphasis. And everything must be very Jewish; but his theology and concepts are very weak. You

- Magnin: can believe in anything you want. You don't have to believe in God at all. It's more ethnic than it is religious.
- Chall: They wouldn't accept this opinion from you without fighting back a bit, would they?
- Magnin: No. Nobody commented on it. I wouldn't care if they did.
- Chall: But you do feel that it doesn't have any merit?
- Magnin: I'm not a ghetto Jew. I'm deeply Jewish. I was raised at a Conservative shul with an Orthodox one downstairs. And from a kid I was raised in that atmosphere.

But San Francisco was small and there were very few Jews. We didn't run around the streets with yarmulkes on. We didn't even have yarmulkes. That's Polish. That comes from Poland to Brooklyn to Los Angeles.

I wore a hat when I prayed. The rest of the time I didn't. I was raised in a home that was fairly Conservative, but very inconsistent. My grandmother had kosher meat, and tamales--which probably had lard in them--and oysters. But I was raised in a Conservative shul with a very deep Jewish feeling. That's why I became a rabbi.

Then as I grew older I began to see that it's a big world. It's the old story about the goose that gets out of the yard. I'm interested in Spanish literature; I'm interested in French literature, in modern painting, in Rembrandt. I'm interested in everything. I can't go home again. I can't go back to my great-grandfather's life in Poland, and the other one from Holland. I can't do this.

I live day by day. I like people. Only last night I got a call from the president of one of the biggest banks representing one of the top organizations in the city--made up of people who run this town. He said, "Edgar, we had a board meeting and this is what we decided on . . . " I'm not supposed to know this, but they're presenting me with a watch. They're honoring me.

Magnin: You see, these are the people that most Jews don't even know, or meet, or hear about. They read about them in the paper; that's all.

Beautiful people. Why should I go around trying to cut myself off? Living behind a wall? They know I'm Jewish. They know I'm a rabbi. They know that I don't go to a Christian church. But for God's sakes, I'm living in America. I have to be a part of my environment.

Not that I would go to Israel or some other place. I see they're having a lot of trouble. I looked in the paper this morning and I see they're having prostitution, mugging, and everything else. And the fights that they would have between themselves, I'm sorry to say, if the Arabs ever stopped. If I felt that deep I would go to Israel. I don't want any ghettos here for myself.

Chall: And you think the Reconstruction people would bring in ghettos?

Magnin: Well, it's an extreme. The point is that they want to be one hundred percent Jewish. I don't think you can be that in America, anymore than an Arab in Israel can be one hundred percent Arab. He's still an Arab, and yet he's got to live with the Israelis and he's got to get along with them. One may be a Jew without assuming a ghetto psychology.

Relationships with Religious Institutions

The College of Jewish Studies

Chall: Could I get from you some of the background of the College of Jewish Studies? You were founding president in 1947.

Magnin: I was the first president of it. Out of that came the Los Angeles branch of the Hebrew Union College.

Chall: The College of Jewish Studies was founded for what purpose?

- Magnin: Well, you see, the city grew and the Jewish population increased.
- Chall: This was just after the war, wasn't it?
- Magnin: Yes. And Reform Judaism wanted to have a place where people could study Judaism. And that's how it started. And later on it became the California branch of the Hebrew Union College.
- Chall: It started, though, not necessarily to train rabbis, but for adult education and teacher-training.
- Magnin: Yes. Teacher-training, more for Sunday schools and religious schools.
- Chall: Who were Rabbi Phinias Smoller and a man named Zelden? Was he a rabbi too?
- Magnin: Yes. They worked for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Smoller, I respected highly. He was a wonderful man.
- Chall: And they were with the UAHC. Their role here was to do what?
- Magnin: To get money for the UAHC. Nominally they were supposed to help Reform Judaism. I think the UAHC has done more harm to Reform Judaism than help. And that's a long story.
- Chall: Yes. Well, we're going to get into that thoroughly. Was there a little building in the Hollywood hills--on Appian Way?
- Magnin: Well, first they used our building for everything. They still did up until a year ago for some courses. That Union did. But up in the Hollywood hills when they became the college, or a branch of the college--I used to call it rattlesnake gulch.

They went up there and at first people in the neighborhood didn't want it. It wasn't a very fancy neighborhood. Anyhow, it's up in the hills, very beautiful.

The zoning commission wasn't going to let them have it. Jack Skirball was on the board of the college, and he and I went down to appeal to the

Magnin: city fathers about the zoning commission decision. And some woman got up and she made a speech. She said, in effect, she's a neighbor, she's not anti-Semitic, but they didn't want to be disturbed, and so on.

So, I got up and I said, "Well, your words are not anti-Semitic but your voice is. That's more important than what you said. Would you rather have a cat on a hot tin roof or a cantor singing a religious song? Which would you like?" They all laughed and the city fathers passed it.

I never liked the place. I never believed that it was a good place. I was afraid to go up there.

Chall: That was the one on Appian Way?

Magnin: Yes. Now they have this very lovely place down across from SC. [University of Southern California]

Hebrew Union College--California Campus

Chall: How did it happen that a site was picked at USC?

Magnin: They wanted a tie-up with the university. The courses are interchangeable. They get some credits and can use the library. I think they like that idea. In Cincinnati they were across from the University of Cincinnati. Only there wasn't any co-relationship when I went there. They were separate. I'd go to the university in the morning and the college in the afternoon.

But at SC between Dr. Topping, former president and now chancellor, and now Dr. Hubbard, who is president, and HUC there is a very warm relationship. Which is nice. That way by being near a university I think they hope to get students who would go into the rabbinate.

Chall: Are they getting them?

Magnin: I understand so. I hope they turn out better than

Magnin: a lot of others; although there are no wicked ones, just mediocrities. I guess that's in every field. I don't know. If they get one good one in a hundred years they're doing well. We can support them.

Chall: So, this was a tremendous move. Six million dollars I read, and maybe more for the California campus. There's an Edgar F. Magnin school of Graduate Studies.

Magnin: It's been successful. And I'll tell you who is raising a lot of money. Dr. Topping, who used to be the president of SC. Some of my Christian friends like Henry Salvatori, Edwin Pauley, Leonard Firestone, of the Firestone tire people, are giving money. They're not through yet.

They're going to have some sort of an affair in, I think, spring or fall, in which they want to honor me. They hope by that time to raise about a half a million. Anyhow they named the thing after me. So what! When I die they'll take it off the wall. So, who cares? I won't worry about it.

Chall: Well, in the old Appian Way school they had a library with your name.

Magnin: That's gone. That's the world. You expect this.

Chall: How does the school here fit in with HUC in Cincinnati?

Magnin: It's a branch of the seminary, except that they don't give them the rabbi's degree, they have a doctor's degree. They prepare them to go to Cincinnati and New York. But, they also have sociological courses and Judaism. They're branching out with all kinds of monkeybusiness now.

The one who was the dean here is now the president of the college in Cincinnati [Fred Gottschalk]. As a matter of fact, he wanted to bring it out here and close the Cincinnati school. But there was too much pressure. Big buildings and all. But Cincinnati has how many Jews? Fifteen thousand, twenty thousand? We've got half a million here.

- Chall: The school here, the Edgar Magnin school will be a graduate school?
- Magnin: The Edgar Magnin Graduate School of the Hebrew Union College--the California School of Hebrew Union College.
- Chall: Who's supposed to go to the school, and what's its purpose?
- Magnin: Anybody that takes graduate courses there. They may be Gentiles, they may be Jews, they may be rabbis, future rabbis.
- Chall: So, it's a graduate school of religion.
- Magnin: Of Semitic studies, and religion, and any Jewish studies.
- Chall: I noticed some names that appeared over and over again in the material about the leadership of the HUC, locally. Some of these people like Jack Skirball, whom you mentioned a few minutes ago, and Dr. George Piness, took active roles for years.
- Magnin: Yes. Well, Dr. Piness was president of the Temple for years.
- Chall: That's right. And why would he assume such a major role then in the HUC?
- Magnin: Well, because they're Jews and they're interested in helping Reform Judaism. They're religious people, in that sense, at least. They would help any of the Jewish causes. But they were active in Reform Judaism. Skirball, particularly, that's been his baby. See, he graduated as a rabbi. He served somewhere as a rabbi for a number of years. Then he had two brothers in the motion picture business. One of them died and then Jack took over and went into the motion picture business. But he has always been very devoted, you see.
- Chall: I see. That's his reason.
- Magnin: Oh yes, sure.

Chall: And Dr. Piness out of generosity?

Magnin: Well, he'd always been a good Jew. And he was a good citizen. He helped St. Anne's, the Catholics. He was a pillar of strength there. And he had always done these things.

Chall: But to be a practicing physician, president of the Temple board here, and also on the national executive board of HUC, takes quite a bit of time and energy.

Magnin: And he also was in Catholic Aid, in the Community Chest, in all these things.

Chall: What was your relationship with Nelson Glueck?

Magnin: Nelson Glueck was very fine. He was an archaeologist. A very fine gentleman. And we worked hand-in-hand on everything. We never had any problems.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregation is different stuff.

[Interruption]

Chall: Did you teach at all in any of these institutions?

Magnin: Oh yes. I was a professor of homiletics, which is supposed to be preaching. Once or twice a year, I would go out there and get them around a table and just talk to them. I'd go down there and analyze what homiletics is all about. What are you trying to do? What is a sermon anyhow? How do you go about it?

And I would listen to some of their stuff. I would say, "Why should a person come out on a rainy night to listen to this? What have you said to either instruct them or inspire them? All you're doing is pulling old cliches out of the hat, and telling them to be good Jews, and they know that." That's how I would talk with them.

Then once in a while I would have them at my home. Dr. Barth asked me if I would do it again this year. Once a year I would have some of the graduating kids come out here and they'd sit all over the place. They could ask me anything they

Magnin: want, personal or otherwise. They like that.

Chall: Yes, that's the practical end of it.

Magnin: Right. The rabbinate is a leadership job, not a Hebrew job. I said to the dean today, "Teach them not to be bores."

Chall: Do you think it has changed at all, the rabbinical training, from what it was when you were at HUC?

Magnin: Oh, I think it has to some extent. I don't think it's the training as much as the attitudes. They run around, some look like they're Orthodox, some look like they're hippies, I don't know. But, they tell me they're nice fellows.

Chall: I know there's been a great change in the Hebrew Union College. I understand they even have a kosher table in Cincinnati. That's what I heard recently.

Magnin: I never heard about that. I'd move the whole library out here. But they have to do it carefully. Another generation will die off. They're not ready yet.

I went to Cincinnati and I liked it. That's where I got my wife.

Chall: That's pretty good.

Magnin: It was good to me.

University of Judaism

Chall: What about the other college here, the Conservative University of Judaism?

Magnin: Well, they have their own school and I don't know much about them to tell you the truth. They are good advertisers; I don't know whether they spend more on advertising than they get, or what it is. I wanted the two to join together and they wouldn't do it.

Magnin: In fact, once when I was in New York, I was speaking at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative group. While I was away they started their school here. They invited me to speak there and when I got out of town they started it here. [Chuckles] And I wanted them both to get together. I said, "What do you need two colleges for? Hebrew is the same; Jewish history is the same; the Talmud is the same. The only thing of difference is whether you want this ritual or that ritual. You can teach both of them. What the hell do you need two for?" Well, it's vested interest.

So, what are you going to do with people? The same way with our defense agencies. We have about eight different defense agencies when one would be enough, or two at the most.

Chall: Everyone feels his own sense of identity.

Magnin: Yes.

B'nai B'rith Lodge

Chall: You were very active for a time with the B'nai B'rith.

Magnin: I was grand-president of the lodge.

Chall: That was in 1928?

Magnin: Whatever it was. At first I was grand-orator. They used to have a position of grand-orator. And he used to go around with the president making speeches, all through the district. And then I became grand-president of the lodge.

Chall: Were you the president at one time of the local lodge?

Magnin: I don't think so, no. I still remember Judge Golden of San Francisco. He was very active. He said to me, "I wouldn't want a rabbi doing that, but you're the exception. I don't think a rabbi should be president of the grand lodge, but . . ."

Magnin: I don't know what he had in mind, anyhow, he said, ". . . for you it's different."

Chall: But, almost directly behind you among grand lodge officers was Rabbi Samuel Koch of Seattle.

Magnin: He was never grand-president. No, no. I think I was the only rabbi. Jonah B. Wise, maybe. When he was in Portland. I'm not sure. He would have been the only other exception, I think.

Chall: As you look back on it, what did the B'nai B'rith as an organization mean to you, that you would take on this responsibility?

Magnin: Well, in those days there were fewer Jewish organizations. And there was no Israel. Everything was more or less local or national. And B'nai B'rith was sort of a meeting place where the Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, and Jews who believe in little or nothing and don't join anything, could come together.

It was partly a social organization, all those things are. There was the Anti-Defamation League, I was interested in that. And in protecting the Jewish name. There was Hillel, which I'm not so happy about now, but which I thought was doing a good job then. It was representative. We had very few organizations. It isn't like today when you've got a million of them. A hundred auxiliaries for Israel and everything else.

Chall: I have a quotation here and I wonder if you will respond to it? "As the conduit for bringing new personages to the foreground of Jewish communal affairs, the Los Angeles Lodge #487, outdistanced the synagogues and the Zionists. Los Angeles Jewry's representative figures of the 1930s were raised in B'nai B'rith of the 1910s and the 1920s."*

Magnin: That was largely so. You can take it with a grain of salt. They had nothing else to join. It was either the synagogue or B'nai B'rith. There were no other organizations. The charities, of course, but nothing else.

*Max Vorspan and Lloyd P. Gartner, History of the Jews of Los Angeles (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970), p. 218.

- Chall: There is an article in the B'nai B'rith Messenger of July 20, 1928, at the time when you assumed the presidency. You said you were concerned with educating the Jew about his own background and culture, because knowledge is the only thing that will re-suscitate Jewish life. As grand-president you said your aim was to arouse interest in Jewish education, to work with other rabbis to prepare material to use in B'nai B'rith meetings. You pledged to use your year as president to educate about Jewish history and philosophy and gain some sense of meaning to being a Jew. Do you recall this sense of mission?
- Magnin: Yes. That's fairly correct.
- Chall: I took it out of your scrapbook.
- Magnin: Well, then I must have said it. I guess at the time it applied, probably. Things are different today. I don't think any lodges are growing today. There are many other things. The lunch clubs and all these various competing organizations.
- Chall: I guess every one of them gives a person an outlet to respond to Judaism in his own way.
- Magnin: Yes. You know, yesterday--speaking of activities--yesterday I was at ASCAP [American Association of Composers and Producers]. They got out a new stamp in honor of George Gershwin. I spoke at his original memorial, you know, coast-to-coast. And they had a ceremony with the United States government down at the Beverly Hilton here. See, none of the rabbis in town would even be asked to this thing. They wouldn't even think of them. That's part of this deal. This is a relationship. You have to understand it.
- Chall: You mean primarily with ASCAP?
- Magnin: With any of these things. When they wanted somebody, New York wrote and asked that I should do it. They wanted a rabbi and didn't consider any one of them.
- Chall: Are you saying that rabbis just wouldn't be a part of this kind of activity?

- Magnin: They just don't think of them in that connection. They think of a cardinal and one rabbi, that's all they think of. Not even a Protestant minister. This is it. That's the way they are.
- Chall: Who are they?
- Magnin: The community. Everybody. Nationally.
- Chall: There's always going to be only one major rabbi in every community?
- Magnin: It seems that way for one reason or another, yes. Well, it was Stephen Wise in his day, and Silver, in a certain sense.

Zionism

- Chall: Well, speaking of Rabbis Wise and Silver, let's talk about Zionism.
- Magnin: The average Reform rabbi had nothing to do with it, was afraid of it, didn't like it. I was never a crusader, but I brought great Zionist speakers here. I always helped it.
- This was before Hitler. I felt that there had to be some place in the world where some Jews could live. Now, how that's going to turn out only the future will tell. But this is it. So, I never was opposed to it, and I've even backed it.
- But many people don't know that, and they probably think I'm either opposed to it or indifferent, which isn't true.
- Chall: That's why we want to get it on the record.
- Magnin: As a matter of fact, the Zionists are having me as a guest of honor at their twenty-fifth anniversary here. They're having a big banquet and I'm to be their guest of honor.
- Chall: Do you mean the Zionist Organization of America?

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin

Spiritual leader of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple . . .

Leader of his community . . .

Servant of his people . . .

A strong voice for Israel . . .

Eloquent spokesman for justice for all peoples . . .

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The Southern Pacific Region Zionist Organization of America

On its 75th Anniversary

and on the 25th Anniversary of the State of Israel

invites you to join in a tribute to

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin

for his six decades of dedicated service,

Wednesday evening, May 30, 1973

Reception 6:30 P.M. Dinner 7:00 P.M.

in the International Ballroom of the

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Couvert:

\$12.50 per person

\$125.00 per table

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Black Tie optional

Magnin: I guess this is the Los Angeles one.

Chall: In the days when you were a part of whatever the local Zionist organization was, this was unusual for a Reform rabbi?

Magnin: Yes, it was.

Chall: Did you then, or did you later, get any opposition from members of your board? Or members of the congregation?

Magnin: Never once. Not by a single soul. Nor have I ever had any opposition in the fifty-seven or -eight years in the Temple from the board on anything. On anything. There's never been an argument. There's never been a quarrel. They've never said don't or do. And everything I've ever asked, they do. And most things they want to do before I ask. There's never been a problem. Never been a problem.

Chall: You were completely free.

Magnin: Absolutely.

Chall: I did notice that there were members of your own congregation--the leaders, like Dr. Edelman and Marco Newmark--who were favorable to the Zionist position.

Magnin: Well, I got Marco interested. Edelman was very Jewish at heart. I got Marco interested.

Chall: I thought it might have been the other way around.

Magnin: No, I got Marco interested. I got him involved in it.

Chall: Wasn't he the first president of the Nathan Straus Society for the Advancement of Palestine?

Magnin: Yes, Nathan Straus. But that was a little organization that raised some money for something--I don't know what it was--in Israel.

Chall: I'm interested in the leadership because I didn't know whether they had brought you along or vice-versa.

Magnin: No. In those days there were a handful of Zionists. They were a little Yiddish-speaking group. But they were an insignificant little group. Nobody paid any attention to them.

In San Francisco when I was a kid there were two women, two sisters, who were Zionists. I didn't know any others.

Chall: Who were Drs. George Saylin and Louis Reynolds?

Magnin: Saylin wasn't a member of our Temple. He was an eastside Jew. But he was very active in all these different things.

Chall: And Dr. Louis Reynolds, was he a member?

Magnin: Reynolds, for a short time was a member of our Temple and then he went to Sinai. Actually, he was a rabbi and I studied with him in San Francisco. When I was a kid I took some lessons from him. But he became a doctor. He went to Sacramento, officiated, studied medicine, and then came down here as a doctor. But he leaned more toward Conservatism and was much more of a Zionist than I would be.

Chall: And Theodore Strimling?

Magnin: Strimling was a nice little man. None of those belonged to our Temple. His widow still lives.

Chall: Aaron Riche.

Magnin: Aaron Riche is now a member of the Temple in the last few years. He's a sweet man. He was secretary of everything. There wasn't a meeting that Aaron wasn't there. He was God's representative.

Chall: He told me, though, that when he came to the community you told him that if he wanted to hold Zionist meetings in the Temple, that the Temple was open to him.

Magnin: Sure, I always let him alone, sure.

Chall: He remembers it though with real feeling.

Magnin: He's a sweet man. I used to call him God's shamus. Because we couldn't have a meeting without Aaron.

Magnin: He was a character. You'll never see his like again. [Laughter]

I began getting prominent Zionist speakers you see, when they would come to town; I didn't bring them here. And then they had a dinner for me in New York; Lipsky wanted me to be their rabbinical representative like Abba Hillel Silver became later. And I said I wouldn't do it. I said, "Let me work my own way through the back door. I can go to a dinner party and do you more good than riding on a white horse. I don't want any orders. You people don't want a leader, you want followers, and you'll send me a wire to boycott the City Hall and I won't do it. I don't want any orders from you. I'll work my own way, I'll help you."

I didn't want to go around to different towns speaking every night, staying in strange hotels. I don't like this kind of life, I don't need it. I mind my own business here, and that's why our Temple is what it is.

Chall: Some people think that you were a bridge between the Reform non-Zionist-thinking people and the Zionists.

Magnin: That's really so. I understand both people and both sides. And I think I have the respect of both of them. Except for a few extremes, maybe.

For instance, they're going to honor me on their twenty-fifth anniversary. And, yet, I'm not an ardent active Zionist. I don't go into this. They also know that I'm a bridge between the Jews and the non-Jewish community. They know that too.

Chall: I see that in terms of your Zionist activities it went from working for the Nathan Straus Society to . . .

Magnin: Nathan Straus came out here. That's how they started that. And, incidentally, he came to the City of Hope. It wasn't the great big thing it is today--an international organization. It was a little bitty thing run by a few Jews. They had a little cottage. They had a picture of an ostrich on it. Straus means ostrich in German. [Laughs]

Magnin: So, they painted an ostrich on the front of it, instead of his picture. [Laughter] It was funny.

Chall: In 1919 you were chairman of a mass meeting sponsored by the Zionist organization to protest against Arab atrocities.

Magnin: There was always a protest against somebody; something was always bothering the Jews. We used to have meetings, mass meetings, at the Philharmonic, or down at the Shrine. Aaron was always there. He was the one who made all the arrangements; had the lead pencils all ready.

Chall: Did you know Louis Marshall at all? Did you meet him?

Magnin: I met him, but that's all. Louis Marshall was, I think, president of Temple Emmanu-El in New York. When they put up the building he didn't even ask the rabbis. He was sort of an arrogant--not mean--but snobbish, arrogant, stuffed shirt, type of Jew. He'd always help the Jews out; he would help the eastside Jews, but he would look down on them. You know what I mean?

In other words, to him they were Yids. He was the German Jew. He did a lot of good in his own way. He was spokesman for the Jew in those days.

Chall: Yes. And he was here during the celebration of the eleventh anniversary of the Balfour Declaration.

Magnin: I don't even remember it. Have I got that there?

Chall: Yes. And you made some statement about the fact that you commended the bigness of mind of Marshall and his group.

Magnin: They're not Zionists, you know.

Chall: That's right.

Magnin: Or anti-Zionists. I was just reading that he and Schiff and these men helped form the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, the Conservative group. Even though they were Reform they thought that those rabbis would Americanize the eastside

Magnin: Jews. They regarded the eastside people as a bunch of barbarians. But it didn't work that way.

This was the real reason. And it only came out recently in a book called Poor Cousins which I spoke on from the pulpit a few weeks ago. The poor cousins are the Russian Jews and soon they become the rich cousins.

Chall: In 1936 and in 1953 you went to Israel. Have you been there since 1953?

Magnin: Yes. I have a few times. On cruises mostly. I stayed two or three days.

Chall: It's remembered, I think, by many people, that when you did go, in 1936, you spoke favorably about the homeland for the Jews.

Magnin: It wasn't Israel then. It was under the English. They already had Arab riots.

Chall: But you did come back speaking favorably about the need for developing a homeland, of some kind, in Palestine.

Magnin: Right. In those days Tel Aviv was a village, a mere village. Just a beach with a few houses. It was nothing, believe me. Pathetic. They had riots. In fact, we had to get the train to Haifa outside of Tel Aviv, and we didn't get off at Haifa, we got off at Carmel station. They even had soldiers on the train.

I made a trip around the world with my family. The kids were little and we took them out of school and went all around. In those days the world was different.

Chall: Not much difference today when you go from one country to another?

Magnin: You go to Spain and you see condominiums like in Los Angeles and Miami.

Every year I've been away, in Europe, or Asia, or Africa someplace, Australia.

Chall: That must have been a most interesting trip for

Chall: you and your wife and children.

Magnin: Oh yes. We went to Egypt and rode on camels, saw the pyramids; oh, it was fascinating. There were very few travelers in those days. It was different then.

Chall: I'm, of course, interested in knowing your evaluation of how you felt about Palestine at that time.

Magnin: I felt that I'd like to see the Jews get a foothold there, and do something decent for themselves.

Chall: At the time you felt that there would be development of Jewish culture?

Magnin: Well, it was an idealistic thing. This was the basis of it. They forgot that when a thing gets big it gets unwieldy.

The American Council for Judaism

Chall: During the war and immediately afterwards there was strong anti-Zionist activity in this country. The American Council for Judaism, I guess, was its main spokesman.

Magnin: I never had anything to do with them. I wouldn't let them talk in my pulpit. I've never joined it. I didn't blacken them up or fight them in a bitter way, but I just ignored them completely and had nothing to do with them.

Chall: Are there some members of your own congregation who could have been members?

Magnin: Not very many that I know of. I think we have a record in that respect; there were mighty few, if any. I can't even think of their names. We never had this problem. Somebody was remarking about that; they went over the records too. Somebody had done some research on my attitudes toward Zionists. They were amazed to find that at that time, in the whole city, we were free of this,

Magnin: compared to other cities. No, we never had this hostile attitude.

Chall: Do you think that that would relate to the fact that the leadership, particularly of the Reform congregations, wasn't interested in it? Wouldn't give it leadership?

Magnin: There was really only one Reform congregation for a while, and then another one sprang up. It wasn't too substantial.

They attribute it to me, but I don't take credit for it. I don't know what it was. The fact is that there was very little said about it. We never had any real battles here on it.

Chall: Maybe you should take some credit for it.

Magnin: Maybe; who knows. What difference does it make?

Chall: It's interesting when one compares Los Angeles to San Francisco or perhaps, Chicago.

Magnin: It was the one exception. I suppose if I'd taken the other side it might have done some harm. See, our people never put up a battle on this thing. We kept them on an even keel always. I never have these difficulties, I don't know why. Partly history, partly just circumstance, partly maybe I'm a little bit responsible, I don't know why. We never had this. Any time.

Chall: With the establishment of the state of Israel and the need for sending increasing amounts of money, the Israeli Bond drives and that sort of thing--I wondered whether, in 1954, your congregation was one of about seventy-five that set aside a period of time during the high holy days to sell Israeli Bonds.

Magnin: No, never did.

Chall: You were honorary chairman of this drive.

Magnin: No, I never sold a bond in the Temple. I probably was chairman to ask the congregations in the city to do it, those who wanted to do it. I may have made a speech on it, not a whole speech, but men-

- Magnin: tioned it from the pulpit. But we never, at any holiday, had this distinction. I never allowed them to sell bonds, to stop our service and sell bonds and raise money. Even for our own institutions. We have never collected a nickel on the holidays. Never. We mention it, that's all.
- Chall: Does your Temple take any other interest in working for Israel?
- Magnin: Not as a Temple. We don't go on any committees as a Temple. I keep them out of everything like that. As an individual, I can go in for what I want. But as a rule I rarely, rarely use the name of the Temple. The Temple has all kinds of people with all kinds of opinions. I've no right to speak for them.
- Chall: Have you ever been a member of the American Jewish Committee or the American Jewish Congress?
- Magnin: Yes, for a while I was a member of the Committee and then got off. But I was just paying dues, that's all. I never was active in either one of them. The Congress never appealed to me.
- Chall: I want to go back to some of the leaders of the Nathan Straus Society and have you comment on them. We talked about Marco Newmark. What about Alexander Brick?
- Magnin: He was a dear old friend. He was also on the hospital board with me. He was a member of the Temple.
- Chall: And Judge Hollzer?
- Magnin: Judge Hollzer was president of the Temple. He was on the board for years and became president. He was almost related to me, but not quite, through marriages. But Harry and I were very, very close. He was the first president of the Community Council. And we were very, very dear friends. He was a fine man.
- Chall: He was an active leader in the Jewish community.
- Magnin: That's right.
- Chall: Also a Zionist.

- Magnin: He wasn't a rabid Zionist, but there were a lot of us who weren't rabid who helped them.
- Chall: And Adolph Fleishman?
- Magnin: He was related to the Hellmans. He was a nice man, but not active. He was a very passive man.
- Chall: Alfred Sieroty.
- Magnin: Well, Sieroty was a real Zionist. Alan Sieroty, who is now up in Sacramento--Alan's mother, Bertha, was the real 1000 percent Zionist. And her brother, Charles Brown. The Zionists can thank Charles Brown more than anybody else for the hold it got in this city and the Community Council. Charlie was a real power. Charlie was so much for Israel. We were very good friends. He and Mrs. Sieroty were great Zionists.
- Chall: That's interesting. The Sierotys were Reform Jews, were they not?
- Magnin: It's got nothing to do with it. There's nothing in Zionism makes you either Reform or Orthodox or Conservative.
- Chall: Generally speaking it seems that . . .
- Magnin: Well, it's the immigrant class. The Russian Jews are more excited about it, that's what it is. The early Reform Jews were Germans. But actually there's nothing in the philosophy of Reform, or Orthodox, or anything else.
- Chall: Not any more.
- Magnin: There never was.
- Chall: I see. Have the Sierotys carried through their interest in the Jewish community?
- Magnin: The family are still members of the Temple.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Chall: I've completed what I've wanted to talk about today, but since we do have some time--if you're willing--I would like to have you go over with me the grounds of your differences with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Magnin: Our congregation has been one of its greatest supporters. I have differed from their policies time and again. It was originally formed by Isaac M. Wise in order to obtain the funds to support the Hebrew Union College. But it grew into a machine that covered a lot more than just that. I don't say they should confine themselves to just that, but they began to make pronunciamientos, which they call social action, on all kinds of political, economic, and social issues. They also built up what I consider a very extravagant organization and got away from the original purpose. So while we continued to send them money, I opposed their policies. I had nothing personally against Rabbi Eisendrath. I helped to get him the position. He accomplished many good things, but I feel that his love for power, and publicity, which I suppose is human, encouraged him to go into fields which I don't think he should have entered. And so I became opposed to the organization. I don't feel that I have to go into all the details.

The union, founded by Isaac M. Wise, was supposed to be an organization of congregations helping to get money for the college. First of all, it was headed by laymen. They had no rabbi at the head of it. They were supposed to raise funds.

Later on when Rabbi Eisendrath became the head of it, then it became almost practically a competing organization with the college. It began to have political influence in the Conference of American Rabbis. And it got to be a bureaucracy.

They took on functions which they had no particular reason to take on. For instance: I've helped Zionism, but they became almost like a Zionist organization. I'm interested in anti-defamation, but they became like an anti-defama-

Magnin: tion league. They come out on every subject, and pretend to represent all of the congregations, of which we are one.

Now sometimes they come out on issues that I don't agree with. They're leftist or they're political; they talk politics about who should be president or should not be president. At least, some of them do. And they get into all sorts of things, and I don't want them to represent us. They don't represent us.

Half the money we give is supposed to go to the college, and that's one main reason we stayed in, to help the college. But I'm not interested in their other functions. We have other organizations to take care of those things. We don't need them for that.

Now, another thing that I'm very much opposed to is this--that they are negative. They will have a convention and instead of emphasizing the positive side--since the press gets all this--and showing that the synagogue is alive, and the rabbis are trying to do a job--most of them, I'm sure--everything is hypercritical, and rebellious. They make it seem that everything is wrong, and it's purely negative. I don't like this.

I think they're harming Judaism instead of helping it. And then, as I say, Rabbi Eisendrath came out from time to time speaking his own opinion, some of which I may have agreed with and some of which I didn't, but he had no right to represent us and to plant himself in the newspaper saying that Reform Judaism represents this and that. That's not his function to my way of thinking.

So we find, as a Temple, that there are too many irreconcilables between them and ourselves.

Chall: Are you able to give me any particular examples of some of these irreconcilable issues?

Magnin: Well, for one thing, they waste a lot of money. They give out a lot of material, most of which goes into the waste basket. It covers all sorts of things, mostly social action, which is largely talk, and little action. That's not all of it.

Magnin:

I look at their budgets; only God could understand the budgets. I certainly can't understand them the way they write them down. I don't know what their money goes for. You see so much for this, so much for that, and it still doesn't define what it is. I think it's a wasteful organization.

I think their budgets are too high for the kind of job they ought to do. This is a tendency of all organizations today, national organizations, to get all they can out of the local groups.

The Jewish people need statesmen, not politicians and publicity hounds. This is their great need. And perhaps one of the reasons--I don't mind saying it myself--why I've had this sort of relationship with the community that most rabbis never have and never will have, is that I've been more of a statesman than a politician. I could have gotten ten times the publicity on things I have had, but I didn't want it. I don't want that kind of publicity. I don't need it.

You cannot change an organization like that. They're all alike. They're run by a few politicians who want it their way and it's settled. They couldn't change some of it. They've got a structure. It's too complicated. There's nothing you can do about it.

VI THE RABBI'S ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE LOS ANGELES
JEWISH COMMUNITY (continued)
(Interview 6, April 2, 1973)

The Health, Welfare, and Community Service Agencies

Cedars of Lebanon-Mt. Sinai Hospitals

Chall: I want to talk to you today about your activities with the Jewish health and welfare agencies, all of those which are now under one roof at 590 Vermont. But I want to start way back in time.

Magnin: Oh God, it's hard to remember way back in time. What do you want to ask?

I was on the board of the Cedars of Lebanon. The original hospital was the Kaspary Cohn Hospital out on the eastside, and then it became the Cedars of Lebanon. Then they joined with Mt. Sinai and now it's called Cedars-Sinai. And I'm still on that board. So, it's been a continuous thing for over fifty years.

Chall: Now, what has your interest been on the board? Why did you stay on the board for fifty years, and what's the value of the hospital?

Magnin: Well, of course, the function of Jewish hospitals has changed. There are several reasons why there was a Jewish hospital.

First of all, there was a Catholic, a Protestant, and so on. Well really, the origin of Kaspary Cohn before I got on was that it was supposed to be a free hospital for the poor. But when it was out in

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Magnin: Boyle Heights it still was for the more moderate. They always had some poor. It wasn't a fancy hospital, very simple, the town was smaller.

Then, it came out to Fountain Avenue, the so-called Cedars. I was on the executive committee for many years. I was not only on the board, but the executive committee.

I must interrupt this to say that another reason for Jewish hospitals was that in the early days it was difficult for a Jewish doctor to get on the board of another hospital. Today that's no problem.

And I had been on because I had an interest. My interest, perhaps, is not as intense as it used to be because today, although the Cedars-Sinai is raising over \$125 million for buildings and things, actually the doctors go to different hospitals. Some of them even own hospitals of their own. The situation has changed a great deal.

But I'm still interested because whatever good they do through the clinics and other programs is important. I'm not quite as active, I don't go to quite as many meetings as I used to, but I have an interest in it. And that's about it.

Chall: When you served on the executive board what was your function?

Magnin: Well, in those days, of course, it was a very small board. There was just the one hospital, Cedars. Our function was to run the hospital. On the lay side, the business of the hospital, not the medical. The doctors run it on the medical end, naturally.

Jewish Committee for Personal Service--Gateways

Chall: Now, many years ago in 1923, from 1923 to 1929, and then again from 1929 to 1935, you were the president of the Jewish Committee for Personal Service.

Magnin: That's right.

Chall: And that has now become also a larger organization.

Magnin: It has become Gateways. That came after I got off of the chairmanship.

Chall: What was your function as president, and why were you interested in the Jewish Committee for Personal Service?

Magnin: Well, they had a person who would go to the jails and to the mental institutions and would try to give help to the Jewish patients and the criminals in the jails. In the case of the jails we could be of help to the wives and children, you know, the families. Then, we would furnish Chanukah boxes, which were always packed at the Temple. The committee at the Temple did most of that in the early days. They still do it, to some extent.

I don't know, I think in later years the Chanukah boxes went to the soldiers.

Chall: And this committee was begun in San Francisco?

Magnin: Yes. Rabbi Martin Meyer and Irving Lipsitch started it. Then Irving came down here. And Judge Hollzer was president of the federation, he was also later president of the Temple. And he and I were very close. Harry, Judge Hollzer, asked me to be chairman of the Committee for Personal Services.

That's how I got Rabbi Dubin. He was in San Diego as a rabbi, and I got him up here to do that, be the worker there part-time, and then part-time to work in the religious school. Then he was the head of the religious school, then afterwards we had him fill the pulpit functions and so on. That's how he got into the picture.

Chall: Judge Isaac Pacht followed you one term when you were president of the Jewish Committee for Personal Services. He was most active in the Jewish community.

Magnin: Oh yes. Judge Pacht right along has been--I think in the orphans home, Vista Del Mar, too; I don't know. It's so big and complex. But he's been active in many ways.

Wilshire Temple and Philanthropy

Chall: I saw a statement of yours in the scrapbook, "Philanthropy lies at the very foundation of our faith." Does your activity and the activity of many of the people who were consistently working with the Jewish community stem, do you think, from this philosophy?

Magnin: Well, all the early charities in this town stemmed out of the Temple, this Temple. They all did. Later on they became secularized, naturally. They already were more or less secularized, but then the federation grew up, then the federation and council. So, by degrees social workers came in and became a profession and got organized. But they were inspired largely by this Temple: the original orphans home, now called Vista Del Mar, the hospital, all these things started practically with members of this Temple, who were interested and involved in founding and developing it. But, later, as I say, they took in the whole community, naturally, a big city like this.

Chall: Have other leaders and other congregations accepted responsibility?

Magnin: Oh, in the last number of years, surely! The city is too big today. The president of Vista Del Mar is not a member of this congregation. And many of the prominent and wealthy Jews here have been in different things, naturally. We can't have them all. We don't want them all, as a matter of fact. We couldn't have them all if we wanted to.

Some are Conservative. At least, they may eat bacon and ham but they go to the Conservative shuls, or Orthodox. No, no. It's too big today to be run by any one little group of people.

Chall: At one time the Jewish Voice, I think it was, criticized the Temple here because they claimed that it represented only three percent of the Jewish population yet had a sort of monopoly of the leadership in the area.

Magnin: I don't remember that there was such a paper. It sort of rings a bell. I've forgotten there was

Magnin: such a thing. But, we've had offbeat papers and articles. There was always a certain amount, in every community--I won't even say hostility--but a certain amount of isolation and suspicion or perhaps, jealousy on the part of the so-called (now don't get me wrong because some of the leaders here were East European Jews) generally speaking newcomer type of Jew who is associated more with Conservative and ghetto life than the old time Reformers. In other words, the so-called "aristocracy" of San Francisco, Los Angeles, or any other place. In New York it was the Warburgs, the Lehmans, the Schiffs.

They always will help the whole community, but there is always a group that want to fight, particularly some editor of the paper who has to write something. They felt--well, like you feel towards people who have more than you, or have more honor than you. It's very petty and very small, but very human. Nobody pays attention to them.

Jewish Welfare Federation and Council

Chall: Now, in 1928 you were the chairman of the budget committee of the United Jewish Appeal. Then, later on, I'm not sure just what that date is--in the late twenties or early thirties, when the United Jewish Welfare Fund was organized--you were on the committee to select the personnel for the first board of directors.

Magnin: I don't remember that, but if it's there it's there. I know that for two years I headed the drive, I was chairman.

Chall: That was later. I'm in the very earliest stages.

Magnin: Yes. Well, there wasn't anything that I didn't have a hand in in those days, really. Because Judge Hollzer was the first president of the federation--

Chall: Marco Newmark was earlier.

Magnin: Yes. Mr. Mosbacher, then Marco, then Judge Hollzer. See, they were all our friends, and on the board at one time or another of this Temple. They were the oldtime families that ran the show.

Mosbacher came from Oakland, but his daughter married Sam Behrendt, one of the oldtime families here, who was related to Kaspere Cohn.

Chall: Those were the days when it was all just beginning. Were you active in a role that, generally speaking, was one begun by Rabbi Hecht?

Magnin: Well, Rabbi Hecht was already--he was younger then than I am now, but he seemed always like an old man when I came.

Chall: But earlier he had a tradition of working on this kind of thing. Not many rabbis did.

Magnin: Well, don't forget in those days there were three or four temples. What were they? The Sinai--now it became bigger--but Sinai was a Conservative group. They had one on Olive Street and one on Breed Street. And those rabbis never knew the public.

As a matter of fact, with over a hundred rabbis here they still are not known. When anything is given here it is the cardinal and myself. The other day I got a call from the White House.

Chall: Again?

Magnin: Yes. I was on the pulpit; I'm glad I wasn't speaking. They called me off one Saturday morning. Someone wanted some information. The other day the chairman of the Women's National Republican Committee, Mrs. Armitage, called up and talked twenty minutes on the phone from Washington. They were having a convention and it happens to come around the holiday time, and she was quite concerned. It was the second day of Rosh Hashonah. When they want to know something they call me up and I talk with them. They don't know there are any other rabbis. It's strange.

With all the publicity, shooting themselves in the newspapers and everything, nobody knows they exist.

- Magnin: See this watch? It's a Patek Philippe. On the back of it is an inscription--which is foolish because it isn't true. This was given to me by the real estate people at their seventy-fifth anniversary banquet: "To Los Angeles' most useful citizen." It's nonsense. But that's the way they are. And they're all goyim.
- Chall: That's a fine gift. I think they were making arrangements to give that to you the day that I left Los Angeles last month.
- Magnin: This is it! It's sweet of them. Really, I had a lot of fun with them. They're nice. People are nice.
- Chall: You've made yourself a very active individual in the community.
- Magnin: By not trying it. I'm not trying to do it. They come after me. I don't go after them. By just doing your business and knowing what you're doing, you've got it. You don't have to go ahead and try stunts, gimmicks or self-advertising. You don't do that. [Interruption]
- Chall: In the beginning of the United Jewish Welfare Fund there were Ralph Wolff and David Tannenbaum who were with you on the committee to select personnel for the first board of directors.
- Magnin: Right.
- Chall: Does that mean that they were active in the community enough to know other people?
- Magnin: Oh yes. Ralph was a real estate man. I think he's still alive. He lives in Palm Springs.
- Chall: Was he in your congregation?
- Magnin: Yes. And Dave Tannenbaum was too. Dave Tannenbaum was a very prominent young lawyer. As a matter of fact, he was Carl Laemmle's lawyer and I think he was the one who suggested to Mr. Carl Laemmle that I be executor of his trust, along with his son and daughter.

Chall: Is that the reason?

Magnin: At least, they talked it over because he was his lawyer who wrote his trust.

Chall: I see. But the three of you--

Magnin: Yes, they were leaders in the community and had a nice standing.

Chall: Who could be trusted to select a good board of directors?

Magnin: Oh yes. They were good.

Chall: And now we come to 1933. There seems to be a great deal of uncertainty, from what I've read, about how the United Jewish Community of Los Angeles got started. Let me fill you in--you probably remember it, but--

Magnin: You know, the B'nai B'rith Messenger has most of this stuff in their files.

Chall: Yes. Well, I'm not really interested in getting the information so much as I am in getting your recollections and reactions which may not be on record.

Magnin: They maybe even have that.

Chall: Do you recall any matters that had to do specifically with kashruth and advertising on the holy days?

Magnin: I think that the kashruth was concerned with the Orthodox. It seems to me that there was some kind of misunderstanding or quarrel between different Orthodox groups. There were rabbis on that. But the details have passed my memory. I wouldn't concentrate on them.

Chall: Well, you were, as you said before, the fund drive chairman in 1941 and 1942 for the federation, drafted by community leaders.

Magnin: That's right.

Chall: My understanding of a fund raiser for the Welfare Federation is somebody who can sort of twist arms a bit, and say, "You've got to give so much. I

Chall: know what your income is . . . " How can a rabbi do that sort of thing?

Magnin: Well, they used my name largely. We had committees to go out and get money. I didn't have to appeal to everyone individually. But, I used to be able to twist people's arms. I still can do it if I want to.

Chall: In your activities on the fund drives today, do you advertise the fund drive in the Temple Bulletin and urge your members to give?

Magnin: I don't do it so much as a congregational thing. I mention it from the pulpit, yes, and I give it a certain amount of morale and support. But, today this is a very high-powered thing in this community. And they have a chairman of every division: plumbers, and dressmakers, and God knows what--theaters. So, it's so big that they don't depend on me for that.

As a matter of fact, some of the rabbis who are more active in it, they don't do anything but then their names go on it. I don't get into all that stuff.

Chall: Would you give the names of your members?

Magnin: No. We will not let that list go to anybody. Nobody ever gets that list. Once in a while, we'll send out material for them on our list, but we will not allow anybody to have our list. That's one rule that this congregation has.

Chall: So, you will cooperate for the success of the drive?

Magnin: Oh sure. Well, some of the biggest ones like Max Firestein probably gave a million last year from his foundation. He's on the board as a matter of fact. They come from all over--temples and no temples. We've got over half a million Jews in this area. It's bigger than Chicago.

Chall: Do you have any assessment of executive secretaries like Irving Lipsitch, Charles Schottland, Maurice Karpf, Leo Gallin, and Julius Bisno?

Magnin: Do you mean what do I think of them?

Chall: Do they represent a certain type of professional person?

Magnin: Well, they are professionals. I won't say they are all the same. Most of them are pretty good men. They've been capable men.

I used to be on the federation and council boards for years. And I got off. I didn't want to be bothered with all this talk. There's a little group that always does what they want to do anyhow, so what's the use of wasting your time?

Chall: Do you mean that if you had a counter opinion they wouldn't listen to you?

Magnin: Oh, I wouldn't say that. It's just that it's big, and I'm on so many things that I don't want to give up every noon and every evening for meetings, that's all. I'm not as young as I was and I don't want to be bothered with it.

Chall: I see. Well, apparently at one time you felt that your presence was important to keep the thing going?

Magnin: Oh yes. Well, my son is now going. He's on the federation board. He's on the Red Cross board. He's a broker, he's not a rabbi. But he's a very fine citizen, and Henry is a sweet man. He's very sincere. The Big Brother, and all those things. He's sort of following suit.

Chall: If you felt that it was necessary for you to do it, you would do it?

Magnin: Well, in those days, I was a leader of the community, one of the two or three and this was it. You just did it. With all they've got on today in a city like this, no one or two people can do this, and they don't need me for every meeting. Not by a longshot.

In those days, at many big Christian affairs, there was no other rabbi ever went to them, no Jewish laymen went to most of them.

Chall: Well, it would seem very hard for the average Jewish layman to get around to the top affairs.

Magnin: It's so big!

Chall: I think it's also quite segregated.

Magnin: No more so than New York or any other place where you have thousands of organizations. Each one has got its own little baby and they're all interested in that. If you look at New York you'll see the same thing, or Chicago, or any big city.

See, San Francisco is a very darling city. It's my birthplace. I'm very sentimental about some of it. It's very provincial. It's really a small town. It's compact, not only geographically, but it's a small town. More activity goes on in Jewish things here in one day than goes on there in a month. The more Jews, the more leaders. They're all Mexican generals. Each one has got to have something. They split like the amoeba.

One guy has a fight with his congregation and he starts his own congregation. We have a hundred shuls here.

Chall: Well, that's the old tradition; the Rabbi opened up his home. Are we going back to that?

Magnin: Every time a guy has an empty store he makes a shul out of it. On Beverly Boulevard, up and down those places, Santa Monica Boulevard, you'll see them, little shuls.

Jewish Community Centers

Chall: To get back to the Jewish communal organization, I found something you said during the last war; you were talking about the Jewish centers " . . . the preservation of our tried and tested institutions such as Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish community centers is inseparably related to the basic values of democracy. . . . As democracy must be safeguarded so must the community center. . . .

- Chall: "Tell me where the community center is after this war, and I'll tell you what are the prospects of saving democracy after we win through to victory." Is that the way community centers strike you today?
- Magnin: No, no, no. First of all, originally they were Jewish settlements, in the early days. You'll remember that. Those were for the poor Jews. It was the poor man's club.

The Jewish Welfare Board, after the first World War, had money left over. The social workers always come with some new gimmick. The new gimmick was that Judaism isn't only for the poor, it's for everybody. So, they took over. Instead of catering to the poor people, which I think they should have done, they now have them out in the middle class areas on Olympic Boulevard, fancy shmancy, big deal, you see. So, that's what it became.

I think in a certain sense they don't hurt a Temple like this, because we don't want their class of people anyhow. I wouldn't want them; in the second place, they wouldn't come if I did. They may worship here.

They want to have Bar Mitzvahs now. They're taking on some functions that really are competitive with synagogues, which they shouldn't do. But they do. And since they don't bother us in our synagogue, I don't care about them. Why worry about them?

They have a function. They do a lot of good. It may be a middle class Jewish club; but why the federation money? To spend hundreds of thousands for people who can afford to get a steambath somewhere? I don't know. And a massage. But this is it.

Those things develop. And you know all these organizations have vested interests. The social workers, and the people who run them they want to make them bigger and grander and get new gimmicks and new purposes. But that's what happens. They have vested interests. Here you have the Anti-Defamation League, it ought to be enough. You have seven or eight different ones. The American Jewish Committee, (although they do it in a different way)

Magnin: the Congress, Jewish Defense League.

Anti-Defamation and Community Relations

Chall: Well, let's talk about the Anti-Defamation League and the Community Relations Committee, as long as we started it.

Magnin: Well, I was the one man Anti-Defamation League chairman for many many years.

Chall: When was that?

Magnin: I don't remember the years. Aaron Riche can tell you that. It's in the B'nai B'rith Messenger, I imagine. But you'll have to go through files. For many years I was the one man.

Chall: How did you do it? What did you do then?

Magnin: What did I do with it? I'll tell you how I used to operate. Then they became the Community Relations Committee. I never was chairman, but I was on it. I used to go every Friday. I haven't gone for years, but I'm still on it.

I get tired of listening to rabbis and lawyers make speeches. It's silly. For me it was action. For instance, one time Juarez was being shown on the screen. Warner Brothers made Juarez. The Church didn't like that because Juarez was a rebel as far as the Church was concerned. At that time there was a little bit of rishes in the Church.

An article came out (I am very close to the Catholics today, and I don't intend to offend anyone by telling this bit of history) in the Church paper, The Tidings, against Jews, and the Warner Brothers. And it asked, "Why did Rabbi Magnin not oppose Bertrand Russell when he came to UCLA?" and so on.

I was at a luncheon that day. I saw one of the Catholic prelates, and I said, "Did you see what that writer said in the paper today?" He said,

Magnin: "Ohhh." I said, "Don't ohhh." And then I told him I wouldn't accept that kind of material in the paper. And that was the end of that. I was very strong in getting things done, and didn't waste time with a lot of committees.

In fact, I got up in the pulpit one day not long ago and said, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth--without a committee."

Chall: [Teasing] Now, you've worked with committees for years and you know sometimes you've got to work with them.

Magnin: Most of them are no good. All it takes is one fool to ruin everything.

Chall: Can you give me examples that we can put on the record of how you might handle a delicate situation, as chairman of A.D.L., in those early days?

Magnin: Well, no two situations are alike. If it had to do with, say, prejudice of a church, I would get in touch with the prelates. I would know whom to get in touch with and how to put it to them. Every situation is entirely different.

Chall: Well then, with the formation of the Community Relations Committee and whatever its predecessors were, starting at about 1932 or 1933, when Leon Lewis came in as executive--

Magnin: I almost forgot his name. That's right. I worked with Leon.

Chall: You were active in those committees.

Magnin: Yes, but I wasn't leading them. There were others; great, bright men, lawyers, and others. But I took my part and I was never bashful. I may have straightened out a few things, but they had plenty of good brains on there.

I've seen committees and talked with certain types of committees. There are some good people.

Chall: Did you feel that the Lewis-Roos combination was a good one?

Magnin: Yes, they did a good job. Yes, they did. There's no question about it.

Chall: It was simpler, I suppose, to fight the Nazis than it was to fight McCarthy, in later years.

Magnin: I don't remember how we handled all these things. McCarthy was a national thing. The Nazis were international. Whatever there was we did what we had to do that we could do, that's all. We couldn't do very much about Hitler here, we couldn't arrange that.

Chall: Can you tell me about Mendel Silberberg?

Magnin: Well, Mendel was a very bright man. He was an attorney. He was a Republican interested in politics. He was a very close friend of Mr. Nixon's. When Mr. Nixon wasn't as important as he is today, Mendel and Mr. Nixon were very close friends. Mendel was a very bright man.

He was political. He didn't run for office, in that sense. But he was politically minded. So, he became the lay spokesman, in some ways, of the Jewish community. He belonged to this Temple for years. He never got out. I officiated at his funeral.

Mendel wasn't a religious type, in that sense. But he was a very fine man; I was very close to Mendel.

Chall: But you considered him effective? He was the chairman of the Community Relations Committee for years.

Magnin: Oh, very effective. Oh yes. He had contacts and he knew how to handle people. He was very fine.

As a matter of fact, there's a bit of history most Jews don't know. And that is that when Richard Nixon was vice-president under Eisenhower, they were talking about taxing money that went out of the country for charities, which would have included Israel. That would have made an awful dent on it. Mendel jumped on the train with some other Jews from throughout the country and went to Washington and spoke with Nixon. And

- Magnin: he prevented this. See, the Jews don't give him [Nixon] credit. They don't know this man. They're fools.
- Chall: It's worth having that story.
- Magnin: Yes, they back a phony like Mr. McGovern who couldn't run a candy store. Nice man, I guess; he's got no brains. I don't know how he got as far as he did. I can't understand it.
- Chall: How did it happen and what prompted you to take the quick action that you took, when the A.D.L. made a statement indicating that the creche should not be out in Olvera Street in a public park during the 1963 Christmas season?
- Magnin: Oh, that's quite another story. This, I don't mind you writing up. This is a bit of history. I'll tell you exactly what happened.

What happened was this: every year down at Olvera Street, which is a Mexican area, they have a little creche in the park there. All right. Who goes there? The Mexicans and they're happy.

So, one day I got a telephone call, I think it was from the press, that the councilmen, the supervisors, the mayor--whoever it was--got telegrams from the Anti-Defamation League saying that public parks are paid for out of taxes and they must remove the creche. I was told that the Catholics were up and storming--the Jews were trying to stop Christmas and a lot of nonsense, all of which one or two people may have said.

So, I immediately got a hold of the Community Relations Committee, together with whoever was the head of it then, and they were going to have a meeting the next Friday. I said that next Friday was too late; by that time all the Jews will be hated and I was not going to wait. When you put out a fire you use the extinguisher. Right away.

So, I got hold of the city desk at the L. A. Times and said, "This is Rabbi Magnin. I want to clear something. I understand these wires went out. I'm sure it does not meet the approval of

Magnin:

most Jewish people. We have no objections to a creche on the technical idea that we pay a few cents toward a public park. This is a Christian thing and we're living in a Christian country, not officially, but as far as population goes, and I'm sure the Jews have no desire to interfere with Christmas. We don't want the Christians to interfere with Chanukah or Passover." I said, "I want you to make this statement. I was, at one time, chairman of the Anti-Defamation League. I oppose this thing, and I want people to know that as far as I'm concerned it's okay." Well, the head of the Anti-Defamation League was too ashamed to back down. He couldn't do it. He stopped right there and then. He didn't say anything.

Meanwhile, I got phone calls and letters from the Catholic church saying, "You saved our Christmas." Which was a lot of rubbish. I didn't save anything. Nobody was going to hurt Christmas. And the Hollywood papers had a big headline, "Rabbi Magnin saved" I don't know what the hell I said. It's so overrated.

This isn't on the record. So, then I went to the Community Relations Committee. In those days I used to go. One member, a lawyer, I think, said, "Who determines the destiny of the Jews in Los Angeles? Who makes the decisions?" I said, "If you are referring to me, sir, first of all, I've never had the pleasure of meeting you. I don't know your name. I'm sure you're a very fine man. But let me tell you something. I don't decide the destiny of the Jews, neither do you nor anybody else. Nobody can speak for half a million Jews.

"But if I'm in a building and I see a fire, and there's an extinguisher near there--I don't work for the fire department either, and I don't own the building. But if I see the fire and the extinguisher is right next to me, I'm going to put out that fire.

"I have children and grandchildren whom I want to live in this country. I don't know whether you have or not, but anytime a situation like that comes up I'm going to handle it. This is for the welfare of future Jews in this town. I don't want any nonsense."

- Magnin: That was the end of that. See, those things have to be handled fast and effectively. You can't fool around with fancy phrases and resolutions. That's what I mean by committees, they can't work fast.
- Chall: Of course, I looked through the files on this, where all your press clippings and letters have been put, marked Archives.
- Magnin: They're going to go ultimately; we'll either keep them here and give copies to the Hebrew Union College, or vice versa. But they want them. I've promised Marcus [Jacob]. We send them duplicates of almost everything now. If I have something printed I send them an extra copy. He wants every electric light bill and plumber bill.
- Chall: I've seen the letters that came to you, and the correspondence. Some of it was mostly pro, but there were some rather strong statements on the con side that felt you had no right to interfere.
- Magnin: Oh sure.
- Chall: But what struck me as being a surprising aspect of this was a statement made by Reverend Lawrence Carter, who called the Anti-Defamation League's action "repayment in very bad coin for the advantages they have been given and an infringement of Christians to celebrate their feast in a public way."
- Magnin: I remember that incident. I don't remember what I said.
- Chall: You answered it, and I'll tell you what you answered. You said that "Reverend Carter's statement was both un-Christian and un-American." That "the Jews are citizens by right and not by tolerance." I think this was a very good answer.
- Magnin: I didn't want to hear any of his nonsense.
- Chall: Were you taken aback or shocked by a statement by one of the leading Protestant clergymen that would indicate this kind of very close-to-the-skin anti-Semitism? Were you surprised about this?

JACK LLOYD

1445 MILLER WAY • HOLLYWOOD 46, CALIFORNIA • OL. 6-4607

November 6, 1963

Mr. Milton Senn
Regional Director
Anti-Defamation League
590 N. Vermont
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Mr. Senn:

I wish to add my own small voice to that of Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin in condemning your ill-advised and potentially dangerous stand regarding the placement of the Nativity scene. As one who tasted the wrath of anti-Semitism at the hands of the masters - Adolf Hitler and Company - it is impossible for me to understand what your organization is doing. I am only grateful that my late father, who devoted every spare moment of his years in this country to the B'nai B'rith and its activities, is not here to witness such shameful goings-on. It would almost seem that the Anti-Defamation League, for which I have always had the greatest of regard, was consciously trying to stir up a new wave of anti-Semitism in order to justify its existence. While I don't mean that, of course, I am truly shocked by your objections to public displays of the majority religion during the holidays. What possible reaction can there be in the mind of the average person other than that it is an anti-Christian crusade? It is to me as repugnant and leaves the same bad taste in one's mouth as the suppression of Buddhists by the recent government in Vietnam.

Were this only the viewpoint of a small group of individuals who would be recognized as such by the American people, I might not be as disturbed about all of the publicity it has received in the press. Unfortunately, however, organizations with your financial backing and large-scale activities - most of which have been admirable - tend to create a false impression that you are not speaking for your own members but for all Jews. Thank God for the courage and wisdom of a prominent Jewish figure such as Rabbi Magnin for trying to clear up this point. While it may not negate the harm I feel you have done, his statements will, at least, find their way into the newspapers and his voice will be heard far above the crowd of people like myself. May I close in the hope that the Anti-Defamation League will soon see the error of its ways in this very sensitive area and that it will not rob our Christian brothers of the natural desire to celebrate their holidays openly.

Sincerely yours,

Jack Lloyd

JL:tg
cc: Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin

LAW OFFICES

BROCK AND SHAPERO

SUITE 913 TAFT BUILDING

1880 VINE STREET

HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

November 18, 1963

ROBERT L. BROCK
MARTIN M. SHAPERO
EDWIN S. SAUL

TELEPHONE
HOLLYWOOD 6-8421

Los Angeles Times
Los Angeles, California

Attention: Mr. Nick Williams

Gentlemen:

It would seem the recent episode in Los Angeles regarding the use of the Old Plaza for the Christmas nativity scene requires further examination, and if you don't mind, even some editorializing.

To recapitulate the events of the recent weeks, Milton Senn of the Anti-Defamation League questioned the legality of using a public facility for the promotion of a religious observance. In this instance, the religious observance in question was, without doubt, the most revered and sacred in our land, and one involving the beliefs of possibly ninety percent of the population.

Senn's constitutional attack on this hallowed and revered tradition was met by the Reverend E. Lawrence Carter of St. John's Episcopal Church, whose response was that the Jewish Community was showing small appreciation for the tolerance granted to the Jews in the United States, by attacking the observance of Christmas.

At this juncture, Rabbi Magnin of the Wilshire Temple entered the scene with a barrel of oil to cast upon the troubled waters. According to Rabbi Magnin, the problem was not a legal one, but rather a question of one man's good will toward another, and he for one found nothing offensive about the Nativity Scene. The Rabbi's heart-warming solution was met with public gratitude. Official praise poured in from local editorials and official government agencies. It is as if the community, being pounded by the constitutional rights of the emerging Negro, had neither the strength nor the desire to consider yet another constitutional problem.

Yet, life being what it is, problems must be faced when they arise, and where they arise. To chastise Milton Senn for raising the issue is not the point. Milton Senn did not create the problem. He found it, and having found it presented it for consideration. I am sure he finds no joy in presenting the problem and would much prefer spending his time at brotherhood meetings. For the Rabbi to refuse to

ROCK AND SHAPERO

Los Angeles Times

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consider the problem a legal one is simply to walk away from the issue which remains, and which must be answered, namely, can the majority in our land use public facilities and tax funds for the support of the religion of the majority?

I submit, the Rabbi has done a severe disservice to the Jewish Community, and a greater disservice to the body politic at large.

For the Jews he has stated that we rely on goodwill and tolerance, if you please. I submit that Jews cannot, Negroes cannot, Catholics cannot rely on tolerance to determine their rights and status in the community. This is not a matter of tolerance but the rights of man, inherent and guaranteed. Nor is this to depreciate whatever feelings of friendship men such as the Reverend Carter may have for the Jewish community. Friendship and goodwill are qualities to be treasured and honored, but they simply cannot be the basis upon which a people live their lives in a free and open society. To put the matter in the vernacular, the minority must be sure of its rights though despised by the majority.

For the Jews to fail to see this is impossible. Two thousand years of history cannot be lost in the warm glow of an Ecumenical edict, which while welcome, is still two thousand years and millions of atrocities late.

Rabbi Magnin has done a further disservice to the general community. Without question, the great social revolution of our time is the Negro emerging into full citizenship. Part and parcel of this process is the education and realization on the part of the balance of our population that the Negro has rights guaranteed to him which are not dependent on the goodwill of the white population. This is a difficult and painful lesson for the white community to learn, but is just as important to the success of the Negro's progress as is the rising awareness of the Negro of his own rights. For if the Negro becomes aware of his rights, and the white community does not learn that the Negro too is a citizen, the results cannot be other than bloodshed.

One is constrained to wonder whether Rabbi Magnin would tell the Negro that his rights are to depend on the good will of his fellow man, rather than legal technicality.

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And if he tells the Negro to press forward with their legal fight, surely he cannot tell his Jews less. Will he tell us Jews to rely on the tolerance of a benevolent majority, or will he have us strike the unpopular blow for freedom?

How pleasant it is to bask in tolerance. But how important it is to fight freedom's fight.

Very truly yours



MARTIN M. SHAPERO

MMS:ik

November 11, 1963

Mr. Paul Coates asked Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin what he thought of the statement made by Reverend E. Lawrence Carter who called the Anti-Defamation League's action "repayment in very bad coin for the advantages they have been given" and an "infringement of Christians to celebrate their feasts in a public way."

Rabbi Magnin said that Reverend Carter's statement was both un-Christian and un-American. He stated further that the Jews are citizens by right and not by tolerance; that we have contributed to everything worthwhile in American life; that we are no better nor worse than any other group of citizens; that, in the main, in every field of endeavor our record is one of which we can well be proud.

- Magnin: No, nothing shocks because there are always some of these people.
- Chall: But this was a leading Protestant with whom I think you had a rather close relationship on committees and whatnot.
- Magnin: No. If he was a leading Protestant he probably didn't talk that way. The modern men don't talk like that. These are mostly bigots.
- Chall: He was the reverend of St. John's Episcopal Church. Is that a leading church in the community?
- Magnin: Yes. Oh, I remember that now, vaguely. Yes, but I've always been close to the bishops. I could stop anything in five minutes with any of these guys.
- Chall: Well, even if you could stop it, I think the point is that he said it, which indicates anti-Semitism or at least the idea that "we're just tolerating you people around here." Didn't that come as shocking?
- Magnin: Of course. But then I answered him, didn't I? [Interruption]
- Chall: Another rather important Protestant minister also was active on the fringes of anti-Semitism for a time, and that was the Reverend James Fifield.
- Magnin: Oh yes. I must explain about Fifield. When I was sick he was the first one to send flowers to the hospital. He's retired now. He's not a well man. Fifield was really not what I would call an anti-Semitic person.

He was more or less opportunistic. He would go along with the very very right wing--I don't think he would personally want to hurt Jews, but he wouldn't go out of his way to do anything. In some cases I think he perhaps had a very slight prejudice. Not that he would want to hurt any of the Jews or black people, but I think he sided with the kind of people who perhaps don't like minorities. But he never himself was a vicious

Magnin: anti-Semite, like some people who made a business of it. He never did that.

Chall: But he did make speeches which were anti-Semitic.

Magnin: Well, they were by innuendo.

Chall: I saw references to them.

Magnin: Mostly innuendoes though. He didn't talk against Jews that I remember. He may have. But I don't remember that he ever was what I would call a real vicious anti-Semite, publishing pamphlets against Jews and accusing us, and things like that. This he never did.

Chall: He sold material in his church that was anti-Semitic.

Magnin: Well, he was on the borderline of it. But I told him what he was to his face, you know. I think he had feelings that so many people on the extreme right have--of perhaps a possible dislike of Jews, that certain Jews and other minorities are not quite their equals. Or whatever it is.

Whatever he may have distributed, I don't know. But he never could be called a vicious anti-Semite, in the sense that he would say week after week, "Jews are this and Jews are that" He never went that far, and yet most Jews felt that he was anti-Semitic.

Chall: Well, they were probably right.

Magnin: He didn't like Jews. But I know a lot of people that don't, and I know a lot of Jews that don't like Jews either, some Jews.

Chall: But they don't discuss it from the pulpit or from their radio programs.

Magnin: Well, he didn't come out in strong stuff against Jews. That, he never did, never to my knowledge. There were some committee meetings with him, I think, some with the Anti-Defamation League from time to time. But, as I say, he wasn't the worst type, believe me. He wasn't exactly a broadminded liberal by any standards.

Chall: The fact that these people have a certain strain of anti-Semitism, rather close to the surface, may be one of the reasons why Jews today are kind of turning inward, or at least their form of community responsibility is a little different.

Magnin: I think there's less anti-Semitism than there was before. I think it goes in cycles. I think what has made the Jews, who are more Jewish that way, has been due to the Hitler holocaust, the old idea that you can be a good German and still be a Jew, and you can suffer. Then again too, all these drives for money make them Jewish-conscious. And Israel and the Six-Day War. All these things. But, otherwise I don't think we are any worse off than we were before in America.

I don't know that we act very sensibly. I think, considering that we are a minority, we're not very tactful. I think a Jew that can afford to give a million dollar building, say, to Israel, which is very nice after he's made his money here, might give a one-million building, also, here. I'm rather concerned that to some people now, the tail is flying the kite. Israel has become a substitute for the religion, for the synagogue, for the American things, and everything else.

They get very emotional, you see. But to help Israel, this is another thing. I've always been for that.

Chall: There were people who were quite concerned in the fifties with Gerald L. K. Smith.

Magnin: That's the man I was thinking of. No, Fifield was never anything like that, or that Protestant minister whom you quoted. They were not of that type. Gerald L. K. Smith made a religion out of attacking Jews. This is what I'm talking about. That's what I call real honest-to-goodness anti-Semitism. It's vicious. Organized. See, this is a different story.

Chall: What is your concern about what many Jews felt was a subtle kind of anti-Semitism? It was never overt, but they always felt there was a danger of it--that came about with McCarthyism in the fifties.

Magnin: It didn't come with the McCarthyism. McCarthyism merely acted on those assumptions. No, the social anti-Semitism, not taking Jews into clubs like the California Club and the L. A. Country Club . . .

Chall: What do you think about that kind of anti-Semitism which denies Jews membership in some clubs?

Magnin: It's a fact that they don't want Jews in their social clubs. They don't want actors either. There's only one actor in the L. A. Country Club. They won't take actors. They don't want them. They're a different type entirely.

I go out there, very rarely, and when I do they all jump up from their tables. They can't do enough for me.

Chall: Let's just take the California Club as an example. Is there any particular reason why the Jews shouldn't have tried entree to the California Club years ago?

Magnin: That's what they're doing now.

Chall: But twenty-five years ago.

Magnin: Yes, but in those days they did have Jews on. Kaspere Cohen was on, but they wouldn't take his son-in-law, Ben Meyer. Maurice Hellman was a good friend of mine--one of the Hellman family--he and Alice were members. They had about two or three Jewish families in the early days. But they wouldn't take any others.

Chall: It's discrimination.

Magnin: Well, they don't like Jews. Now Hillcrest has a few non-Jews. Leonard Firestone and Walter O'Malley wanted to come in. They have other clubs or just as good. But they wanted to come there. So, we broke that down, but not too many, because we have to have a Jewish club, you see. Otherwise the Jews have no place to go.

Chall: I think that ministers were called together to decide how to fight communism and atheism in the community. Again, this was during the fifties. And the meeting which was called to consider this problem was held in the California Club. The

Chall: invitation was beautiful, like the kind you get for a fine wedding.

I wondered about your feelings--two things about it--your feeling about whether this was the way to combat communism--in that kind of an atmosphere? And secondly, why in the California Club?

Magnin: Do I go?

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: Yes, I go under certain circumstances. I go for business meetings. By business I mean organizations. And I'll go for things like that. But, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, which is very high class, very ershtergoy, honored me. Oh, they gave me a Lalique. It's beautiful.

These people hold all their banquets at the California Club. When they honored me I wouldn't go there. I said, "I'll go for business, but I won't go for any other reason." So, they had it at the L. A. Club, which wasn't half as convenient on account of the facilities. But I wouldn't go there when they honored me.

But I've been there with friends for dinner. I've been there mostly for meetings, board meetings of organizations. World Affairs Council, for example.

Chall: Fred Schwartz came through California, probably through the nation, with what he called the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade in the early sixties. Your name was on the list as one of the local sponsors.

Magnin: Oh yes. Let me tell you what happened. Later on I got off, and most people didn't know that. You see, Fred Schwartz was Jewish himself. He was kind of an evangelist, and he came here presumably just as anti-communist. He wasn't anti-Jewish or anything of the sort. The Jews were always suspicious of people like that.

And every public man, including the mayor, or anybody from California government, including the governor were all on the committee and they

Magnin: asked me. "Well, how does it look if a man comes with an anti-communist program and you have the cream of the town and not one single Jew?" So, I went on. Later on I took my name off. But there was no announcement.

One day I was on a ship, and there was a gentleman sitting there--he's a psychiatrist incidentally--he said to me, "Gee, I never knew you." I said, "Well, why do you have to know me?"

His wife said, "You know I used to hate you and I love you." I said, "You have no reason either to be hating me or loving me. You didn't know me so why should you hate me? I've done nothing for you so why should you love me?"

I said, "What you have is an inferiority complex for someone in public life." She said, "Maybe you're right."

So, he said to me, "I have a different idea." He mentioned the Schwartz incident. I said, "You didn't know I got off?" He said, "No."

Chall: You should have publicized it.

Magnin: Well, you never make your explanations to the public.

Chall: I don't think there was a single Jewish name on it, in Northern California, because I think people knew who he was. But, I was surprised to see your name and I wondered what the reason might be.

Magnin: Well, the reason was he was presumably fighting communism, and Jews should be a part of anything like that. I don't know if the method was the right one, but why should Jews sit back if every other citizen, and every other religion, and group are against communism? As though we were Communists.

Chall: Well, that's the way it might look to the other side, but the Jews might understand better what the fight is all about.

Magnin: You have to concern yourself with the other side.

Magnin: You are a very small minority. You can't do things that other people can do, and get away with them. You may think so, but you see what happened in Germany. It can happen here.

If I meet you I should at least be courteous to you and have you feel that I'm a decent person rather than antagonize you right away. What's the virtue of antagonizing?

Chall: Are you saying that because the cream of the crop, as you put it before, of the non-Jewish community feels something about, let's say in this case it was anti-communism . . .

Magnin: Well, in this case it was right. I wouldn't join them in everything. After all, look at communism. Look right now at the Jews in Russia. The Russians never were any good. So, why the hell should I not be opposed to a system that is rigid, tyrannical, imperial; why the hell shouldn't I?

The fact that the foremost prominent citizens in the city were for it, and not one single Jewish name was on it, looked very funny.

Chall: It might have looked funny, but the one Jewish name came off because it wasn't legitimate.

Magnin: By the time it came off nobody was paying any attention to it anymore. It really blew its course. I'll tell you one thing. I've kept more damned trouble out of this town through things like that. Somebody said it the other day.

For instance, every Reform rabbi fought Zionism. We never had that division here in Los Angeles. The American Council for Judaism is a little nothing, a little group of nothings. I forbid all this kind of nonsense. Because you have to know how to handle people, how to lead them.

Chall: Well, since we're discussing anti-Semitism, you did, during the twenties, take some active role in urging that the Merchant of Venice be removed from the schools.

Magnin: Yes, because I thought there were some other Shakespearean plays and that the teachers weren't

- Magnin: capable of interpreting it. While Shylock has been defended and all this, when all is said and done, taking a pound of flesh from a body isn't a pretty picture. I don't want the Jew pictured in this way. You can't ignore the Merchant of Venice. I didn't make as much fuss about it as some people, but as long as there was a better choice, they could take some other play.
- Chall: Have you any idea why the Merchant of Venice is a play that, year in and year out, somehow came into the school curriculum?
- Magnin: Because it's a great play. It's a marvellous play. A very dramatic play. That wasn't Shakespeare's original idea. He borrowed that plot. He did this with most of his plots. Oh, it's a very dramatic play. It's like Dickens. Like Fagin-- colorful--
- Chall: The play can be very sympathetic. As you pointed out, it's hard to make people understand the basis of it.
- Magnin: Oh, Shylock was a bastard, despite his persecution. Any man standing there with a knife ready to cut a guy's heart out is not a very pretty picture. He wasn't a surgeon, you know. They had no anesthetic.
- Chall: Years ago you said that intolerance is caused by "mental laziness, ignorance, selfishness, and apathy."
- Magnin: Repeat that again, what was it?
- Chall: [Repeats question.]
- Magnin: Also fear and envy are two of the big things. Those are statements I make in a hurry. I put articles out and I don't stop to think about those things.
- Chall: This was something I think you were quite concerned about for many years.

Jewish Home for the Aged

Chall: To return to the various agencies, what about the Jewish Home for the Aged?

Magnin: Well, my interest there was Ida Mayer Cummings, who was Louis B. Mayer's sister. She started what they called the Junior Auxiliary. All the juniors were eighty years and over. But they called themselves juniors.

Every year they gave great big affairs, generally in a hotel. And they'd get all the talent because of Louis B. Mayer. I would go to every one of those things and take part in it, and give out trophies. There's a picture where I'm giving one to Frank Sinatra as a young man.

Chall: There's one of Bob Hope. I saw one for every year in the scrapbooks. She was an interesting lady. You could see her picture in the paper every year, a real bright-looking little person.

Magnin: Oh, she was a humdinger. She was a bundle of energy.

Jewish Day Schools

Chall: What's your opinion of Jewish day schools today?

Magnin: I don't believe in Jewish day schools. I know that some of the Jewish children go there because of the fact they are frightened in some of the schools, where the black kids might beat them up.

But, actually, up until recently--I'll put it that way--I believed in the public school children clustered together on a common level, with Jews learning to know Christians, and vice versa. Naturally, they learn more Hebrew if they go five days a week than if they go once.

Chall: You have to assume that's important.

Magnin: The question is what do they do with it? One day I was over at Rabbi Dolgin's before he went to Israel. He is in Israel now. A boy came in and he was speaking Hebrew and when he got through I said, "What's he going to do with it? When he gets older he'll go into business, and he'll brush his teeth with Crest in the morning, because he'll only have one cavity. And he'll eat trayf in restaurants at noon. What's he going to do? There are no kosher restaurants to speak of."

Well, how is it all going to end up when you're all through? But some people want to feel more Conservative, especially since Hitler, the holocaust, and Israel. Since the Six-Day War, there's been a little more yarmulke wearing, which is a lot of nonsense. I said that last Saturday, "There's a lot of mishegoss."

Hillel Clubs

Chall: I don't know whether it's true that there's a change in approach in the Hillel Clubs, but I know that you were president of the Hillel Council from 1947 to 1952.

Magnin: Yes. I don't like the way some of the Hillels are being run today. I haven't been as close to Hillel in the last few years as I used to be. But reading their publicity, it seems to me that it consists of Israeli dances, guitar playing, and talks about boycotting lettuce. I don't know how much religion is in it.

Some of the rabbis in Hillel are men who either couldn't get along in the pulpit, or didn't like it, or don't believe too much religiously, and it's another form of expressing Jewish life. I think they must do a lot of good, too. I'm not condemning them.

But, I have a feeling that they're potchkeeing around with all kinds of guitar playing and nonsense.

Magnin: It isn't my idea of what Hillel is.

Chall: What is your idea of Hillel?

Magnin: My idea would be if they want to play a guitar, let them play it. But I think there should be a cultivation of a real religious spirit. It's our religion. What are we here for? To eat gefilte fish? What do you think kept the Jew alive all these centuries?

Chall: Tradition--

Magnin: No, tradition be damned. Tradition is based on religion. What was the tradition? Seder is a religious thing. Pesach is a religious thing. Succos is a religious thing. It was a feeling that they were destined--right or wrong--destined to carry out a certain type of religion. They prayed, the shul meant something to them. Today we have become secularized like everybody else.

There is a difference between being Jewish and being religious, being ghetto-ish and being Jewish by religion. For instance, talking with an accent, and living in a ghetto, and acting like a ghetto person, may be Jewish, but it isn't religious. It's a different thing entirely.

Chall: In 1923 you said, "The American Jew must know more about Judaism. Ignorance is a menace to the American Jew." And you meant ignorance of one's own heritage?

Magnin: Sure. How is he going to have any pride and act like a normal person?

Chall: And I was wondering, too, whether some of this so-called return to Judaism sort of thing that you feel is not a return to religion as such, may be an attempt to feel it emotionally.

Magnin: It's the Jewishness. It's the Jewishness. That's what they're returning to, more than religion.

Chall: Your idea of religion then, is what?

Magnin: Well, that's a long story.

Chall: Well, let's get it.

Magnin: There are different expressions of it. I would say the support of the synagogue. I'm not saying that you have to go every single week, but an occasional visit; bringing up your kids in that atmosphere so that they know what they are; belief in God, prayer, which is very important to people's mental health aside from any other purpose.

And a source of identification, this is important. I don't say you have to be like your grandfather and go to the shul three times a day and daven. This is nonsense. But there should be some religious feeling. Unless a Jew affiliates with some synagogue, to me he's only half a Jew. What the hell does he need to remain Jewish for? Simply because you can't get out of it? There's no virtue in just eating gefilte fish; it may taste good, but it isn't a virtue.

Chall: A person could affiliate with a synagogue and still not necessarily be a religious person.

Magnin: There are such people. That's right. Well, it doesn't mean that joining a synagogue and going necessarily makes you a Jew. That's part of it. Certainly.

Chall: Now, you think the students at Hillel aren't going to come out with that feeling?

Magnin: I don't know enough about it. I see their publicity. I haven't been near them lately. It's just a general feeling, knowing some of the leaders, and seeing some of the literature. I wonder sometimes whether they really have some kind of a religious feeling in addition to the Jewishness. I wonder.

But I don't want to condemn them. I don't know them. But I don't go near them anymore. I don't have the time to go running after all these people.

Chall: Well, that's true, but I just wanted your opinion. You are a person who has spanned a long time in the Jewish life of this community.

Magnin: And also the non-Jewish, too. I'm around every-place.

Chall: That's true. You can see changes going on in the non-Jewish community. The Catholic church is undergoing tremendous upheavals.

Magnin: I don't know how much of an upheaval it is. I have my doubts about it. There are always some dissidents among priests and amongst other people. I'm sure if they want to commit abortion they're not going to ask permission.

But, in the main, it's a pretty strong structure. This church across the street [St. Basil] where one of the cardinals lives, I call it the medieval fortress. It looks like it. I told that to Cardinal McIntyre. I said, "The church is a medieval fortress." He said, "You're right."

It's very cold because it's modern, but very interesting. I hear the one in San Francisco--my friend Archbishop Joseph McGucken is the head--is very beautiful. I haven't seen Joe. He and I are very dear friends, very close friends.

Chall: Well, you think that the Catholic church is not undergoing the same changes as the Jewish?

Magnin: Sure. They have changes. Yes. And the synagogue hasn't changed so much if it's run right. There are synagogues here that try gimmicks, and guitar playing, and catering to the kids.

We're going to graduate forty high school students in another month or so, who came back of their own accord. And up at our camp we have camp things. We have the TAG room here--I don't know if you ever saw it--where they can go in and have some fun. But never on the pulpit. There's no monkeyshines, no gimmicks, no cheap stuff.

We had fine attendance Friday, and Friday night was a Bar Mitzvah. Saturday morning, with no stunts, Bar Mitzvahs, or anything we had a fine attendance. If you know what you're doing, if you know how to handle people, you don't have to resort to these things.

Magnin:

That doesn't mean that everybody is going to come every week. Does everybody go to the art museum every week, or to the concert every week? Not at all. I love music, and lately I haven't been going to concerts. But I'm listening to high-fi all day long. It doesn't mean I'm not musical because I don't go to the concert, or you're not religious because you don't go to the synagogue every week.

The main thing is when you do come you should have respect. And there should be a proper atmosphere. You should go away with some feeling of lift and some feeling of "I'm glad I'm a Jew." There is something to life, some meaning."

Unless a rabbi can encourage that feeling-- and I'm sorry to say that most of them can't do it--this is their weakness. They may be good men, educated men, very fine people, but they haven't got that kind of a charisma, an artistic feeling by which they can touch people. They haven't got it.

Chall:

There are many young people going into the Chabad Houses today.

Magnin:

I don't know that there's so many. There are some. They are seeking. See, we're living in an age that is anti-rationalistic. The nineteenth century was largely scientific. Huxley, Darwin, and all this. People were academic, and so-called intellectual. I don't like to use the term. They were pedantic, and philosophic. Then comes the atom bomb, the wars, Vietnam, and people say, "Why is science producing an atom bomb?"

So, now they're seeking. They're running after something. They don't know what. So, one goes to a guru, another one goes to Zen. They don't know anything more about Zen than they know about their knucklebone. They go about being Jesus freaks, and Jewish freaks, and Chabad Houses, and all this. There are a certain number of people that are--especially young people--some of them on drugs or trying to get away from drugs too.

Some girl was coming out of UCLA the other day and she said, "Oh, Rabbi Magnin, I'm Jewish

Magnin: and I love Jesus. Why don't you love Jesus?" I said, "Leave me alone. Look, honey, it's a cold day and I don't mind going to hell. You do what you want; God bless you. If you love Jesus, love him." There was a whole crowd standing around. I said, "I didn't tell you not to. Leave me alone. I mind my business and you mind your business. Do what you want. Save your own soul. Don't try to save me. I'm beyond being saved."

But you have this. It's just like they go for drugs. I heard of a boy the other day from one of the richest families. Millions. Everything to live for. He shot himself. Now, we found out he took drugs.

The Jewish Press
(Interview 7, April 4, 1973)

Chall: Now, I want to move on to another subject, that being Jewish newspapers.

Magnin: Yeah? What about them? We have several Jewish papers.

Chall: I have taken down the names of what I thought were local Jewish community papers over the years, all of which seemed to have disappeared, except for the B'nai B'rith Messenger, the California Jewish Voice which was just now absorbed by the Messenger--

Magnin: And then Brin's paper, the Heritage, which is fairly new compared to the Messenger.

Chall: Right. There is also Israel Today. Also, as I understood it, you began in 1936, along with Louis B. Mayer, Marco Newmark, and Louis Nordlinger, a twenty-four page local paper called the Jewish Community Press to confront anti-Semitism. That lasted about two years. And this, apparently, was set up after some kind of an argument you had with Mr. Cummins [Joseph] of the B'nai B'rith Messenger. What was this about?

Magnin: Oh yes. Cummins today is one of my very closest friends. We used to have lunch together once a week, and now it's maybe once a month. But we're very, very close friends. He's a fine man.

When he came here as a young man, back in the thirties, whenever it was, I think he probably wanted to become kind of a Jewish Hearst. He got very aggressive in ways that he should not have. He was bold. There was one short period, this is when he was first here, when he began to attack all the leaders of the community. Today he has a good paper and we are good friends.

Chall: What about your Jewish Community Press that lasted for a couple of years?

Magnin: I don't remember. It was so far back.

Chall: Let me read to you a comment that came from Stephen Wise regarding editors of Jewish papers. I'm paraphrasing. He said that editors and owners of Jewish papers in America live on the Jewish community, utilizing the community to administer to them and their greed. They are people who fatten upon their fellow Jews, purporting to non-Jews to be omnipotent in handling Jewish affairs, in controlling the Jewish vote, in commanding Jewish patronage. He went on to say that if decent, earnest people who are not self-seeking would get their teeth into Jewish problems a little more deeply, there would be no room for such people. It is indifference and dilatoriness which breeds them.

Magnin: I know what he meant. He's talking about the worst kind. It is true. It's a private business. And it is bad to this extent: the average Gentile that picks up that paper doesn't know it doesn't represent the opinion of the Jewish community, but the opinions of one man who owns that paper. It may coincide with the interests of the Jewish community, or it may not. And some of them can make enemies.

And Jews can be blamed for what one guy says who simply owns the paper and makes a living out of the paper. This is true. But this doesn't mean that all they say is bad, or that all Jewish papers

Magnin: are bad. Not at all. For instance, Cummins started out with that defiant and hostile attitude but he's settled down and has run a different kind of a paper for many years.

Chall: Has the problem of the Jewish press--there were so many at one time and now there are three--is that just the same kind of problem as there has been with the major presses, expense and lack of interest?

Magnin: Yes. The Voice, I guess, wasn't making money. Gatch got sick and old, and he went by the wayside.

Chall: Now, I understand that there's a possibility that the Jewish Community Federation-Council might take over the Jewish press.

Magnin: Well, I don't think that Cummins will sell out. This would be a very dangerous thing.

Chall: You don't think that's good?

Magnin: I know it isn't good. Because no one group of people should have all that power, and nobody else can express a contrary opinion. This is a bureaucracy, which is getting bad all over. They're going a little too far. And I would fight this. Not only that, but they can't prevent people from opening a paper tomorrow morning.

Chall: No, they can't. However the cost of it is so great that it would be easier if it were run by a central organization.

Magnin: It's a terrible thing if they ever get a hold of it all by themselves. But it might happen someday.

Chall: Yes, it might.

Magnin: I don't think that any one organization should have a monopoly of anything. I wouldn't care what it was. Monopolies are dangerous, even well meant. A benevolent dictator would be the best form of government, but nobody could take the chance of it.

Chall: So, your hope is that the Jewish press would always be an independent press?

Magnin: Free. Yes.

VII THE RABBI AS A LINK BETWEEN THE JEWISH AND
NON-JEWISH COMMUNITIES
(Interviews 7 and 8, April 4 and May 7, 1973)

The Movie Industry

Chall: For a while today I would like to talk about your associations with the movie industry, and also their association with the Jewish community, since I think it isn't too well covered yet.

Magnin: Well, in the days of the giants I was very close to the motion picture industry. Many of the big producers like Louis B. Mayer--he was on the board of this Temple for a while--the Warner brothers, Carl Laemmle, and others, were members here; so were some of the actors like Jack Benny and Eddie Cantor. But not too many. I don't think many of them belonged or gave to religious institutions.

In the old days there were very few Reform temples, and I officiated at most of the weddings and the funerals. I'm in most of the books about the early years, like Louis B. Mayer's biography, and the Thalberg book, and the latest one that came out on Hepburn and Spencer. I'm in all these books, every one of them.

I used to be very close to Mr. Mayer. I would go out to lunch with him two or three times a week. Every Sunday afternoon the Mayers had a brunch at their home at Santa Monica, and we'd go out for brunch after Sunday school, and the Barrymores and all these people would be out there around the pool. Some were swimming. Some were playing cards. Louie and his first wife Margaret, and Evelyn and I were very close. Louie would do anything for me. He loved me.

Magnin: There was a party for Joe Scott, who was a very famous Catholic layman around here on his ninetieth birthday. I spoke at the end, and the people were weeping. And Louie came up to me and he said, "You're still the greatest." This is how he felt toward me.

I married Norma Shearer and Irving Thalberg. You can see in the scrapbooks how involved I was. There were a lot of weddings and funerals.

Chall: Oh, yes. I have. I wanted to know something about these people and your contacts with them.

Magnin: They're all different. I would say generally, as far as the community is concerned, that on bigger things, for instance, like the welfare fund drives and all, the producers especially, but also some of the actors, would be part of it.

But, actually, the movie element live in a world of their own. Socially, with some exceptions, you know, they go to parties and social affairs, for their own crowd, and they mingle more in their own. As a matter of fact, the L. A. Country Club won't take an actor. They have only one. I forget his name.

Chall: Now our imagery of Hollywood in the early days is one of loose morals, wild living, and all that sort of thing. Did this affect the Jewish community in any way?

Magnin: No. First of all most, or many of them weren't loose at all. You read about the wild parties and the wild people, because they make the news. A lot of them are good substantial people, but Hollywood lives by itself more or less.

Chall: And did then?

Magnin: Did then. Yes, there was a certain amount of mingling of business executives who met at times at charity affairs, some other things. But as a rule, Hollywood lives its own life. Most of them are pretty good people, and whatever shenanigans others pulled off didn't affect the Jewish community or any other community as a whole.

- Chall: Oh, I see. Did you have any opinion regarding the roles that the Jews played in movies, about gangsters, and wars, some stereotyped characters?
- Magnin: You mean lately?
- Chall: No, even in the early days.
- Magnin: Well, it wasn't so bad in the early days, because they were afraid of censorship then. See the Catholic church with the Legion of Decency was quite powerful, and they used to toe the mark, and they were very very careful. The looseness got in when they began importing pictures from Europe which were made in Europe. So that they now have gone to the other extreme, but I think a reaction will set in in time.
- Chall: Did you know Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson?
- Magnin: Very well, Paul and Bella and I traveled together for several days. Both of us spoke for the Jewish Welfare Fund in St. Louis. So we traveled three or four days each way and stayed in the same hotel rooms together. We had a suite of rooms. Yes, I knew Paul. His first name was Muni. I'm trying to think of his last name. I forget. But he took the name of Paul Muni. He was a very talented man, very nice man. Bella was nice, too. I liked both of them.
- Chall: He was strongly identified as a Jew?
- Magnin: Yes, he really used to be on the Yiddish stage at one time, you know.
- Chall: And he would go around with the Jewish Welfare--
- Magnin: No, he didn't go around. One or two occasions. They asked him, because they wanted to get a crowd and get money, and so he consented to do it.
- Chall: What about Edward G. Robinson?
- Magnin: He was a very good friend, and he was a very fine gentleman--cultivated; he had a great knowledge of art. He never was a member of the Temple. I don't know if he was a member of any temple, but he was a very good friend, and I knew his first wife very

Magnin: well. In fact we went to a party at her house, after they had separated. Both are dead now. Jane, his present wife, I see out at the club. We are always very friendly. Eddie was a sweet man.

Many of the movie people go to the Hillcrest and I'm very close to them there. Georgie Jessel, the comedian, Milton Berle, Jack Benny, Lou Holz-- I know them all. I've been to so many affairs where they have put on benefits for people, where I have either spoken or given prayers, or both. So, I've gotten to know some of them rather closely.

Chall: Some of them, like the Warners, and Louis B. Mayer, and Carl Laemmle, and Sol Lesser you knew well in the early years.

Magnin: Well, I'm taking Sol for dinner tonight, him and his wife. We're very close friends. Incidentally, speaking of Laemmle, until about three or four years ago, I was a trustee--along with his two children--of his estate.

Chall: How did that come about?

Magnin: Nobody knows. I think he probably wanted a third party, and he probably felt one was needed perhaps because of the difference in temperament between the children. They're both very nice, but they had differences of temperament. And he wanted a person who cared, and who, in case there might be any conflicts, might be able to be a neutral party, and smooth things out. Not that anyone expected fights or anything, but differences of opinion. Fortunately there were no disruptive arguments. We got along very well.

I don't know. He liked me, and he came over one rainy day--I'll never forget it--and asked me if I would do it. And I said, "Yes." Later on a man from Chicago, a banker, came out on business concerning the estate, and he didn't realize that I was Rabbi Magnin. He wasn't sure and he said to me, "How do you know so much about business?" Then he says, "Oh, you're with I. Magnin." I said, "No, that's my grandfather. I'm not in business. I know two and two make four. It's just plain common sense." He said,

Magnin: "If I ever come here I'll join your congregation."

We have the respect of all kinds of people. See, I am very many-sided. I'm very practical. I don't like the word idealistic. It's pretentious. It's become crappy. But I'm much of a poet, and some part of a mystic at moments. I'm very sensitive to beauty. It's a funny combination, you see. I can talk to them and make them laugh and cry within five minutes, you see, because it's the way I feel.

Chall: Well, I think Louis B. Mayer said of you, and this quotation comes from a long article about you and the movie industry, "Edgar would fit into any group."*

Magnin: Yes, did I ever tell you he offered me a job?

Chall: As what?

Magnin: Anything. We were eating lunch at the Hillcrest Country Club--this must be over fifty years ago, certainly over forty-five years ago. And he says, "Edgar, how would you like to come into MGM?"

I said, "Doing what?" I'm sure he didn't need me. But he liked me. He said, "Anything. You can be a director, a writer, or anything that you want. An actor, anything."

I said, "Are you kidding?" He said, "No." So, he said, "I'll top anything you'll ever make." I said, "Put the figure down." I wanted to test him. He started to write. I said, "Stop it. I'm not interested. I want to be your rabbi for life, not work for you for two weeks. But you're beautiful and I'll never forget it." And I never forgot it.

Chall: Well, he appreciated your talents, I guess. I

*Richard Z. Grimberg, "The People's Ambassador," The Jewish Tribune, January 6, 1928.

Chall: don't think he was one to throw around compliments, was he?

Magnin: I'm the only rabbi he ever liked. He had no use for most of them, and he had no use for a lot of people. He was a genius. This man was a very strange man. He could be very rough and hard, and he could be very sweet and tender. You had to know him.

Chall: When I talked yesterday to Judge Lester Roth, he said that he felt that Louis B. Mayer was one of the most ingratiating men he had ever known.

Magnin: He was the greatest actor in Hollywood. He could put on an act and cry and make the actors break down and do what he wanted. Oh yes. He was an amazing man.

Chall: But, he had apparently, a great influence in the political sphere.

Magnin: He used to take down the phone and talk to President Hoover. I was there when he did it. I used to eat lunch with him two or three times a week out at the bungalow. I'd go in there, and he'd be sitting like this. He had a desk with pills all over it. He was a hypochondriac. I'd go in and say, "Louie, get off your cross. One Jesus was enough." See; then he'd start to smile.

I called his office Mussolini's office--a big beautiful desk. I'd say, "Let's get the hell out of this office. I want to talk to you." And once I did. I went to him and we sat on a board way out on the lot. And I said to him, "Do you know what I want to talk to you about?" He said, "About what?" I said, "I want to run your life for six months." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Not pictures. You're a genius. I want people to love you and really know you."

He said, "Well, your chemistry is different than mine." I said, "If you're going to talk chemistry go back to Mussolini's office." That's how close I was to him. Nobody else would ever dare to talk to him like that. He was rough.

Magnin: He was a giant. He was the Jolly Green Giant, but he wasn't always jolly. But I loved him. He was kind.

Chall: Why did he know, for example, Herbert Hoover well enough to talk to him? And I think he made some of the judges around here.

Magnin: Well, he was powerful. At one time he had a greater salary than the whole of what the Senate and Congress make put together. He was a very powerful man. I guess he contributed to Hoover's campaign. Anyhow, people recognized the big man that he was.

Well, I know friends here that just pick up the phone and talk to Nixon. I can do it myself, but I don't do it. Because it's not necessary. I told you the other day Julie Eisenhower called me up.

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: Did you see the tape of my speech that they got? The introduction he gave about my knowing his wife before he did? I'll have a copy made for you of the speech and some of the newsclippings.*

Chall: I'd like to have that. Now I think we've got a pretty good assessment of Louis B. Mayer. I'm sure there is much more to tell.

Magnin: Harry Warner was a sweet man.

Chall: Yes, tell me about the Warners. I understand that they were religious men, and charitable men.

Magnin: Very, very charitable. And by religious I don't mean they went every week to temple. They had a fine religious feeling, and especially towards the Temple. They gave us the wonderful murals, the Ballin murals. In addition to that, later on the Warner Youth Center. They've always been very loyal. They're grand people.

Chall: Is there one Warner brother left?

Magnin: Jack is the only one left.

*Appendix .

Chall: And there were three of them.

Magnin: There were Harry, Jack, and Major Abe Warner. Samuel and Milton had died earlier and the murals were given in their memory. Then there were the girls, who were very close to us. They have all passed away.

Chall: Large family.

Magnin: Oh, yes. Their father was a butcher in Ohio, in Youngstown. They used to say they put the kosher meat in one case, and the chozzer in back in another one. Sometimes Jack likes to clown.

They opened a little nickelodeon. I think Jack sang and they put on an act. I think they used undertaker's chairs. It was a small thing, and out of that--look what they became.

They were dear friends of mine. Most of the top people in the movies were very close. Even those that weren't Jewish like DeMille. DeMille was very fond of me. We were very good friends. Cecil B. DeMille claimed that one of his grandparents was Jewish, or partly Jewish, I don't know.

Chall: Tell me about Cecil B. DeMille. You, I understand, gave him some assistance with his early movies.

Magnin: Well, the King of Kings came and the Jews made a big fight about it. First of all, he followed the New Testament, which is their Bible, and which is read every single week. There is nothing new about it. But he cut out some horrible things like "His blood be upon you . . ." in that passage where they bring a basin to Pilot and he washes his hands and says, "His blood be upon you and your children."

He tried to show that good Jewish people loved Jesus as well as the others. He toned it down as much as you could without ruining the whole Bible story. And he got abused besides for it. I wasn't any regular advisor, or paid advisor in the studio working with him, but he would ask occasionally. He tried to avoid anti-Semitism but the story itself produces it.

- Magnin: It's like the Merchant of Venice. You can't make it beautiful, no matter what you do.
- Chall: Did you recommend Dr. J. M. Alkow as a research assistant to DeMille?
- Magnin: I'm not sure that I recommended him, but that was in the Ten Commandments; I think he did some research. I don't think it was the King of Kings. I have some pictures with him in a case down in the hall. He sent me the script of the Ten Commandments, in beautiful red vellum. I have it at home.
- Chall: He would be careful, then, not to offend?
- Magnin: Well, he didn't want to offend anybody. He was selling pictures. Why should he make enemies? And not only that, he was a dignified man, and he had a lot of Jewish friends.
- Chall: In the sixties when the King of Kings was produced again, was there any kind of problem?
- Magnin: I don't remember any reaction then, but I remember the first time. There was one rabbi, in particular, let him rest in peace. Some of these hotheads have to have some movement to fight or espouse, to do something. They have to keep busy. They get their names in the paper somehow or other. They made a big tsimmes over the thing, but it blew over like anything else.
- Chall: Well, I assume that you wouldn't want the Jewish people to be offended by the movies?
- Magnin: Of course not. I once asked L. B. Mayer why he didn't use rabbis in his pictures, and why he used Catholic priests and Episcopalians. And he told me, "There's nothing dramatic about a man who dresses just like everybody else--without the collar and the vestments and all that." He was a dramatic fellow.
- Chall: And now we have Fiddler on the Roof with the Chasidim in their payess and shtreimels.
- Magnin: In those days we wouldn't have thought of such a thing. Well, the world has changed.

- Chall: Sol Lesser, of course, has been a very close and very dear friend of yours for many years. He has been very generous, I understand, with the University Religious Conference.
- Magnin: I was president for many years of it, and on the board for many years. Oh yes.
- Chall: As a result of that you were able to get some of your friends from the film industry to help out?
- Magnin: Oh yes. Also, there was another man there besides Sol Lesser. It was George Bagnall. He's a lovely, lovely man. He's non-Jewish. George is very important in the motion picture industry, not as an actor, he's a producer. For instance, I think he was the head of the home out there for the motion picture people. Anyhow, he was influential. So, it wasn't Sol alone, but Sol did help. Sol helped with a lot of things.
- Chall: Can you tell me about Walter Wanger.
- Magnin: Yes. Walter was never a member here, he became a member of the Episcopal church, but we were good friends and I've always had a great respect for his ability.
- Chall: I understand that he headed, at one time, the Hollywood branch of the Community Relations Committee.
- Magnin: It's possible. I don't recall.
- Chall: But was he concerned?
- Magnin: Oh yes. Well, the Jews are most interested in anything that effects Jewish interests.
- Chall: In the early days do you have any recollection of the fact that one of the vice-presidents of the Jewish Community Committee was reserved for the film industry, and that Harry Rapf and Jacob Karp usually were the appointees.
- Magnin: Well, I knew they always put them on committees. Wherever they could use them, they did, naturally.
- Chall: Can you tell me something about these men?

Magnin: Harry Rapf, I think, was on the board here for a while, I'm not sure. But he's a very close friend. He was out at MGM. He wasn't in the class with Louie Mayer or anything like that, or Irving Thalberg, but he knew his business.

Chall: And Jacob Karp?

Magnin: We are friendly; he's not a member of this Temple.

Chall: You blessed, recently, Adolph Zukor on his one hundredth birthday.

Magnin: Yes. They had a picture of it in the New York Times. All my New York friends called me; they thought I was in town. [Laughter]

Chall: Tell me about him.

Magnin: Zukor, I don't think, belongs to any congregation. He may have given to Jewish causes, but he's never been active. But they had this great big dinner and Cardinal McIntyre gave the invocation and I was supposed to give the benediction. So, I got up and all I said was, "Well, Moses lived to a hundred and twenty, who knows?"

Then, I turned to him and I put my hands on his head and blessed him. And the New York Times man grabbed it quick, and the next morning it was in the New York Times. I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "It was so beautiful, the way he looked up at you." We have a picture of it.

Chall: Yes, I saw it. But he was never an active Jew?

Magnin: No, not to my knowledge. I guess he helped everything like most people would. Not like the Warners or Louie Mayer.

Chall: Do you know Dore Schary?

Magnin: Very well. I used to have lunch with him all the time in the bungalows with Louie Mayer. I saw his development from a young writer at MGM up to the time when he headed the studio, and left.

Incidentally, too, when Jesse Lasky died I officiated at his funeral. He wasn't a member

- Magnin: either, but I do this for people sometimes.
- Chall: Can you tell me about Sam Behrendt? He must have been an interesting person.
- Magnin: Yes. Sam Behrendt in the early days, going back to pioneer days when I came here in 1915-16--Sam Behrendt was in the insurance business; he was the fixer of the community. By that I mean if you needed a doctor he'd get you a doctor. If you needed a rabbi he'd get me. He was a man-around-town who knew everybody. He was just a character. He was a very fine fellow, and a character. You had to know him.
- Chall: Norton Stern told me that he was also an amateur historian, a collector of slides and pictures--
- Magnin: Yes, he had also an old census of California, and things like that. But that was a little hobby of his. That wasn't his main interest.
- Chall: In the Jewish Tribune of January 6, 1928 there was a two-page article about you and the movie industry. I'm just going to read you a couple of parts of it and see how you respond.
- "Magnin has broad activities in Southern California, yet, it is Hollywood first with which the average California mind associates the young rabbi whenever his name is mentioned. For, though Temple B'nai B'rith is situated way downtown . . . a number of miles away from the city of studios . . . many a Jewish movie man drives all the long distance hurrying to Friday night services or the Saturday morning sermon."
- Magnin: Well, that's exaggerated. Some may have. They came down on the holidays, of course. But, I can't picture all of them coming down every single Friday and Saturday. That's a lot of baloney. Some of them may have, I'm sure, from time to time.
- Chall: It's nice to find out, because these articles last a long time and their inaccuracies sometimes are considered facts.
- Magnin: Oh, these writers . . .

Chall: This is from the same article:

"His artistic sense is understood by Hollywood, so no major picture of importance is reviewed without his being asked to attend with the cream of Hollywood. 'Is the film good? How about its moral? Any corrections to avoid inciting race prejudice?'"

Magnin: That's some more baloney.

Chall: And Grimberg goes on to write that you were asked for advice regarding Jews in filming.

Magnin: That is true from time to time. But the idea that I went out on every single film is ridiculous. Of course, it doesn't make sense. But, I have been asked many times when there's any question about things, sure. When they needed me I answered it. I wasn't going out there regularly. I have something else to do besides that.

Chall: Were you involved in the formation, or in the organization itself, at any time, of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League in the thirties?

Magnin: I don't remember. I can't recollect. It's a long time, unless there's something to show it, I wouldn't be sure.

Chall: I'm not either. I found reference to it in a graduate student's paper on you [Michael Ellis]. But I don't think I found anything in your scrap-book, and I was wondering about it.

Magnin: I don't think so. I don't know. If it was a good cause the chances are I was on almost anything and everything. But I don't remember.

Censorship

Chall: Do you have any feelings about censorship in the movies? I think, in the thirties, you said, that if they were going to censor movies they might have to start tearing leaves out of the Bible.

Magnin: Yes. I've always been opposed to any form of censorship. Of course, today there's a certain conflict. What goes on today under the guise of art is purely pornography, there's no question about it. It makes you hesitate whether there should be some stopping. I haven't seen the Last Tango in Paris, and I haven't seen Deep Throat, but from what I hear of it, particularly Throat, it should certainly be stopped.

On the other hand, where do you draw the line? And who draws it? So, for that reason I would rather something like that would go on occasionally than to have decent things thrown out. After all, Shakespeare's plays are full of things that to prudes would be very shocking. I've never been for censorship. I don't like it.

But they are going quite too far. For instance, they have nude girls in bars. They stopped that. So, you know what they're going to do? They're going to have Coca-Cola now. They won't have liquor. They don't need a liquor license. They'll sell the girls. They're not selling the liquor.

You see, they get around anything. You cannot regulate human nature, only up to a point, that's all.

Chall: So, it's better to leave it alone?

Magnin: Oh, I think other pressures can be brought in certain cases, but I don't like to see it legal.

Interfaith Movements

Chall: I want to go into your activities with respect to inter-faith relationships. How would you characterize your attitude toward inter-faith activities, like the Conference of Christians and Jews, the Festival of Faith and Freedom, and Brotherhood Week?

Magnin: Well, I think they all help. I don't know that they make a great dent on things, but they're all constructive. I've been interested in all of them--the Religious Conference--and all of these things.

I think, in the long run, they carry with them a certain tone and spirit of understanding and getting together, which is good. But they're not going to do away with anti-Semitism. Nothing has so far and nothing will, 100 percent.

Chall: In the National Conference of Christians and Jews is it primarily the leadership who already believe pretty much in brotherhood who run the organization?

Magnin: The trouble is that they get people who are already sympathetic. But some of the publicity, and some of the things they do--they have certain activities--might reach people. I don't know. They're all worth helping, but don't take them as cures or anything like that. Oh yes, any constructive thing.

Chall: The only name that is familiar to me in the National Conference is Reverend Clinchy.

Magnin: Yes, I knew him. He was the founder. Well, you see when they came out here there was kind of a conflict between them and the Religious Conference, which was working on the local level. Perhaps Clinchy might have gotten together better with them, but things didn't work out that way, and who knows whose fault it is. But I helped both at the time.

Chall: Yes, but you were active in the National Conference?

Magnin: Oh yes, but I gave more time in the early days to the University Religious Conference.

Chall: You received an award.

Magnin: Oh yes. They've done all sorts of monkeyshines. I've got every kind of award from everybody. That doesn't mean anything. [Interruption]

Anything that's positive is worth supporting. There are so many different things that you can't give the same to everybody. But you proportion, you uphold them.

Chall: Do you feel the same about such things as big advertisements on the Bill of Rights?

Magnin: It depends what they are, how they are worded, who says it. If they're said by phonies then I don't like it. If they're said by real people and organizations, certainly.

Chall: But that is not the total way of reaching people and changing opinions?

Magnin: For one thing the Jewish people have to change a lot to get friends. And I don't know if it's possible. As a people, we're good people. We're no better or worse than other people. We're very charitable, we're bright; we have a lot of qualities. But I don't think the average Jew has the capacity of cultivating the average Gentile in a way to make him like him.

By that I don't mean that he should kowtow to him, or try to make him like him. That's where you don't get it, if you try to do that. Just be normal, natural, and at home with people. After all, there's a tendency for chip-on-your-shoulder Judaism--I'll show you who I am. It's one thing to be defensive, and it's another to be suspicious, and aggravate yourself and other people. I think there's too much of it.

Chall: Did you have a consciousness toward your role as a rabbi and a Jew in reaching out to the non-Jewish community?

Magnin: Never. I just act like a normal, natural human being.

Chall: It wasn't an intention on your part?

Magnin: Naturally, it was subconscious. I, naturally, would want to make as many friends for Jewish people as I can, and for myself--this is natural. But no more than I would try to win you as a friend, just to have you as a friend, and go out of my way to have you like me. I've always been myself. And I treat people that way and they respect that.

I don't pull any punches, but I'm one of the very few people in the world that can call a fellow

Magnin: an S.B. and get away with it and make them like it.

Chall: From the very start in your rabbinate when you went to Stockton . . .

Magnin: In Stockton I talked to the Woman's Club. I had a little group of kids at the public library on Saturday afternoons, and I used to tell them stories, and tell them about the lives of great people like Rembrandt and George Washington.

Chall: I was wondering whether, as a young rabbi, you had made a decision--and I don't mean this crassly--but that you had made a decision that you were going to present to the Gentile community--

Magnin: A normal Jew, a normal person.

Chall: A Jew that could be understood, and liked, and a representative of the Jewish community which they didn't know. This was sort of a conscious effort on your part.

Magnin: Partly conscious, and mostly just natural. I mean, I don't go out with the idea of how many friends can I make for Jews. That's no way to do it.

I go out with the idea of giving every man a chance to show himself as to what he is, without prejudices, and treating him accordingly.

Chall: Now, when you say that most Jews aren't able to do this, or aren't willing--for whatever the reason . . .

Magnin: It isn't a question of willingness. I don't think they feel at home with other people. I mean, I'm a business partner and after six o'clock it's over. I don't think it's always the Gentile's fault. I don't think people know how to communicate with their own, even with their own families. That's why you have fights in families.

Communication is a great gift. This is a secret of many things. When Clarence Darrow spoke to a jury he communicated. When I talk to the congregation I'm talking to them like I'm talking to you, not preaching. Who needs this? And I never did.

- Magnin: Being natural I was able to go to the White House and make them laugh in the middle of the sermon, a half a dozen times, and still hold their attention. [Interruption]
- Chall: Are you able to transmit your ideas about dealing with your fellow man, regardless of whether he's a Jew or Christian, to other Jews, so that they will cross the barriers?
- Magnin: You can't teach things to people. They have to have it within themselves to do it.
- Chall: Now, when I go through your scrapbook--I get the feeling that Los Angeles in the last number of years, is a basically conservative and really segregated community. That there are very few people that can cross over various boundaries.
- Magnin: Well, that's true in every community. Everywhere is the same. Only a handful of Jews, for instance, in San Francisco, know the top echelon goyim there. Maybe some of the Hellmans and maybe not. Maybe Cyril Magnin, my cousin--and then I don't know socially how far it goes. I think the line is drawn everywhere more or less. That is a hard thing to buck, because people have their own little cliques and friends.
- Chall: That's friendship. What about the professionals? Let's assume that your son, for example, who's part of a different generation from you--one would assume that after X number of years of public school education, that in his generation there might be more socializing.
- Magnin: Henry has a lot of Gentile friends. But I'm talking now about the top social crowd. Jews mix to some extent with the others, but not too much either--as much as they should.
- Chall: What about your son's crowd. It doesn't have to be at the top.
- Magnin: Oh, Henry's very respected. First of all, for Jewish things--he's going in the federation where I got off. I'm still on the Red Cross board. He's on the Red Cross board. They wanted him to be president of the Jewish Big Brothers, but he

Magnin: wouldn't. He's a very successful man. He's an amazing man, an amazing man. And I'll tell you why he's so amazing--he's one of the top producers of E. F. Hutton Company anywhere in the world.

Chall: That's not a Jewish firm is it?

Magnin: No. Matter of fact, years ago there were very few Jews. He's the assistant manager at the Beverly Hills office. But this kid, when he started out, before he had any business at all and was glad to get a buck, turned down a big order--I saw him turn it down. A man came up to him at the country club one day and said, "Buy me \$100,000 worth of something." And Henry says, "Please don't buy it." And when the man walked away, I said, "What if it goes up tomorrow morning?" He said, "It'll go up. But it's no good. I don't want him to buy it." That's how he's built up his reputation. Whether it's a little widow or whether it's a multi-millionaire, or corporation, he's just the same. In other words, he has all my wife's virtues, you know.

This kid built up a tremendous business; somebody overheard a manicurist one day say, "My broker is Henry Magnin and he gives me as much attention as he would the Standard Oil Company." Which is true. Oh, he's a man.

But, regarding social contacts, I would imagine that the average American Jew, the descendant of the East European and other Jews, probably knows how to mix much better than his father or grandfather who has a little accent and a foreign way. But, on the other hand, I don't know . . . Every Jew has some favorite Gentiles. Some Gentiles have a favorite Jew. This goes on all over.

But on a broad scale, maybe it was because of the fear of inter-marriage, or of being shy, or of feeling they weren't wanted, there isn't enough getting together between them. See, the rabbis are now starting this business against inter-marriage. The Orthodox, and now some of the Reform.

Now, the Orthodox make a big fuss about that, but not the fact that people all go out and eat

Magnin: trayf every day, and don't go to the shul, or observe other laws. I never encouraged inter-marriage, but there are times when I will do it because they're going to get married anyhow, and why push them away? The rabbis marry two Jews who don't even go to a synagogue and don't believe in religion. What makes it so precious? Just because they're born Jews?

I'm not an ethnic Jew. We are a people, but I'm not an ethnic Jew. I think it's the religion that counts. If we give that up, there's no reason to exist, that is, as Jews.

I don't take these professional stances. I'm not a professional Jew. I'm a person.

Chall: What about the inter-faith work of the University Religious Conference?

Magnin: I was a founder of the University Religious Conference here, which is Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. We have one piece of property in common. I was president several times, and on the board God knows how many years. I was very active. I worked with the university students in the Hillel clubs. Then we brought them in to the University Religious Conference later on.

The Catholics, the Protestants, they're all a part of it. It's not what it used to be. Times have changed. I don't want to get into all that, but it was very effective.

Chall: Why did you help found it?

Magnin: Why not? It brought about good will. The Christians had less to get than we had to get. Students used to speak at the Rotary and other service clubs. They were a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew, and sometimes a Mohammedan, and a colored person, and a Japanese.

They went to India; some of them made several trips to India.

Chall: What was the role of the people like you, the ministers and the rabbis? Aside from founding it, what else did you do?

Chall: I noticed that you were active for many, many years.

Magnin: Well, I was on the board. Whatever there was to do I took part in it. I didn't run it. They had executive secretaries to do that.

Chall: Did you have to find a site for the buildings that were ultimately erected?

Magnin: I suppose. I can't remember every detail. I was right in the middle of all of it. So, how far I went in picking this site or that site is another matter. But I was on the board all these years.

I got off a few years ago. I got a little weary of it. See, the religious advisors wanted to take over everything. We should just raise the money and they wanted to make all the decisions; I had nothing against them. I said, "You want to make the decisions, you get the money too."

It got to be something different than it was. It still has value. My wife went out there yesterday. They honored her--the women out there. It started at the time of the Ku Klux Klan resurgence. The Catholics and the Jews were anxious to start it then. If it didn't produce good will, it prevented a lot of bad will. At least, for Jewish people, I'm sure.

Chall: The Ku Klux Klan was active in Los Angeles?

Magnin: At that time, all over the country. It wasn't just Los Angeles. In Texas it was worse.

Chall: And you felt that the area of the university would be the place to offset the kind of prejudice represented by the Klan?

Magnin: It started in the East under Rockefeller's auspices. It was started by a man--I forget his name. And then he came out here and we organized. And the Protestants got into it, the Catholics, the Jews. Oh, there are pages of what they've done; a whole history. They could tell you.

It produced a lot of good will, and good feeling, and a chance to get together. And then

Magnin: during World War II there was a chaplain's service corps. Out of that, the women, including my wife, used to send gifts to the soldiers for Chanukah and Christmas. In fact, when I was up at the Aleutians during the war, I saw some of the packages coming through.

Contacts with Non-Jewish Religious Leaders

Chall: In your relationships with the Catholic and the Protestant leaders, you've been careful not to offend their ideas and their ideologies, but at the same time you would take a stand on your own, if you felt it was important?

Magnin: Oh yes. If I felt it was necessary I would take a stand on my own. But I won't go out of my way to offend them. I don't see any reason for doing this.

Chall: Now, I noticed that twice in your replies in the press--when the Supreme Court made the decisions on prayer in the public schools and on teaching the Bible--that you did part company with the conservative Protestants and with Cardinal McIntyre.

Magnin: Well, I think the opponents of church and state are taking too much of a legal point of view on it; not that it can't be taken advantage of. But, there are other ways of getting around it. And I think the influence perhaps of lawyers among our leaders has made for a very legal attitude.

After all, England has church and state and they don't persecute Jews, and Hitler did it without any religion. So, this doesn't prove anything. I think they could have certain prayers, a silent prayer, at least. Let them have a silent prayer, anyone according to his own heart. Or, if they were to have things like the Ten Commandments, it wouldn't be such a terrible thing. They have Greek mythology. I don't know why they shouldn't have that. But, not theological things.

Magnin: I don't mean to say that God gave the Ten Commandments, but what they are, see. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal--just those words, repeated every week.

Chall: Do you think that does any good, to repeat a standard prayer or the Ten Commandments? Do you think it has any value?

Magnin: No. I don't think it does much good or much harm. But, you never know what fish you catch on a hook. But, on the other hand, what harm would there be in reading the Ten Commandments in the schools? Billy Graham asked me that. My answer was, "They'll go beyond that, and some fool will use it in another way."

In the main I still think it's best to keep it separate. But, actually, I'm not as scared as they are about this. I stood with them on the church and state being free, but I think sometimes it's too legal a point of view.

Chall: However, in taking a stand--parting company with these people with whom you are generally in accord--that's no problem to you?

Magnin: No, it hasn't been that I know of.

Chall: Are you able to help them understand the position of the Jews in the controversial cases of this kind?

Magnin: As a rule, they don't bother me. I haven't had any Catholic priest ring me up, or the cardinal, and say, "Make a speech against abortion." They don't bother me that way.

Chall: But are you able to help them understand?

Magnin: I don't argue with them on things like that. The matter of abortion is as close to the Church as their own mother. You don't argue with people on that. You don't get to first base.

Chall: Not arguing, but, at least, allowing them to understand that other people have another point of view.

- Magnin: Oh, they know that. They read it all the time, naturally. There's nothing new about that. That's why they're opposed.
- Chall: In terms of your ideas about religion in the schools--when you were writing about it in 1925, and then just recently when the Supreme Court made a decision on prayer, you felt at that time that religious practice belongs in the homes and the synagogues, and not in the schools.
- Magnin: Chiefly. In the churches and synagogues, oh yes. I think in the main that's true.
- Chall: I saw an article of yours written in 1925, a long one about the Church and the Bible, and at that time you were really quite concerned about setting up a form of sectarianism in this country similar to that in Europe, which you felt was dangerous.
- Magnin: Well, that's the general argument. I was a little more intense in those days.
- Chall: That was fifty years ago.
- Magnin: Less mellow, but I think essentially it's correct. The idea is still correct. I think some compromise could be used. I think when you are a small six million out of two hundred million people--although, the Jews aren't the only ones who say this--I think you'd have to be a little bit cautious. You want to keep it out to prevent anti-Semitism. Then, you turn around and make all the Christians hate you by taking a stand like that. All the fundamentalists think you're Godless, you know. After all, a lot of Americans believe in this.
- Chall: Just to take the other argument, wouldn't it be better to find some way to indicate to the fundamentalists that you're not Godless, and that you still disapprove of this?
- Magnin: They won't believe you. In fact, if you're not Christian, that's enough already, much less Godless. You can't prove anything to anybody, anymore than you can make a Zionist Jew believe that there's anything wrong with Israel, or an anti-Zionist that there's anything good about it. You can never convince them.

Chall: But if there is a cause to fear the sectarian approach by Bible and prayers in school it doesn't do the Jews either good or harm to keep it out--damned if you do, damned if you don't?

Magnin: I don't think it makes much difference.

Chall: At the time of the latest Supreme Court decision Cardinal McIntyre said that the decision was shocking and scandalizing.

Magnin: Well, from their point of view, it is. Because they'd like to see religion bound up with everything, of course.

Chall: Now, the fact that he, in one press release, said that it was shocking and scandalizing, and you said, in the same release, that you felt it was a good decision, does this put any strain on your relationship with the Catholics?

Magnin: No, they don't expect me to agree with them. I never have discussed abortion. Another rabbi took abortion as his sermon topic. I thought it was silly because a lot of old women sit in the Temple, they're not going to have an abortion. The young women aren't going to ask him. It's a Catholic problem, not a Jewish problem, really.

See, my attitude is, if it's something that is a really compelling thing and it is necessary to speak out for any purpose, I will do it. But, the ministry is a leadership job. We have too many Jewish politicians, and not enough statesmen. You need to be a statesman. What is the good of having an Anti-Defamation League if you're going to have a million Catholics hate you, and they hate you for some silly thing you said?

When you want them to help you for a real purpose, they're not going to be with you. You have to make people like you. I told you about the time when they fought the little creche down at the plaza?

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: Well, that's an example of it. I've been close to the Church ever since. They'll do almost

Magnin: anything for me except break their own rules, naturally.

Chall: Have you been careful to measure the statements that you would take on positions by considering how the Catholic church, perhaps, or the major Protestant denominations would react?

Magnin: Oh, I have generally said what I want to say about anything. I always think of trying to be a statesman. We're a handful of Jews. We're hated enough anyhow, and deserve to be, in part, a lot of us, shooting off our big mouths on every damn silly thing. We wouldn't be liked anyhow if we're saints or geniuses. So, anything you do to pour fuel on the thing is bad.

Cardinal McIntyre told somebody when he came from New York he thought the Jews out here were not religious until he met Rabbi Magnin. It showed his feeling, at least. You see, by having this man's friendship it meant a lot. The whole Catholic community feels very close to me, which means much to the Jewish people, see. And I think this is a valuable service.

Chall: Could you tell me something about Father Charles Casassa?

Magnin: Yes. I love him. He calls me Edgar and I call him Charles. He was, for years, president and he's now chancellor of Loyola. He's been very kind to a lot of Jewish people. Rabbi Wolf, who teachers out there now, is probably close to him. Father Casassa has been to many Jewish affairs. He's a really wonderful man, broadminded, as liberal as he can be. We have a very deep friendship.

Chall: And you have a deep friendship with Cardinal McIntyre, too.

Magnin: Oh yes. The old man, I take him for lunch once in a while. We go to the Los Angeles Club. I missed him lately. I might call him up and see how he's doing.

Chall: When I went to see him, we talked about his friendship with you. There are a couple of things he said which you might like to have on the record, because

Chall: we didn't tape, of course. He said that you wouldn't sacrifice conscience and honesty for anything; that you were a religious leader of the most monumental and magnificent church in town.

Magnin: He said that?

Chall: He said, "He speaks for the Jews. His viewpoint is a practical one, which in no way diminishes the spiritual foundation."

Magnin: That's a nice way to put it.

Chall: He claims that you two are "a combination in restraint of trade"--the trade being dissension.

Magnin: That's right. He's a nice man. He lives across the street in St. Basil's. When he looks across the street, he says, "We have the Old and the New Testament." I like to call this area on Wilshire Boulevard the Eucumenical Mile instead of the Miracle Mile.

Chall: I wanted to find out how he felt you represented the Jews, and I said to him as a preliminary, "Now, I realize that you are considered a spokesman for the Catholics . . ." and before I even finished he said, "Oh no. Absolutely not. Nobody can speak for the Catholics."

Magnin: Nobody speaks for the Jews.

Chall: So, I said to him, "Do you think Rabbi Magnin speaks for the Jews?" And he said, "Absolutely." [Laughs]

Magnin: That's funny. No, I don't represent all Jews, completely.

Chall: But he thinks that. In his own way he knows he can't represent all Catholics, but he . . .

Magnin: I don't think he means that. I think he means that I have the respect of the Jews and Gentiles. When I say something the public accepts it as Jewish opinion, that's what he means. If he says he is against abortion, he speaks for the Church, not for all Catholics. A lot of Catholics are going to do it anyhow.

Chall: He's very careful about the way he chooses his words.

Magnin: You know he used to be on Wall Street, did you know that?

Chall: That's right. He told me.

Magnin: He holds a pencil when he talks. He's quite a guy. I love the man. And, you know, he's right, and I'll tell you why. You see, I happen to belong to a liberal group. But you notice the money today and all the interest is going to fundamentalism, and the more conservative things, and the mystics. People are fed up with cold reason. It has no warmth to it.

They made a mistake, I told the cardinal, when they put the Mass in English. And he agrees with me. It takes out all the mystery. People love warmth and emotionalism, and mystery. [Interruption]

Chall: Now, how about the Protestant church? Who do you think represents, is the spokesman for the Protestants?

Magnin: They have none here now. They have what they call the head of the Protestant Church Federation-- I just met him for the first time the other day. In the old days, for instance, if you had a banquet, a big affair like when the president of the United States comes, you would have a rabbi, a Protestant minister, the cardinal. This time they didn't even have a Protestant minister. It was the cardinal and myself. However there are some very fine Protestant ministers in town.

Chall: Couldn't they rotate a number of Protestant ministers for major affairs?

Magnin: No. Here it's the cardinal, it would be Manning, now, the new one. And for the time being at least, myself.

Chall: From an interview in the local press (this one was June 28, 1970 in the Los Angeles Times), the writer says that you were "one of the last to remain active of the great churchmen who did so much to stabilize Los Angeles' spiritual reputation

Chall: after the spectacular evangelists had focused upon it a nationwide bemusement. He was a friend of all of them." Is that a fairly accurate statement?

Magnin: Well, there was Aimee Semple McPherson. I never was close to her. She always wanted to come and see the Temple, which she probably did. She was a very spectacular woman.

Chall: What does he mean by "stabilizing L.A.'s spiritual reputation after the spectacular . . . ?"

Magnin: Well, years ago they always thought Los Angeles was a place for freaks. It was all wrong. We had certain extremists, I forget their names now, and the whole country used to kid us. I once told a man from Boston that they had Mary Baker Eddy, right under the shadow of Harvard University, who says there is no sickness. They had Father Coughlin in Detroit.

But, what they meant was that I, along with certain of the clergy among the Protestants and Catholics, helped to put the city on a more firm religious basis. But, of course, it improved, too. And there were many more of the educated kind, as well as others. I wouldn't take too much credit for that. It's one of those things.

Chall: Well, you were here at the time.

Magnin: I did whatever little part I could, along with the others, I guess.

Chall: How did you happen to get your private audience with Pope Pius in 1958?

Magnin: Well, I'm very close to the cardinal. Also I had an audience again with Pope Paul. I could have been with Pope John, but I was in a hurry. We had two of our grandsons on a tour of Europe, and we had to go on to Florence. But Pope John did bless our whole congregation. My name was on the list as being there. They had ten thousand people at St. Peters, but they know me down at the North American College. My name was passed on and he blessed Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

[Pointing to picture on the wall of the audience with Pope Paul.] In this we're just four of us--

- Magnin: Dr. and Mrs. George Piness, and Evelyn and I. There were about twelve or thirteen of us with Pope Pius, whom I knew before he was the Pope. He came here as Pacelli.
- Chall: Was that an exciting experience?
- Magnin: Well, it was a private audience. Sure. That's a little different. The other one with Pope John there were ten thousand people.
- Chall: In a private audience what does one talk about?
- Magnin: Nothing. How's Joe Scott? How are you? How's Los Angeles? There really is very little to say. You don't say much. What are you going to say? Argue with him?
- Chall: No, no, no. I don't mean that. [Laughs] Not very many are there in the inner sanctum; I was just curious.

Inter-racial Contacts

- Chall: Now, there was some activity on your part in the last decade or so on interracial affairs. You were on the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Human Relations. Is that an interracial committee?
- Magnin: Yes.
- Chall: What kind of activity was involved?
- Magnin: Well, there wasn't much activity. That was done more on an other level through another group. But it really wasn't an advisory committee. We'd have lunch with him and he'd tell us some things, about what he wanted to do.

For years I was on the inter-racial county committee, but now Rabbi Wolf is active on it-- I can't be everywhere.

- Chall: Wilberforce University in Ohio, in 1962 gave you an honorary degree. How did that happen to come about?

- Magnin: I don't know. They knew about me, and they wanted to give it to me. I don't know. They're all black, you know.
- Chall: Yes. Have you had any specific or special relationships or friendships in the black community?
- Magnin: With individuals. But not as a group. For instance, I see Norman Houston, who's the head of the Golden State Life Insurance. I see him at a lot of meetings, and I'm friendly. But, I'm not close to any groups, as groups, at all. They don't know themselves what they want. They have different leaders and ideas.
- Chall: What about contacts with the Mexican community, particularly those who have been part of the Los Angeles community for many years?
- Magnin: Very little. I am close to some of the Mexican-American leaders and have taken part in some of the celebrations down at the plaza.

VIII THE RABBI'S ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE GREATER
LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY
(Interview 8, May 7, 1973)

Rotary and Masons

Chall: You've been a member and favorite speaker of the Rotary for many years.

Magnin: Well, I was a member, but then I dropped out because I couldn't go every week. So they made me an honorary member. They'll honor me once or twice a year, and I'll go and speak to them at Easter or Christmas, or sometime.

Chall: How did you happen to get into the Rotary?

Magnin: Oh, that was years and years back. I had an uncle who was a Rotarian, Myer Siegel, who was a very important merchant here. He had a store like Magnins in the early days. He got them to invite me.

Chall: Well, I can tell from reading your scrapbook that during those early days the members of the Rotary Club were very fond of you.

Magnin: Yes, in those days. They still are.

Chall: What about the Masons? Were you a Mason?

Magnin: Yes. I have the highest honor they can possibly give, that's the 33rd Degree. I'm not active because I haven't got the time. But I was Grand Chaplain, that is, of the Grand Lodge. They've conferred all the honors on me. In the last few years I can't go to meetings; in the earlier days I did.

Chall: What was your reason for belonging to the Masons?

Magnin: Oh, you belong to everything when you're young, and everybody else belonged. Then, my grandfather Fogel was a Mason. He always had a Masonic emblem on his watch chain.

It's a strange coincidence, he was buried from the Scottish Rite Cathedral on Van Ness Avenue. And you know when I became Chaplain of the Grand Lodge, the first time they had a committee meeting to arrange the program it was up there in that hall. I'm sentimental about it. It would have pleased him to know the honors that masonry had bestowed on me.

Personal Friendships with Prominent Community Leaders

Chall: I'd like to know about some of your personal friendships with many prominent non-Jews. For example, why did Marie Wilson ask that you officiate at her funeral?

Magnin: Well, she was married to a Jew. And I think she felt close to me, too, probably followed my articles and things on television and radios. So, I meant something to her.

But, I think, the additional reason probably was that she wanted to express to her husband that, you know, "I love you." This is my hunch. I wouldn't be sure, but this is my hunch.

Chall: That was a rather nice thing for her to do.

Magnin: Yes. And Ken Murray came up later and was very sweet.

Chall: Who was the Princess Pignatelli?

Magnin: Princess Pignatelli. Her husband was a Catholic prince, not of a principality. You know, the Catholics have their Knights, and they give regular titles. (You have to render a service.) Her husband was Prince Pignatelli, an Italian. And she ended up by

Magnin: being a social columnist for the Hearst paper, for the Herald Examiner, and possibly some of the other Hearst papers. That's it. And I got to know her very well. She would always come up and kiss me. Then, when she died the family rang up and said, "Are you going to the funeral?"

I had a date, but I said, "Yes, I'll break the date." I went over there and I went in and they wanted me in the sacristy. So, I went into the sacristy. Now, this was a funeral. St. Basil's was packed with the most prominent Catholics--and other leaders of the community.

Now, this was a big Mass. Fortunately, I had a dark suit on. They said, "We want you to be in the procession." So, we came down the aisle with a big cross and all--the whole works. And I was marching down. When we got to the rail I was invited up to sit there during the Mass, which I also did when they dedicated the church. To my knowledge, it's never been done before.

So, there I was sitting like a carbuncle on your nose. Now, what do you do when they kneel? What does a rabbi do when they kneel?

Chall: Either stands or sits, but he never kneels.

Magnin: You see, I'm standing up; or if I am sitting I bend over to show my respect. There's nothing wrong--I can kneel to any God I want, but people would say, "Ah, you see, he's playing to the goyim." So, if I'm standing up, when the priests kneel, I lean over like this, that's all. [Rabbi Magnin demonstrates how he stands with head and shoulders slightly bowed.]

Chall: You just bow.

Magnin: That's all. You have to know what to do. The average rabbi has no imagination, no common sense. Some are jerks.

Chall: Did I understand that you also took part in a celebration of Cardinal McIntyre's golden years? Was there such a thing?

Magnin: Well, first of all, when he came here he didn't come here as cardinal, but shortly after they had a great big affair at the Shrine Auditorium. I hardly knew him then. I was part of the procession, and sat in about the first row during that event.

Now, when he had an eightieth birthday there was a party given at the Century Plaza. There were three speakers, John McCone, the president of a bank--I forget which one--and myself. Of course, those guys are dry. I mean, it's not their business.

So, I got up. You know, we'd just been robbed here. They took my tape machine and the police recognized my voice.

Chall: I think that's a great story.

Magnin: Yes. You've heard it. So, I got up and I said, "You know, Your Eminence, they robbed our place a few days ago. They got \$300,000; the only thing is, it was in pledges." [Laughs] "They really were looking for you next door. They know you have the dough." The whole house came down. It was the first bit of life.

I said, "You know, we love that Temple and all our property is worth millions. But I'll swap it for the Pieta, or the Moses of Michelangelo, or anyone you want to give me." See, right away . . .

Then I was kidding him. You know, he was an Irish boy from New York. When I got through they were crying, really crying.

I said, "You don't know your value. A business man knows how much he sells, how much he makes. A lawyer knows how many cases he wins and loses, what he makes. Do you know how many hearts you've healed? Do you know how many people you've set right? How many poor devils that relied on what you've said and done in this world? You figure it out. Only the angels up there have got the books on that." This is the way you talk.

He was crying. See. From laughter to tears because it's real. It's no monkeyshines. You read a stupid thing and nobody cares. Of course, you've got to be damned sure of yourself to talk that way.

- Chall: That's right. Mr. Golden [Alfred] whom I saw last month, told me that at one of these affairs when you were going down the aisle in the Catholic church somebody called out to you . . .
- Magnin: It wasn't the Catholic church. It was the Episcopal church, and it was the funeral of Bishop Stevens. He was very dear to me. I think I shed the only tear. When I marched down, there was a guy with a big cross. As I was coming down the aisle, James Page, who has a great sense of humor--he's one of the most powerful laymen in this community--said to me in a loud whisper, "Ed, we'll get you yet." I said, "The hell you will." And off we go. [Laughter]
- Chall: [Laughs] That's such a great story too.
- Magnin: It's true. It's absolutely 100 percent. [Laughs] Well, you couldn't imagine that happening to most people! It did; it happened.
- Chall: It's even funny that a person sitting in a pew would speak out like that.
- Magnin: He was kidding. He was a great kidder.
- Chall: In terms of the Protestants, Bishop Stevens was one of your closest friends?
- Magnin: Yes. Now it's Bishop Eric Bloy. He's a very fine man. I was at his installation as bishop. He's going to retire soon. We've always had a nice relationship with these people. There's probably no rabbi in the whole United States who has had the kind of personal contacts--the spectrum of personal contacts--as I've had. Stephen Wise comes closest, but in an entirely different way. He went a different way, politically, and otherwise. Also, Emil G. Hirsch, whom I admired. In Chicago he was the president of the board of the public library. A man like that. There are a few in every community.

I call them the Age of the Giants. There was Wise, there was Hirsch. There was J. Leonard Levy in Pittsburgh. There are very few. And, of course, in my generation [Abba Hillel] Silver and myself.

Magnin: Some of them went on a national scale. Silver was interested in building up Israel. And Lipsky gave a dinner for me in New York and wanted me to do this sort of thing. I said, "No. I'll help Israel behind the scenes. I don't want to be a crusader. You'll send me a telegram and tell me to do something that I don't agree with. If I don't want to do it I'm not going to do it. I'm not your guy, but I'll help you."

There are only about four or five in any generation. But here there's something different. I don't think that any rabbi in America, the world, has had--possibly with the exception of Stephen--has had the kind of friendship, intimacy, with important non-Jews. I mean, men like John McCone and Roy Ash and Henry Salvatori. I saw Roy only recently since I saw you. We were at a cocktail party a few days ago. It gets that close, and I make no effort at it.

Chall: There are people, who have a strong feeling about what you have accomplished, in terms of your relationships in the general community.

Magnin: Oh yes. Louis B. Mayer used to say to me, "I'm not religious, but my interest in the Temple is what you mean to the Jews in this town." Oh, he saw that.

Chall: There are others who say that you are the most influential member of the Jewish community, in the general community, that you've been a great bridge between the organized Jewish community and other leaders.

Magnin: I think that's true.

Some Further Thoughts on Ethnicity

Chall: Well, there are other people who say that in working to have the Jews represented you haven't asked for anything as a Jew. And you have succeeded, therefore, at the cost of ethnic needs.

Magnin: The cost of ethnic needs?

Chall: Yes.

Magnin: You mean, that I've given up something Jewish in order to do this?

Chall: Or held something back.

Magnin: I'd like to know what it is.

Chall: I think this is the feeling of the people who have a strong Jewish identification.

Magnin: Well, you see, these are the immigrant types. These are the East European or their descendants. They're jealous people. They're people who are looking for some reason to why I am what I am, which is natural. I don't blame them.

I told you the story with Rockefeller where I gave the Jewish prayer. Did I ever tell you the story about the dinner given by my friends--the president of one of the oil companies--Bob Minkler. He and his wife lived out in San Marino where all the eshter goyim live, the crowd of anti-Semitic Jews.

So, Bob had a dinner party for Winthrop Rockefeller. This was many years ago. Win was a young man. He died recently. Bob had about fifteen people. He invited my wife and myself. I hardly drink now. I don't like it in the first place, and there are too many calories. But that night, I had about three martinis and Win Rockefeller was calling me Ed, and he was Win. And we were both having a good time. So, Mrs. Minkler called us to dinner and here was this beautiful palatial home. Now these people are millionaires, they're tops.

And I sat down to dinner and he said, "Edgar, will you give grace?" I said, "Ask the Baptist over there to do it," [laughs] meaning Win Rockefeller. He said, "I want a Jewish grace."

I said, "All right. So I gave the prayer completely in Hebrew. He wanted a Jewish one, he got it Jewish.

Magnin:

Then I told them the story about the boutonniere. Did I ever tell you the story about the boutonniere? This is a famous story. I was at a luncheon that Louis B. Mayer gave. I think Churchill was the guest. And I sat next to Gloria Vanderbilt. And when I left the table--they had carnations, hundreds of them--I took a carnation and started to put it in my buttonhole. She said, "Wait a minute, let me do that." She took two carnations by peeling that thing that holds them together. She made a big deal. So, here I was going out with this big silly thing.

I went to get gasoline at the Red Man station and the fellow said, "Where the hell did you get that?" I said, "From Gloria Vanderbilt." He said, "The hell you did. You got it from Rockefeller." [Laughs]

So, I told this story at the table and Rockefeller told a story that is the opposite of it. He was traveling in New England and they didn't know him. He was in a little town and went to a bank to cash a check and it said, "Rockefeller."

The fellow thought it was a fake and said, "Who the hell do you think you are? Vanderbilt?" [Laughter] So, I told them the story. But I gave a Jewish invocation.

Well, I have never been less Jewish or religious. I'm not, by nature, an ethnic Jew. I have a natural pride of being a Jew. I was raised in a Conservative shul, as you know. I love Judaism or I wouldn't be a rabbi. But, I'm not a professional Jew. While I made my livelihood out of it, to be sure, and a good one at that--I am not a professional Jew.

I could have been in the motion picture industry. I could have been a lawyer or anything I wanted to be. And I preferred to be a rabbi. But, I didn't prefer to be a ghetto rabbi. I'm glad my grandfather got the hell out of that damned ghetto. I don't want to go back to it. I don't see anything virtuous in running around with a little beanie on top of your head. I don't see any sense to it.

Not because I'm ashamed of it, but what's the point of it? If an Arab comes here he should dress

Magnin: like an American, not go around with a burnoose or a towel over his head, you know. So, it's my attitude. After all, I'm a third generation in America. Why should I go around exalting something that those poor devils were glad to get out of? What was beautiful about that damned shetl?

They lived like pigs, and they treated their wives like dogs, and their children were beaten by the melamed in the Hebrew school. He'd hit them over the head if they didn't know Hebrew-- give them a slap in the ear. They lost many a Jew that way. There's nothing beautiful about it. It's poetic. It's romantic. It's historical. But, so is Oliver Twist. But who wants to be Oliver Twist?

Chall: In terms of a couple of things that you've written in the last number of years, I just want you to explain them with respect to today's whole push towards ethnicity.

Magnin: Oh, I only recently wrote a little column for the paper that will be published soon. What I say is this: There's something in the pride of ancestry. But I didn't choose my ancestors, so I deserve no credit to begin with. Secondly, I must recognize that other people have ancestors and other cultures. And I love my own the same way that I love my children more than your children. But, I don't think my children are better, necessarily, than your children, nor brighter, or that they're the only ones who deserve any love in the world.

The melting pot you couldn't have if you wanted to, but I believe in something more approximating that, than in breaking up into all kinds of fragments. I believe in pride of descent but not chauvinistic pride, arrogance, and hostility.

Some of the rabbis talk about the Jewish point of view, and so at a meeting of rabbis, I lifted a glass of water and said, "What's the Jewish point of view about this? There must be some Jewish point of view."

Chall: There are those who say we don't want to be Jews at home and Americans in the street, that America is a multi-ethnic country and the Jew can be a part as Jews.

Magnin: That's right. They can be as Jewish as they want. But they're mixing up ghettoism with Judaism. I happen to like gefilte fish, but I also like chili and beans. I don't eat pork products. That's a mental block with me. But, I happen to like lobsters. They like it, but those idiots pretend.

Conservative Jews say that if they go to a Jewish banquet, it has to be kosher. Last night I was out at the Hillcrest Country Club and there was the wife of a multi-millionaire who belongs to a Conservative shul, but she was eating chili and beans on a trayf plate. [Irate] What's she doing eating chili and beans? "Rabbi," they will tell you, "if you have a banquet it's got to be kosher." He goes out to the club himself. Maybe he doesn't eat meat, so he eats fish on a trayf plate. Who the hell is fooling whom with all this? You can't live a separate Jewish life.

I visited Rabbi Dolgin one day before he went to Israel. He brought in one of the kids from his Jewish day school. So, the kid talks Hebrew. It's all baloney. With all this Hebrew--who's he going to talk it to? The butcher? It's a nice thing to learn, and I'm glad he did. It will give him a certain feeling of Jewishness. But, who is he fooling if he isn't going to be any more Jewish in his life than any kid that comes out of our Sunday school. Maybe less. He may have a reaction against it all.

See, they don't want to think things through, these people.

Chall: In an essay or speech of yours, "Where Jews and Christians Meet," which I saw in your scrapbook, you talk about great similarities between Judaism and Christianity.

Magnin: That's right. There are.

Chall: They have much in common, you wrote, but they will not discard entirely the outer differences of their religious practices.

Magnin: There's no reason why they should.

- Chall: "There are differences between us that are psychological and instinctive. These are deep-rooted in the historic background of each of the faiths and could not, even if it were desirable to do so, be washed away by mere rationalization."
- Magnin: That's right.
- Chall: "We must strengthen ties of brotherhood and amity that exist between us, but we must be careful to do it in a dignified way without sacrificing our self-respect."
- Magnin: I would say that same thing today. After all, the seder means more to me than Christmas candles. Channukah lights mean more to me than Christmas candles. But, I don't have to turn my nose up at Christmas candles, or think it's a great sin if somebody has a little tree. See, I tell our kids, "You don't need the tree." But, it's no great sin. First of all, it's a pagan festival. It never was Christian originally. So, I try to maintain a balance. I don't try, I just naturally maintain a balance. Maybe some people can't. They have to go from one extreme to another.
- Chall: I think, in the twenties, you said that you preferred the idea of a flower garden with unity but with variety, rather than the idea of the melting pot, which you felt was suicidal.
- Magnin: That's right. No, we don't have to drop everything that's Jewish, or Catholic, or Protestant, or Chinese, or German. You don't have to drop them at all. But, you don't have to go around being more German than you are American. Or more Chinese than you are American. I think we owe something to this country to keep it united and cooperative, not to fragment it to a million pieces. This is what we're doing today.
- Chall: You once said that the American Jew must know more about Judaism; ignorance is a menace to the American Jew. That was in 1923. What did you have in mind?
- Magnin: I would say the same thing today. How can a Jew have any sense of pride or any Jewish religion if he doesn't know anything about it? He has to study it.

Chall: And part of it is historical?

Magnin: Well, it gives him his background. I think he should have it. And, you know, it's a funny thing about these kids who go to Sunday school and get out like my own grandchildren. As they get older they mature and they get stronger feelings about their background.

I got a letter from my grandson David who's in Bard College in New York. He went to a seder this year and he writes to me about it. It's nice.

Community Organizations

Chall: Now I want to talk about some of the activities in which you participated in the community. I can just give you the ones that I know have been important to you and you can respond to them. The Red Cross.

Magnin: I've been on the board for years, and during the Second World War I was on the executive committee. It was a smaller group.

Chall: What has been its significance to you, being with the Red Cross?

Magnin: I believe in what they do. They help people all over the world, as well as our soldiers and their families. They have a tremendous program. I don't go to every single meeting today, but I'm still on it. My son is on it. He's very active.

Chall: You, as I understand it, were one of the founders of the local Community Chest. Is that correct?

Magnin: Yes, that is correct. I was one of the first ones. I can't remember if I was on the board or not. I was one of the founders. You name it, I was on the beginning of all these things.

Chall: Just from the point of view of historical research, can you recall the founding of the Community Chest?

Magnin: I don't remember all the details. It's so far back. I've been on so many things. Most of the Jewish organizations were started by the members of this congregation. You know that, the federation, all of them. And, of course, I was very active in them, more than I am today. I had more time and I was less spread.

Chall: In terms of the non-Jewish things, though, like the Community Chest, how did you become one of the founders?

Magnin: Well, you see, they had the important clergy on there. How many rabbis amounted to anything? It was a small Jewish community compared with today. There are today a hundred rabbis, more or less. In those days there were three or four of us who were understood to count.

This was the Temple with the prominent Jews. And the rabbi was the rabbi of the main Temple. This was it, period.

Chall: So, when the Community Chest was organized you were asked to be on it as a representative leading Jew?

Magnin: That's right. Oh sure, they don't put it that way. But, of course, they want to get every element in. They took those Jewish laymen who were prominent, some of them, and I as the rabbi. The other rabbis, they didn't even know who they were. Nobody ever paid any attention to them.

Chall: What about Boy Scouts?

Magnin: Well, I got the Silver Beaver Award. Not that I did any more than anybody else, but I was active at one time; I'm not anymore, I don't go to all the meetings, but they use my name. I'm interested and back it up, and they gave me the Silver Beaver. That's a high honor. There's only one higher, and that's the Silver Buffalo.

Chall: This was because you were active in the leadership? Did you ever have a group of Scouts here?

Magnin: Our Scout troop here is years and years old. Not only that but their ritual started in this Temple. We had a man by the name of Mr. Bernard, who was

Magnin: the Scout leader, and he wrote the Scout ritual being carried out today.

But, I'll tell you how this thing comes. You don't ask for it. You become a figure in public life. It's like if you could get Frank Sinatra at an affair, or Bob Hope, they're figures. People like figures. That's why when the vice-president comes out he stays with Sinatra. These are figures. And you become a figure. I don't say I'm of the same dimension, I'm not, but when you become a figure, you're in demand. They call me a celebrity, but I don't think of it that way. I feel I'm just another person.

Chall: You could get off some of these boards if you didn't want to be on them. But, apparently, you serve at will, once you're asked.

Magnin: Oh yes. Some of them I have gotten off. I had Rabbi Wolf put on the county inter-faith committee instead of myself. He's been very active on it. He's on the board of the Conference of Christians and Jews. Larry Goldmark, the young assistant, is out in public a little bit. I don't want to hog everything.

Chall: Now, the Hollywood Bowl--you always sponsored it.

Magnin: I was on what they call the original charter board. Once a year, at least, Joe Scott--who was the most prominent Catholic layman--and I, would make a speech at the Hollywood Bowl to raise money. We spoke without a loudspeaker in those days, reaching way back.

I was always interested. I was very close to Mrs. Artie Mason Carter who was the original founder. Later on Mrs. Chandler helped it a great deal.

Chall: How could you speak in that large Hollywood Bowl without a microphone?

Magnin: You can, if you know how to pitch your voice. Most men can't, I could. But not for any length of time, or you'd strain yourself. But I know how to pitch my voice, this is the secret.

Magnin: It's funny how when I look back on my career, it seems like a few years; it's just a phenomenal thing. When I think of the day that I came here and left Stockton, California and there were orange groves and lemons, and I think what has happened. This is the second largest city in the United States.

Chall: It's a unique city.

Magnin: Oh, it's got a flavor all its own. I wouldn't trade it for all the world. I don't want to make trips anymore. I want to stay home, really.

Chall: And all of this that you have done, in terms of your friendships and your leadership, do you look upon it as sort of gradual, or did it come to a head and remain on a plateau?

Magnin: I never thought of it. Years go by one by one, the months one by one. It just comes and goes, and you don't think anything about it. I never sat and looked at myself in the mirror to see how big, or tall I am, or short. I take everything as it comes.

Chall: Well, it's come well to you.

Magnin: You're damned right it has. The Boss up there had his finger on my shoulder right along. He's been very good to me.

Chall: You must have done something to help yourself.

Magnin: Well, use a little common sense and try to understand people. This is the greatest thing in the world, to know people.

Chall: What about the World Affairs Council?

Magnin: Well, the World Affairs Council is a very prestigious group of people. The first president was John McCone. The last president before this one was Roy Ash. Today it's Tom Jones, the president of Northrup. And that's the kind of men we have in the World Affairs Council.

Chall: I know that it's always been an important organization in any community.

Magnin: This is the top people.

Chall: And you serve on the board, don't you?

Magnin: Right from that day. I'll show you the whole group of them here. [Reads names from the letterhead and gives their business and professional connections.] With some exceptions, these are the top people who run the town.

Chall: Does this have a small board that plans the meetings and hires the speakers?

Magnin: No. It's done mostly by committee. Because only a few are active. They take the speakers as they come. For instance, they had the Israeli ambassador last week. I introduced the Austrian ambassador the week before. Once in a while I do, you know. There are only two Jews on there.

Chall: On the board?

Magnin: That's all. One of them died--there were three.

Chall: I saw a picture taken a long time ago, dealing with a benefit concert to aid exiled musicians. And I think Rufus von Kleinsmid was with you.

Magnin: He was the president of SC.

Chall: I don't know very much about him. He looked like a very handsome man.

Magnin: He was a very nice man. The Jews thought he was anti-Semitic. He wasn't, he was of Dutch descent. He got a Jewish doctor, a refugee, in to the medical school. It was almost too late, but he got him in. He was a nice man. Those foolish Jews. They don't know what they're talking about; they believe every silly thing they hear.

No, he even had a brother-in-law, I think, who was Jewish. Or sister-in-law, I forget. No, it's not true.

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HAROLD C. MC CLELLAN
JOHN A. MC CONE
CHAUNCEY J. MEDBERRY III
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The Speaker's Circuit

- Chall: As part of your activity in these organizations in which you were a member of the board, you spoke often before the meetings.
- Magnin: For all these things.
- Chall: I want to quote to you from a column by Bill Henry, which I saw in your scrapbook.
- Magnin: He was a writer for the Times.
- Chall: I want to get it on the record, and then I want you to comment on it.

"When religion is to be represented you usually find Archbishop Cantwell, Bishop Stevens, and Rabbi Magnin. The latter is one of the most eloquent talkers in town. But like the other two he usually only gets a chance to offer a prayer. Archbishop Cantwell, Bishop Stevens, and Rabbi Magnin have suffered at many a banquet, have heard the same platitudes they heard at the last one, and the one before that. To the closely observing their faces show their pain as they pick at the boney chicken and hear boneless addresses." Does that prove to be correct?

- Magnin: Right. I don't eat that food because I'm sick and tired of looking at it, and they give me anything I want. Did I ever tell you the story about the thousand dollar tuna sandwich?
- Chall: No. [Laughs]
- Magnin: It's true. I was down at the Century Plaza at a \$1000-a-plate dinner. And they know me. The captain came up to the dais, and said, "What do you want?" I said, "Oh, I don't want you to go to any trouble." But they'll bring me anything I want, so I said, "Give me a tuna sandwich." "What! Are you kidding?" I said, "I want a tuna sandwich, if it's convenient."

Now, they got a joke out there that they sold the most expensive tuna sandwich in the world--a

Magnin: thousand dollars. [Laughter] You see how you make history? Isn't that something? I wanted a tuna sandwich. I didn't mean to be funny, but it turned out to be funny.

Chall: What about the speaker's circuit?

Magnin: I call it the "rubber chicken circuit." [Laughs]

Chall: So, he's right.

Magnin: He's right. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you something. They waste talent. They have a boring speaker where I could, perhaps, be more interesting to them. They'll use you for a prayer and then a guy will bore the hell out of you.

Chall: Do you feel that there's any meaning at all to having a prayer before and after these meetings? What's the point?

Magnin: It's a formal thing. By the way, the World Affairs Council never has one, they never have a prayer. Oh, I think it's a gesture to the clergy, to religion. It's a gesture, largely. But it sets a tone if it's done right, which is all right.

I told you about the one I gave at the president's banquet, didn't I? Where they raised \$1,800,000. It was one of the last things before the election. He came out here. We raised more than New York did at the dinner.

Chall: Tell me about that.

Magnin: Well, the cardinal opened it with prayer. Then, they had Governor Reagan, Bob Hope, the president of the United States, after which I was to give the benediction.

In the middle of the benediction they all applauded; I've had this happen before, but not often. And Art Linkletter turned to my wife and said, "I've never seen this before." So, the president ran up to me afterwards and he practically embraced me and he said something about the White House. All I heard were the words White House. What he said probably was, "I want to see you soon

Magnin: at the White House."

Chall: What had you done to solicit applause in the middle of the benediction?

Magnin: Well, I'll tell you. When I got off the elevator to have breakfast with them, Pat put her arm around me and said, "That was a great speech." I said, "That was no speech. It was a prayer." She said, "It was a speech." I said, "Well, I wanted God to know whom I was voting for." [Laughter]

Well, actually, in a form of a prayer, it was a speech. A quick, short, rapid, lively thing, in which I'm talking about America and I said, "God bless the president and God bless America." And they cheered, you see. "Amen." But, it was a prayer and it wasn't a prayer.

The usual prayer is deadly. Here, you're following the president of the United States of America. It would be an anti-climax. So, I said what was on my mind; I always do. They never heard a prayer like that, and they applauded. I did this the other night.

The other night I said a prayer at a banquet for the liquor people. They started to applaud. A few of them always do that, as though it's a speech.

Chall: I noticed when I was going through the scrapbook that in the later years there would be words such as "Rabbi Magnin, invocation and remarks."

Magnin: Yes. I did that and I'll tell you why--although the remarks are very brief.

For instance, the other night the liquor dealers association of California had a conference and a banquet here at the Biltmore Bowl, and they were honoring Harold Jacobs, whose father met me at the train when I first came here. And Harold has been a member here for years. The Simon Levi Company. It started in San Diego, it's a big company.

I wanted to say a word about Harold. Well, you don't do that in a prayer, "Dear God, Harold

Magnin: is . . . " So, as I got up I said, "Just a few seconds before we have our brief prayer. I want to say something and I can't incorporate it in the prayer. I've known Harold since his childhood. We've been very very close and he's a wonderful man, and I'm so happy to see him. I want to congratulate him and you on this nice affair. Now, we bow our heads and pray." That's what I mean by remarks.

It's kind of silly asking God in a formal manner to bless someone. It's ridiculous. It doesn't make sense.

Chall: Well, I know, but there are some people who pray that way in public.

Magnin: Well, they're braying, they're not praying. We used to have Dr. Kohler at the college. He was a German and spoke English with an accent. He said, "Let us bray." [Laughs] That's what the jackasses have been doing ever since. [Hearty laugh]

Chall: It seems that it isn't proper for prayer if you have an idea about what prayer is supposed to mean.

Magnin: You have to have a sense of fitness in anything. You see, it's the same way with the benediction. When I close, these people sometimes are crying. See, I'll say, "Let's think for a few seconds." We have the lights dimmed a little. "Here you are alive. In a split second any one of us can be killed. Here we are in this beautiful place, alive, able to see, to hear, to walk, to breath, and the old heart beating." This is the way you talk. I say, "Let's be grateful for this. Now another week starts. A few hours from now the old stars will be playing peek-a-boo."

See what that does to you? It's imagination. You can't be a stuffed shirt. You must feel things. A pulpit has to be filled by an artist, not by a shmo, a jerk. This is what bothers me. But, what are you going to do about it?

The Radio Programs

- Chall: Tell me about your work on the radio. In 1936 you were called the "famed radio preacher."
- Magnin: I had a regular network. And I went on week after week. When I was on the air in the afternoon, they wouldn't start the show in the theater in Bakersfield until I was through. It went almost all over the country. To this day people come up to me, "I miss you." You know, older people. I used to talk on Socrates, on Sophocles, on Euripides, on Moses, on Ezekial, on Spinoza, anybody I damned pleased, anything I wanted.
- Chall: What was the network? Was it one of the local stations at that time?
- Magnin: No. Later on I was on a local station, on KFWB. No, I was on both the Mutual and the Columbia networks covering several states.
- Chall: Was that once a week?
- Magnin: Yes, Sunday afternoons. I had a big audience.
- Chall: How long was it? Fifteen minutes?
- Magnin: At first it was thirty. I cut it down. And I never had a script in front of me. Will Rogers followed me, and Will never could get over it. He said, "How can you do it? How do you know when to stop?"
- Chall: I was going to ask you that because I know you don't usually prepare. They're so careful on radio, they'll cut you off at the split second.
- Magnin: I was the only one who was allowed to do this. I have an inside clock, a built-in clock.
- Chall: So, you were no more prepared for your radio broadcasting than for your sermons?
- Magnin: Of course, I was prepared. I prepare it here [pointing to his head]. I don't get up without thinking about what I want to say. I have notes and plenty of them. I probably give it more thought

Magnin: than those who write out stuff and don't know what they're talking about. I probably write fourteen outlines and then throw them away. Oh yes. Don't think I ever get up unless I'm called on suddenly. You can't work that way without being a fool. But I'm liable to decide at the last minute, and change my mind and show another phase. I don't like to read. I'm not an ABC fellow.

See, with me, I get up and I say, "There are two or three things I want to tell you tonight. The first thing I want to tell you is a new book has come out on Hitler. This monkey with the little moustache. He's not such a monkey. He was a tiger with claws." See, this is the way you talk. I just made that up now as I'm talking. See, this is the way you do it, but you have to have imagination, a big vocabulary, a broad background of reading, ability to think quickly on your feet, and plenty of self confidence.

Chall: So, you think about it for quite a while?

Magnin: Of course. If I'm going to talk on Hitler, I'm going to read again many things that I can draw on. But, at the last minute I'll probably think of other things that strike me.

Chall: I see. You worked on the radio for a number of years, ten or more?

Magnin: I don't know. More than that. When it started I was with them.

Chall: What was the reason that you did it?

Magnin: I reached millions of people who knew what a Jew was for the first time.

Chall: And you were talking to them about the point of view of a Jew?

Magnin: Largely, but not entirely--I talked about anything that would make them feel more sensitively. Bible, Greek, Chinese literature--I might bring up anything I wanted. That's what surprised them. It was a humanistic program, but with a lot of Jewishness in it. I said what I wanted. Just like with the articles I write for the paper. They're

Magnin: not all Jewish. Some are and some aren't. It's just trying to reach people.

They thought I was a graduate of Cambridge or Oxford.

Chall: Well, I know that's always been one of your areas of fame--that you were on the radio before anybody else in the clergy.

Magnin: Will Rogers used to follow me. He was next in line. He watched me through the glass. He called me Father Magnin. I said goodbye to him. I remember when he made the trip with Wiley Post. He said, "I won't see you next Sunday." I said, "Will, God bless you. Have a great trip." And I never saw him afterwards. When the newsboys were shouting extras announcing his death, I was driving to officiate at a funeral. I stopped my car at the curb and cried. He was a great man. A genius.

Chall: Can you tell me more about him?

Magnin: Well, I would see him at banquets and affairs. He had a good sense of humor.

Chall: And he did really have that kind of sense of humor he is publicly noted for?

Magnin: Oh, he could say in a sentence more than most people can in an article. Of course, he had writers, too. But he was a natural.

You know how he got famous? He was a cowboy and he used a lasso on the stage, in the Follies. He would lasso some prominent personality in the audience, and start to comment. While he was doing this he was commenting on the politics, life . . .

Chall: He had imagination, too.

Magnin: Oh goodness yes. I had his typewriter. I went to the typewriter shop and bought it secondhand. One of my grandsons used to admire it, but I sold it long ago or gave it away. I wish I'd kept it. Beverly Hills was small, but he was the mayor of Beverly Hills.

Chall: Why did you leave ~~the~~ radio broadcasting? Was that because radio had less impact, or you were tired of it, or what?

Magnin: Oh, I kept it up for years and years, and then I got tired of it. I wanted to go away on trips and things, and let it go.

Chall: Have you ever thought of television broadcasting?

Magnin: I had my own program for a few years.

Chall: Oh, you did?

Magnin: Oh yes, I had a nice audience, too, but I got tired of running it regularly.

Chall: I see. Did you conduct that in the same way as you did the radio--just sitting and talking about whatever you felt you wanted to discuss?

Magnin: Anything I wanted. It might be Socrates, Moses, Spinoza, anybody. Yes, same format.

Chall: Can you evaluate the effectiveness of these broadcasts?

Magnin: Yes. Millions of people listened and Christians, a lot of them. Jews, too. It gave Jews more self-respect and pride, and many Christians to this day (those I mean who are left) mention it to me.

And even at the university [USC]--I'll show you how influence goes. When I was up at San Francisco a few months ago to speak at the Mayor's Breakfast, Evelyn and I were having our lunch in the Fairmont. Across the room were a couple of gentlemen, and one came up and introduced himself to me. He said that he had been one of my students at the university, and now he has an executive position in the telephone company up there. He said to me, "I learned more from you than from most of the others, because you used to talk with us--give us, you know, common sense and wisdom." And he said, "All of them, when they heard there was a rabbi that swore, wanted to take that course."

Press Columnist

- Chall: I would like to talk with you now about your relations with the press. You had your columns in the Mirror.
- Magnin: The Mirror belonged to the Times. Then they abandoned it. Then the Herald-Examiner invited me to write a column.
- Chall: Let's see, I read once that you were writing three times a week. And that was in 1964.
- Magnin: Nine years. Three times a week.
- Chall: That's a remarkable record. Before that, you were writing for the Mirror and you started that, in 1954, on Saturdays. So, that was ten years for the Mirror.
- Magnin: Then I also wrote for King Features, a national Hearst syndicate, together with Bishop Sheen and the Episcopal bishop in Washington D.C.
- I'll write columns and I don't know if most people read them or pay attention. Then, all of a sudden, I find out one man is carrying one in his pocket, or someone else wants another copy to send to someone, someplace. Like this talk I gave at the inaugural prayer breakfast, I have more requests from people who want to send it to their children.
- Chall: There's a letter in your scrapbook from somebody asking for this.
- Magnin: Many people ask me right off when I speak from the pulpit, "Have you got a copy of that? I want to send it to my son, or my daughter." Well, I don't give them copies, as I speak from the subconscious extemporaneously.
- Chall: I would like to hear about your relationships and contacts with the local editors like Norman Chandler.
- Magnin: I knew his father.
- Chall: Was his father Otis?

RABBI MAGNIN

Genius of Soul

2-1-74

There is something miraculous about the minds of geniuses. They seem to grasp all time and space in a split second.

Pablo Casals said that he saw God in Bach.

Moses was a spiritual genius who heard the Voice of God emanating from the Burning Bush and again on the summit of Mount Sinai where, amid the peals of thunder and the flashes of lightning, he received the Ten Great Words upon which our civilization rests.

Shakespeare saw sermons in stones.

Casals was a spiritual person. He always associated art with character.

He said that he was a human being first and an artist second. Real artistry requires more than technique. Back of it all is a soul.

RABBI MAGNIN

Spiritual Heights

2-8-74

Cramped minds are pathetic. They fence in prejudices and opinions without any logical foundation.

A petty, narrow person is really to be pitied. He forfeits half the fun of life because he excludes the wide world of friendship and the rich cultures, thoughts and heroic examples of so many fine human beings.

The world belongs to those who have sense enough to encompass its beauty and glory. This is done partly through reading and imagination, but it depends largely on an attitude that is sensitive and loving rather than hostile.

In these days when educational opportunities are open to everybody, there is little excuse for mental and spiritual pygmies. Helen Keller saw with the eyes of the soul what many of us are unable to see with our physical eyes.

RABBI MAGNIN

Respect for Good

2-20-74

Definitions change from time to time. The word, "let," in Shakespeare means the very opposite of what it does today.

The dictionary is not static. With every edition, it grows stouter. Many new expressions are very colorful, even though they may be quite different from their original meanings.

I don't mind colloquial verbiage, but I do object to it when applied to the classics or religious ritual. I prefer my Shakespeare one hundred per cent undiluted and unadulterated.

The same thing goes for the Bible and religious ritual. There is a certain patina in traditional expressions that fades out when they are converted into the colloquial.

I love God and have faith in Him. I don't "dig" Him.

RABBI MAGNIN

God's Companion

3-13-74

No commercial announced the revelation of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Nor did Moses receive them in a city with all its noise, hustle and bustle.

In fact, he avoided the crowd. He climbed the mountain all alone, well not exactly alone, for he kept company with his own soul. His dreams, his love of his people and God accompanied him with every step as he climbed higher and higher.

Then the thunder shook every tree and the lightning lit up the landscape for miles and miles around. There was silence, complete and perfect silence, and then the Voice proclaimed the Ten Great Words which are the foundation stones of our civilization.

All the world heard that Voice and those words have been translated into every tongue and dialect.

The same Voice whispered in Abraham Lincoln's ear when he delivered the Gettysburg Address.

Magnin: No, his father was Harry. Otis, General Otis, was his grandfather who started the Times.

Chall: Have you known the other Chandlers well?

Magnin: I knew the old man, too, Harry. But Buff (her name is Dorothy, friends call her Buff because she is a Buffum from Long Beach), Norman, and I have been friends for many years.

Chall: How about Manchester Boddy? Did you know him?

Magnin: Very well. He wanted my father-in-law to go into business with him. Manchester was a liberal, and he was a very pleasant man who loved flowers. He owned the arboretum or whatever it was out there, and sold it. I was on that board for a while, and got off.

Chall: The board of the Los Angeles News?

Magnin: No, I'm talking about the arboretum board. Oh yes, I've been on a lot of things; I got off because I can't go to too many meetings for lack of time.

Manchester Boddy retired and moved to La Jolla. Virgil Pinkley was editor of his paper for a while. I saw Virgil not too long ago.

Chall: What's he doing now?

Magnin: I think he's editing a small paper somewhere in the desert; I don't know just where. He is a nice person.

Chall: I noted that, in 1955, you were the chairman of the committee of one hundred Jewish leaders who gave a testimonial dinner for Virgil Pinkley, for his coverage of the Mideast during his visit there.

Magnin: Yes. I've forgotten about that.

Chall: Did you know and like Manchester Boddy as well as you like the Chandlers?

Magnin: Oh yes. I like both of them. We've been friends for years. I don't know if I've ever told you

Magnin: this story about Norman. They bought this beautiful home not far from me in Hancock Park. They put a fortune in it. They bought a big stone mansion, just like the White House, and they were rebuilding it. So, during this period he fixed up the chauffeur's quarters on top of the garage. He and Buff, with all their millions, were living there.

One evening at Norman Chandler's home, he informed me that he and his friends had a great affection for me. I told him I appreciated this and thanked him; and that I was sure that if his group, some of whom were not too close to our people, knew more Jews, there would not be the same social prejudice that exists in some of the clubs. [Interruption]

Chall: We haven't talked about William Randolph Hearst.

Magnin: I only knew him casually. I used to meet him at MGM. He was a good friend of L. B. Mayer. I'd see him at affairs and I'd chat with him briefly. But I never was what you'd call an intimate friend or anything like that.

Chall: Were you friends with his sons?

Magnin: Yes, George and I are very good friends. George is a member of the World Affairs Council and I see him at some public affairs and banquets. We often kid each other, since I write for his paper.

Chall: You once were asked about William Randolph Hearst and his being an anti-Semite, which you claimed he was not.

Magnin: No, he wasn't. He never was an anti-Semite. Quite the contrary. He went with Jews all his life. He and Louis Mayer were very close at MGM.

Chall: Did you ever go to his place?

Magnin: San Simeon? No. I could have gone and I never took advantage of it. I wish I had. It would have been nice.

Author

- Chall: You wrote a book called How to Live a Richer, Fuller Life, in 1951, and you thanked Herbert Childs and Kenneth S. Giniger for their advice and counsel.
- Magnin: Yes. Ken was the man who was the publishing director for Prentice Hall, and Herb was the editor. I'd give him what I had to say, and he'd trim it up and send it in because I had no time for the final details. So, he would take it, and edit it, and then send it in.
- Chall: I read parts of the book and I don't hear you in it. I mean, there's something about your style that I can hear and feel when I read, even your 1925 articles; but I didn't feel, I didn't hear you in that book at all.
- Magnin: No. There's too much of Herb in it. He took it and switched some things and put it in his style. I gave him the ideas and the wording, but I was too busy or lazy to bother with all the details. You are so right. It never went over. That's what happened. It's not me.
- Chall: It's not the you of your columns or the you in your articles.
- Magnin: Not at all. The ideas are mine. Some of the illustrations are his. All the headings are mine. I always regretted it.
- Chall: Well, you're so individual in your style. There was one phrase that I thought might have been written completely by you, and that's the dedication. It says, "To Evelyn. The walk from Marion Avenue to Podesta's Ice Cream Parlor goes on toward infinity."
- Magnin: That's right, that's mine. Podesta's was an ice cream parlor and when I went to Cincinnati I boarded in a home there, and I began calling on my wife in the last two or three years of my college career. She lived in a beautiful place. They were people who amounted to something in Cincinnati.

Magnin: What could we do in those days? There wasn't television or radio. I'd call on her and we'd take a walk. And end up at the ice cream parlor. In those days I'd walk home about midnight from her home quite a few blocks to where I lived. I felt absolutely secure. You can't walk three feet today without being mugged. What I meant was that this little walk we took goes on and on forever.

Chall: It's a beautiful sentiment.

Magnin: Well, we've been married fifty-six years. Next month will be fifty-seven. Isn't that something? I'll be eighty-three in July. Isn't that a hell of a thing? I wish I were forty.

Politics

Chall: Now I want to know about politics and the Temple's policy over the years. Maybe it's been your policy.

Magnin: No. I never get into politics and I never involve the Temple. I have been a Republican who voted for five or six Democratic presidents in succession.

Chall: You're a registered Republican?

Magnin: No, I'm registered as Democrat, believe it or not, but I'm too lazy to change it. Actually, I'm at heart more of a Republican than a Democrat because I believe in--not in being reactionary--but in conservation of the best values. I think the capitalist system with all its evils is far ahead of anything I've seen anywhere in the world. And most have thrived under it--not everybody--so I'm for preserving it. Because, I think, you throw away a lot of stuff and it all goes down like a house of cards.

We don't want to be Fascists, we don't want to be Communists, and we don't want to be Anarchists. So, what the hell is your choice? You can modify what you've got, but in the framework.

Magnin:

I've given an invocation at a few affairs like the Republican National Committee, local, or state, or something like that. But I have never dragged the congregation in as a Republican or Democrat. I have never had a political candidate as a guest of honor in the Temple.

When Nixon came to Los Angeles, he was already president. And it was a dinner to raise money. I wasn't asking anybody to vote for him particularly. I wasn't there for that purpose. These were all his friends. But I've kept as much as I can out of all partisan politics. I've kept the congregation out of it. In the congregation are people of different political loyalties and I don't want to involve them in my own choices. I don't want to fragment the congregation.

I know that I'm thought of as a Republican by a lot of people. Some of them are surprised to know that I voted for so many Democratic presidents when I tell them. They think of me as a rightist, because I have participated twice in President Nixon's inauguration and Governor Reagan's.

Chall:

What about your contact with Earl Warren?

Magnin:

We were very close. We have several pictures here. I knew Earl when he was district attorney of Alameda County, way back. I was riding on the Lark with him one day--he probably forgot this. Earl said, "I envy you." And I said, "Why?" He said, "The way you speak. I wish I could do it." I said, "Well, Earl. Everybody has his own way, but maybe you could improve." We sat up quite late while I made some suggestions to him along the lines of public speaking. Little did I realize I was talking to a future Chief Justice of the United States.

[Interruption]

Chall:

Then following that did you see him when he was governor?

Magnin:

Oh sure. He came into the office one day and before he did he phoned. My secretary said, "Some nut has been calling up and he's saying that he

Magnin: was governor of California."

I said, "How do you know he's a nut?" It was Earl. He came up here to see me. [Laughs]

Chall: Did you have any contacts with Governor Brown? Did you know him?

Magnin: Yes, I was friendly with him, and I wasn't a Democrat. I never was close to him in that sense. But I see him today. Once in a while he comes out to the club. He has friends here. We pass his car sometimes in the mornings, and he'll stop and we'll talk across to each other. I'm always friendly.

Chall: Very rarely did I find that you took a stand, even on propositions.

Magnin: Very rarely.

Chall: Now, I did see one in the last election [November, 1972] that dealt with a whole change in the taxation system, Proposition 13.

Magnin: Yes, sometimes I do. I've been on a lot of these committees, but I don't generally make speeches about them.

I see too many sides of a question. For instance, the sob sisters of the ministry think everything that the labor union does has to be perfect. Well, the workers started as serfs, and the unions were necessary.

Today they have resources of millions. They can finance anything they want. They have millions of dollars. One man could stop the subway system in New York, which means all the business in the world. This is too much power. Even the president or king lacks that same power.

The older I get the less I know what I'm for. And I don't think most people know what they're for. I'm a very conservative person in that respect. I don't jump into print to get my name in print and be a hero right away. I don't see it.

Chall: Well, this is a part of your feeling that you do--

- Chall: whether you represent all the Jews or not in the community--you do represent one segment. And many people think that you do represent all of them. Does that require a certain caution on your part?
- Magnin: Nobody thinks you represent all, but you can reflect all in this way. For instance, if Joe Smith murders a man tomorrow morning, it's Joe Smith. If Rabbi Magnin kills a man, the headlines are, "Prominent Rabbi Kills" So, every Jew trembles. And people who don't like Jews say, "See, I told you." This is what I mean. I feel that--whether I want to or not--I have other people's rights and liberties in my hands, to some extent. Every public figure has this. You're not your own boss in the public life.
- Chall: In World War I (this is going back) you wrote an address on "Why I am a Jew," and you said, "The mission of the Jew is to help bring joy and gladness, justice and love. This is part of his make-up Judaism is a protest, an outcry against human oppression and man's inhumanity to man." Is this something that you would still write?
- Magnin: Well, it's poetry. That's oratory. Yes, to a certain extent. The feeling of the Jewish religion has been one of justice and compassion. There are all kinds of Jews, honest and dishonest, wise and stupid. This applies to all people.
- Chall: What do you feel about the Jews in politics, as such? Many of the local Jews here have been judges.
- Magnin: They're all right. Most of them are pretty good men. In the last few years, many Jews have occupied important political positions, including the judiciary. Most of them are fine people.
- Federal Judge Hollzer was an outstanding person and so is Judge Pacht.
- Chall: Stanley Mosk.
- Magnin: Stanley Mosk and I have been friends for years and I admire him greatly. His wife, Edna, was confirmed in our Temple and often talks about it with pride.

Chall: Do you know some of the Democratic party leaders like Carmen Warschaw and the Eugene Wyman's?

Magnin: Gene Wyman just died. Carmen is very friendly. Her husband is an awfully nice fellow. I see him out at the club all the time. Rosalind Wyman was one of my pupils at the University of Southern California.

Chall: Now I have seen pictures of you with Mr. Yorty. Have you known him well?

Magnin: Oh, very well. Fine person.

Chall: Do you have any opinions as to how well he managed as mayor of Los Angeles?

Magnin: I think he was an excellent mayor. Much of our progress, new buildings and all sorts of things were done in this city--were carried out under his term. He's an excellent mayor.

Chall: Did you have any association with Fletcher Bowron?

Magnin: Very much so. He was an unusually high-class man. He was a judge and a very very scrupulous person. He leaned backwards to be just. He was a very fine person. I liked Fletcher very much.

Chall: Did you ever take a stand, or did you have any particular reaction to the Japanese relocation in 1942?

Magnin: I don't recall.

Chall: What did you think of President Lyndon Johnson. I have heard that you disliked him.

Magnin: On several occasions where Mr. Johnson spoke, I delivered invocations. He came up especially to compliment me which I appreciated, but I never liked him because he sent so many fine young men into Vietnam to be injured or killed. Of course, I also blame Congress for this.

Chall: What do you think about Barry Goldwater?

Magnin: Well, I haven't had close contacts with him although I'm a great admirer of him. I think he's got a lot of common sense and integrity, parti-

Magnin: cularly outstanding.

Chall: Now, I noticed that you were listed as a member of Governor Reagan's Blue Ribbon Committee of citizens to promote his tax initiative that was Proposition 1 on the November [1973] ballot.

Magnin: Yes.

Chall: How were you approached to become a member of this committee? It was a name-only committee, I take it.

Magnin: Oh, they had a committee that met at a club, and they asked me, and it seemed reasonable to me at the time; I think we get too many taxes that aren't necessary, and I thought it was a way of possibly saving money for people.

Chall: I see. What are your present feelings about President Nixon and his colleagues?*

Magnin: I don't want to pass any opinions, because that's for the courts to determine. And so far he's only been accused, and nothing has been proved at all. I like him. He's a friend. I think he's doing a big job internationally. I think he's trying to do it nationally. Newsweek interviewed me. I don't know if you saw it.

Chall: No; recently?

Magnin: Yes, two or three weeks ago. Funny thing is, a congressman from Louisiana and I were quoted as saying the same thing. They wanted to know what I thought about the effects of impeachment, and I said I thought it would create a trauma. Irrespective of whether innocent or guilty, I think it would create a trauma, and I think it would weaken us internationally. I'd hate to see it.

Chall: This is a quotation from something that you said a few years ago. "If America is to preserve her traditional institutions and principles which were established by the Founding Fathers, it will be necessary to bring people closer to God and make Him the guiding spirit in their individual lives and national policy."

*This question was asked during the interview of April 15, 1974.

Reagan Tax Initiative Committee

Sacramento

The group backing Governor Ronald Reagan's tax limit initiative appointed a special committee yesterday, including James Roosevelt, son of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to oversee the campaign for the November 6 ballot.

The appointments for the 12-member "blue ribbon" committee were announced by Californians for Lower Taxes, the group formed by Reagan earlier this year to qualify the measure for the ballot and promote it across the state.

Roosevelt, 66, is a former Democratic congressman and the unsuccessful Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1950, losing by a 2-1 margin to Earl Warren. He also is a former Democratic national committeeman from California.

Also named to the committee was Ben Swig, 80, owner and operator of a string of hotels, including the Fairmont in San Francisco. He also is a prominent Democratic party financier.

The other ten appointees are:

David Packard, 70, former assistant Secretary of Defense. A Republican, he is a partner in Hewlett-Packard Co. of Palo Alto.

Mack Easton, 56, president of the California Taxpayers Association. A Republican, he is manager of the Pacific Coast territory tax department for Sears, Roebuck, Co.

Newton Steward, 53, a Republican and president of the State Board of Education.

Former State Senator Hugh M.

Burns, 71, Fresno, president pro tem of the Senate from 1957 to 1969. A Democrat, he is chairman of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Appeals Board.

Allan Grant, 66, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation and state Board of Agriculture. A Republican, he also is a voting member of the University of California Board of Regents.

Dr. J. Clayburn Laforce, 44, a Republican and chairman of the Department of Economics at UCLA.

Phil Watson, 48, Los Angeles county assessor for the past 11 years. He is a Republican.

Vernon Orr, 56, Republican director of the State Department of Finance.

Rabbi Edgar Magnin, 83, a Los Angeles Republican and an officer of the National Service Organizations and the National Council of Jews and Christians.

Moon Lee, 69, a member of the California Highway Commission. A Republican, he is a retired Weaver-ville businessman.

Magnin: That's right.

Chall: And how do you think that could be done?

Magnin: Washington said the same thing. And Lincoln. How it can be done is another matter. You may know what's good for a patient and not have the medicine for him, especially in psychological things. You can take Anacin for a headache, but for a foolish head there is no medicine. So it's the same way. People are people. We can hack away as we do from the pulpit, and as some columnists and other people do. Schools try to teach people to have respect for integrity, responsibility, to honor the concept that the moral law is an absolute, not a relative thing. That's what religion is. But I have no way of suddenly changing two hundred million people-- and a lot of them are good people.

IX CODA
 (Interviews 8 and 9, May 7, 1973 and April 15,
 1974)

The Future of Judaism

Chall: What do you feel about the future health of Judaism?

Magnin: Who knows what forms it will take? It will take different forms, but it will go on. The pendulum swings.

Chall: Do you think that each of the three main branches is going to stay separate as it has?

Magnin: Well, if they do, it will be because of vested interest. Years ago I wanted one college here, the Conservative and ours. I went to see Finklestein. I was in New York talking in his school at the time. I got Dr. Eisendrath to go with me and to talk about it, but nothing came of it.

Each one has got to have his own little baby, and his own money and so on. Hebrew is the same in any college. There is only one Jewish history. It's foolish. Wasting people's money.

Well, Stephen Wise had the idea.

Chall: Yes and I thought you didn't agree with Stephen Wise about the training of rabbis.

Magnin: I agree, and I don't agree. It isn't a question so much of agreement. I was raised in the Conservative shul, as I told you. Then I became Reform, and I wanted to retain some things; I wanted a definite Reform but not the extreme that turns its

Magnin: back on all traditions as they began to do at the start of the movement. Stephen Wise's dream was that you train a rabbi and then let him go where he wants to go, depending on what he believes. I can't see that there's anything terrible about it. Matter of fact that's happening anyhow--it always did happen. Some rabbis who graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary, if they could get a better position in Reform, would accept it. I don't know how many Reform rabbis went to a Conservative shul because they could do better or needed it. I don't think it makes much difference.

What I had in mind is that it's silly to spend millions of dollars for two institutions with different professors, grounds, and everything. You can even have both schools in one building, teaching classes with the same professors: Talmud, Jewish history, rabbinics, Midrash. All this could be done by one professor for the two groups in the same class. I hate to see public waste with other people's money. There's too much of that going on anyhow, and I get very irritated about it.

Chall: You don't think that it's possible that the Conservative and Reform at some time will merge?

Magnin: I say it's possible, yes. Matter of fact, some of the Reform congregations already suggested bringing in a certain amount of Conservatism, and I think it's hard to define the difference in some cases. I think that's largely, to be honest about it, not only because there's been a feeling of more Conservatism lately for the reasons that I already mentioned, but because they seek members, and many of the members they get come from more Conservative and Orthodox congregations, and they don't want to have too great a chasm there--a gap. I think that's the reason.

Chall: Can you contrast the Reform movement in California, or particularly in Los Angeles, at the time you first entered the rabbinate with what it's like today?

Magnin: Well, I think what I would say would be true of all cities today. The only difference is that when

Magnin: I started out, Reform Judaism was composed largely of German Jews and the wealthier Jews, and the Conservatives flirted with it to some extent--at least wanted their children to go there--because they figured they might meet a better-established group of people. In later years Conservatism became very very aggressive, and many of the East European Jews became terribly wealthy and have helped the movement, and they don't come into Reform for that reason.

Many of the Reform rabbis today, while they are not exactly Conservative, have brought back a few things and some of them wear a head covering. In other words they want to look more Conservative, and they have perhaps brought in a few more traditional customs.

When I came here, Reform was the old type of Reform--almost extreme, and as I said somewhere along the line, I brought certain things back, but not many things.

Chall: Some time in 1954 you said in an article in the Jewish Voice that "Reform gives new vitality to Jewish customs and forms, but it must overcome a number of weaknesses. One is the tendency to become static, and the second is the failure to make demands upon its adherents."

Magnin: Right.

Chall: "A religion that makes no demands on people is bound to be weak and lose ground."

Magnin: That's true of all liberal religions.

Chall: How would you overcome this tendency to become static?

Magnin: I [pause] can't overcome it. I'm merely observing what goes on. I have no cures. You notice recently (if you read some statements that have come out in the press) the religions that are flourishing are largely fundamentalist because they make demands. But that goes back to certain beliefs that many--the modern people, the liberal people particularly--would not want to accept.

Magnin: And the weakness of Reform is that it makes no demands.

But on the other hand, if we made a lot of demands, I'm not sure they would obey them anyhow. Jews are not made that way, and I don't know that I would force them to do anything. I don't believe in forcing people. So for modernism, and liberalism, and intellectualism, and common sense, you pay the price of a lack of discipline. This is the whole thing.

Chall: If you had your way, is there anything you would think about revising?

Magnin: No, I wouldn't do a thing, because first of all I couldn't and, secondly, I think we can get along the way we do. And there'll be a reaction anyhow. Every so often there's a reaction. Same as people are reacting now away from Godlessness to wanting to get back to some kind of religion. You're going to find in time that they'll react away from some of these extremes they're going through now and return to liberalism again. It goes in fads-- action, reaction.

Chall: Maybe the desire to make demands on people has resulted in the return of the Sabbath manual and things of this kind.

Magnin: Yes, the rabbis are making an effort as they say, to put in "more Jewishness." Now whether they can or will, I don't know.

Chall: You said that taking Latin out of the Catholic mass takes the mystery out of it. Do you feel the same way about taking Hebrew out of the Jewish service?

Magnin: Oh, I think there must be a certain amount of Hebrew.

Chall: For its mystery or for some other reason?

Magnin: Yes, not only that; it's traditional. It's a link with the past, and it is distinctly Jewish. But I think you can overdo that, too, if you have too much, then they don't know what you're talking about, and they won't be interested. You have to

- Magnin: have a sense of how much to do. It's like baking a cake. You have to know how much of this to put in and how much of that.
- Chall: You have said (this was taken from a column in the Heritage in 1970) "as long as the synagogue remains strong, we will continue to be a great people. If it ever succumbs to the force of destruction, it will be the end of Jewish history." You think that Judaism is tied up closely with the synagogue or the temple?
- Magnin: Well, this is eloquence, but back of it my meaning is sincere. What I'm trying to say is that the synagogue preserved the Jew, because the Jew preserved the synagogue. It was a reciprocal thing. Without the synagogue which means religion, Judaism, why remain separate? What virtue is there in being beaten over the head unless you're beaten over the head for a purpose? It's one thing to be a martyr. It's another thing to be a scapegoat. It's all the difference in the world. A scapegoat is a fellow who doesn't necessarily believe in anything, he's just attacked, but a martyr is a man who dies for a principle, who suffers for principle. What I'm saying is that with a Jew who doesn't practice his religion, doesn't belong to a temple, has nothing to do with it, even doesn't observe Yom Kippur or anything, he can't get out of being a Jew, he's born that way. But if you had enough Jews like that, this would be the end. Certainly, assimilation would increase, but there will never be that much. There'll always be enough the other way.
- Chall: The whole ferment that seems to be current today about the intermarriage rate; does that bother you as it does others?
- Magnin: No, I'll talk to you very plainly about that. I think a lot of it is sincere, and I think a lot of it, too, is what I call professional Judaism. I could see where a strict Orthodox Jew would be opposed. I don't know many such people because I'm talking about observing every one of the commandments, not just praying with a tallis, and keeping a kosher house, and eating trayf at noon in some restaurant. I'm talking about a real honest-to-God 100 percent Orthodox Jew. I can

Magnin:

understand that he would be opposed. But many of the rabbis who really don't observe all the Jewish traditional laws, are beginning to say you shouldn't intermarry--the Jewish people won't survive. I think a lot of this is frankly professionalism. I don't say they're all insincere. I'm sure they mean what they say, a lot of them, but I don't think they've thought it through.

I think since the so-called holocaust, there's been a lot of this sort of reaction, back to at least if not Conservative practice, Conservative feeling. It's been the result partly of Israel and partly of the tragedy in Germany, but I personally feel that we should use common sense and be human about all these things. I happen to be a human being. I like people, and, as I said in San Francisco at the Mayor's Breakfast [January, 1974], I know black isn't beautiful, and white isn't pretty, and pink isn't lovely, and being a Jew isn't chosen, and being a Chinaman isn't something else. For goodness sakes we're human beings, and we have to live together as human beings, not lock ourselves in behind walls and ghettos and strive to be different. I'm sick and tired of this overemphasis on the ethnic. It's overdone, and it's caused violence, and hatred, and everything else, and so I don't like it; and that doesn't mean we have to assimilate and try to be like everybody else. We should try to be like ourselves whatever we are in this world.

The point I make in one of my recent articles is that rabbis all seem concerned about the survival of the Jew. I'm not greatly concerned about this. He has survived for two thousand years without Israel. He's produced Maimonides, Gabirol, and Sadia, and in the later years Spinoza, and Freud, and Marx, and Einstein. I'm not worried. A lot of Jews have assimilated. We've lost many through compulsory conversions, as happened in the Middle Ages and in Spain, under Torquemada and all that, but the trunk has remained the same. We've lost leaves, and fruit, and so on through expulsion, forced conversion (the Marranos), through indifference, assimilation, desires to be like others. We've lost; but here we are, and we're going to go on.

Magnin:

Why do you figure that you want to go on and live? You don't get up in the morning and say shall I live or die--like Hamlet--"to be or not to be?" You simply take life for granted, and you live. And that's the way with the people. Most people don't think, Oh, you're a Jew. So you're a Jew. If you're a Catholic, you're a Catholic. If you're a Frenchman, you're a Frenchman. You don't stop every day and say what am I living for. You live.

Then, of course, there's a sort of an unconscious feeling of great loyalty--you belong to a people that has lived for centuries. There's the religious incentive where you have religion. I could see why that person certainly would want to survive. I could see that in an Orthodox Jew who lives an entirely different life from everybody else.

And then persecution, as I said before, will keep us alive. There'll always be enough anti-Semites to remind us that we'd better be Jews.

But the main point we should ask ourselves is not shall we survive, but what are we surviving for?

Chall:

Yes, what are we surviving for?

Magnin:

Well, I think it's an unconscious desire to live, on the part of a group, as it is on the part of an individual, and I think there's a sort of an unconscious feeling of destiny. Whether you take this idea of being chosen as a literal thing, I think unconsciously we feel that somehow or other we've lasted all these years for some purpose. We've given the Bible to the world and so many things that destiny sort of says, "Well, the Jew shall go on and live." I think it's all unconscious.

Chall:

I see. You have written in the past that Jews were "destined to carry out a certain type of religion." Do you think that's a meaning that you instill in youth today?

Magnin:

Oh, I don't think that applies as much as it used to. I think in the old days when Jews were cut

- Magnin: off from everybody else, when they lived a strictly Orthodox life as different from the rest of the people as daylight is from night, I could see a conscious will to survive. I think whatever will we have today is an unconscious thing. I think it's just like we live. As I say you don't get up in the morning and say, shall I commit suicide? You just live. That's all.
- Chall: You once said that you like people to leave the Temple when you're on the pulpit feeling that they're glad to be not only alive but to be Jewish.
- Magnin: Jews and to be human beings.
- Chall: How do you instill a feeling that they should be glad that they're Jews rather than something else.
- Magnin: This is an art, Malca. This is an art. Why is it that when you go to a theater that you come away laughing or crying? Because of the lines, the art of writing the play, and the art of producing it. If a rabbi, a minister, priest, anybody has a natural art of speaking, has a certain sincerity and conviction, a way of phrasing things (which is an art in itself) in a colorful way, and imagery able to touch the people's sensibilities, you can do this. If not, you can be a rabbi, or a priest, or a minister for 10,000 years--if you could live that long--and you still won't get to first base. You will not convince anybody. It's an art. That's all.
- Chall: But you want them to go out feeling glad that they're Jews.
- Magnin: Certainly, and they do. They tell me that. When I spoke up at the Mayor's Breakfast in San Francisco, there was a rousing ovation. Recently Gerry Burg, our administrative executive, heard from some lawyer up there (I don't know who he is), who said, "I felt ten feet taller. I felt like I was proud to be a Jew. I felt like a human being--like a person." Now how you instill this, Malca, I don't know. I don't play tricks. It's just without any false modesty, I suppose God has given me a certain gift which I've developed, in being able to express myself in a way to move people.

Chall: You're glad that you're Jewish?

Magnin: Of course, I have no choice. Of course, I'm glad. I'm glad I have my mother and not Mrs. Rockefeller, or be born of some devil. First of all I'm very happy and I'm proud to be Jewish, but I'm not sour-grapes proud. I don't go around with a chip on my shoulder. "I'm proud to be a Jew" as though I'm trying to prove something. I accept my Judaism like my Americanism, like my having lived in California, like anything else, as a normal thing. It's what I am. It's what I inherited. You don't have to study every little thing.

Chall: Do you think that Judaism offers something that other religions don't?

Magnin: I think every religion has something very distinct about it, and I think Judaism is a very sane religion, doesn't go to extremes. It's more of this world than the next. It's not ascetic. We don't flagellate our bodies to save our souls, or starve ourselves. It has its weaknesses. There are some superstitions. Some traditions are contained in it that today from a rational point of view we wouldn't accept--myths and legends--but even they are beautiful and they contain certain truths. I think, in the main, Judaism has a lot to give the world, but so have other religions, many of which are copied from us anyhow, with some theological differences.

Chall: But does Judaism offer something that other religions don't?

Magnin: Well, it certainly does to a Jew anyhow. Again I don't analyze it too closely. I'm a Jew because I was born and brought up that way. If I had been born and brought up a Catholic, I'd probably say that the Catholic religion brings certain things out that other religions don't. I think they all have something to give. Judaism certainly is a very sensible religion. I mean Reform Judaism.

I say that because anybody outside of a strict-honest-to-God-100-percent Orthodox Jew is Reform. When a Conservative Jew eats at a country club on trayf plates, or eats ham, bacon or anything else, he is really Reform and the Orthodox would regard him as such.

The Concept of God

Chall: Over the years has your concept of God--which I take from our discussions here has a real meaning to you--has it changed?

Magnin: Maimonides said that nobody can say exactly what God is, only what He is not. Although we ascribe certain attributes to God, they are not to be interpreted as human attributes. When you say God is good it is not as a human being is good.

To me God is an infinite mind, and if there's an infinite mind, it's as impossible for me to understand it with my little mind, although our souls reflect the Infinite Mind in a diminutive degree. A dog in this room could not understand what we're talking about. The dog knows we're here. He has a certain intelligence, but stops at a certain point. I like to think we have that same relationship to deity. The dog would never guess what we're talking about, nor can we possibly know what God is. Some Creator must have made it all. If you look at things carefully, some things are foolish. Why did He make it this way or that way? We don't know. I agree with Maimonides that in a sense of knowing a thing concretely, like knowing this is a pen, or a desk, or a book, we can't know God. God is something we feel. We intuitively know, but we don't know through reason, or by our five senses, because you can't touch, taste, feel, or smell Him. In other words empirically. We can never know God that way.

God is something I feel. It's something I reach toward. The flower reaches toward the sun. It doesn't know why. It lifts its head toward the sun. The bird starts to fly after so many days. The beaver is an engineer that never got a degree in engineering. These qualities are instinctive, and I think religion is part of that. In man it's like instinct in an animal. I call it intuition, something I feel, I reach toward. And I pray and I assume that God hears me. Who knows? I can't prove this. Nobody can prove this.

Chall: You believe in the power of prayer, then?

Magnin: Of course. What it does to you physically and mentally, it's a great thing. But to my way of thinking religion is an art. It's not a science. Science is something which allows you to look through a microscope; you touch it, and you measure it through a test tube. Religion is like any other art. Nobody told Beethoven how to write music, how to compose. Where'd he get it? Nobody told Shakespeare how to write Hamlet. It took Shakespeare to write Hamlet. It took Goethe to write Faust. It took Ibsen to write Peer Gynt. There are some things that just come naturally, and religion is something that comes that way. The moment you begin to try to analyze it like you do a problem in physics and chemistry, you're doing a foolish thing. You can't do it. The human mind isn't made for it.

Chall: So it's an emotional feeling that you've had all your life.

Magnin: Yes, it's an inborn thing. Of course, maybe some of it is acquired through childhood by teaching, but whatever, it's there anyhow.

You know I had a compliment recently. I don't mind putting this on the tape. I have five doctor's degrees. I don't say they don't mean anything--I'm proud of them--but the best degree I got lately came from some of the confirmants. I'm eighty-three and they're fifteen, and they called me a "cool cat." You know what a cool cat is? You speak their language; don't agree with them necessarily, but you understand them; and you talk sense; and you talk directly; and you are a human being; and you can put yourself in the place of a person that age. That's what a cool cat is. That's my latest degree. Now that will tell people who read this more about me than all this other stuff. This is true.

Chall: Do you ever try to discuss religion with people who believe that God is dead?

Magnin: No, I might answer a question or two. I haven't got the time for it in the first place, and secondly unless they've had a certain amount of

Magnin: philosophic training, they probably wouldn't know what I'm talking about anyhow. If somebody asked me, I might quietly discuss it with them a little while, but I don't try to convert people, and I don't try to convince them. I haven't got time for that.

Chall: How do you think it can be done?

Magnin: Well, there was one man out at the club, he's dead now poor fellow. He was somewhat of a smart aleck although he'd had several tragedies in his life, and I could understand. I was sitting in the locker room one day talking with the fellows after a golf game, and he came through and he wanted to be smart. So he says, "Edgar, I don't believe in God." Nobody asked him his opinion, so it was smart aleck. So I replied and they all laughed. I said, "God got along without you for billions of years. He'll have to worry about the next few billion."

So I don't argue with such people. Life's too short. Don't argue with most people. You don't convince anybody anyhow. You know that, don't you?

Chall: That's generally true.

Magnin: Yes, generally true. People believe what they want to believe, and I let them alone. If it isn't vicious, or bad, or evil, what do I care what they believe in. It's their business.

Rabbi Magnin: On the Pulpit and Off the Pulpit

Chall: People have often mentioned your casual pulpit manner. You're a man who has a deep feeling for religion, God, and the synagogue, but they always talk about your open robe, and your casual way of leaning on the pulpit, and your shocking language. What does this mean?

Magnin: The reason I have an open robe is I may want to reach for my glasses or for a little notebook, or

Magnin: a piece of paper. And then again I like freedom. I don't like to be chained in, walled in. Like Robert Frost I don't like fences. That's number one. My casualness simply consists in this: that I lean over and I talk with them like I'm talking with you. Now I may rise to heights, and all of a sudden I'll get some spurt of imagination, a bit of poetry, or something funny might strike me, or some bit of wit, and I will say it. I talk in a very natural way through the stream of consciousness mostly.

In one of the classes here, the older students were studying Jewish humor, and they asked me how I tell stories in my sermons or talks. And I said I don't tell stories. I'm known as a story teller, and in fact Groucho Marx once said to me I ought to be earning \$20,000 a week at Las Vegas. I don't think I could, or would even want to, believe it or not. What he meant was that I'm a story teller by nature. But I never or hardly ever tell stories from the pulpit, because I don't like it. I want to get a message across and I just talk with people. But if something strikes me and it happens to be funny, because life is funny as well as tragic, I will say it, and then there will be a break of laughter, you see.

Chall: And you don't shock, use shocking language--for a purpose?

Magnin: No vulgar language.

Chall: Sometimes they say you shock people.

Magnin: No, I don't try to do anything. I talk naturally, live naturally. No, I don't want to shock people. This is cheap, and corny, and vulgar. Matter of fact, I'll tell you something. I gave a talk at one of the conferences and they were laughing and almost crying at times. And after the talk they went up to the professor of homiletics at the college, and they said, "Edgar Magnin breaks every rule you've taught us." This man had some insight. He was a very bright man, and he said, "What is poetry in Edgar would be vulgar in you." And this is true.

I can use certain expressions, never vulgar

Magnin: language, but I can be casual where the average man would be forcing himself to be casual, because it isn't his natural way, and it doesn't go with the pulpit. See? I can go to a funeral and understand people and be sensitive, but I won't put on that long hypocritical face. I've driven back with the family in the car and while no one tried to be funny, no jokes were told, just because something was said that has a bit of humor in it, they'd be laughing and forgetting about their sorrows, because it was natural. In other words I'm more or less of a natural person. That's all it is. I don't study how to be natural. If I did, I'd be unnatural.

Chall: Or study how to be a professional rabbi in a model sense?

Magnin: No, I never was a professional. I told you the story of my first pulpit in Stockton, where I took those little flowers off the pulpit because they were in my way. I couldn't see the people so I put them on the floor. It wasn't done for effect. It was as natural for me to do that as to eat or drink when I'm hungry and thirsty.

Chall: I have heard that you do have a philosophy about comforting the bereaved, in helping survivors to face the future. Is that a special philosophy?

Magnin: I have no plan, no scheme, and no system. I'm just natural. I talk with people. I understand them, I think. Most of the time. I'm sensitive to people, to their joys, their sorrows. I know them. But most of the time the less you say when in a house of mourning, the better. In fact, I think somewhere in the Talmud there's some kind of a statement to the effect--if I remember correctly--that you don't talk to people in mourning. Let them alone.

I think the worst thing a minister can do is to go in with a heavy voice and a long face, and act as though it were his own dad. It's ridiculous. It isn't. Nobody can be feeling the same as the person who is the mourner. Your mother is precious to you. She isn't to me. I may feel sorry for you, that you lose her, but I can't put myself in your position, and it's hypocritical to try to

Magnin:

do it. Just be natural with people. The comfort you give mostly is this. If they have done the right thing which many of them have, the comfort is that they did the right thing and whatever beautiful memories they have are important to them. If they didn't do the right thing, and they haven't got beautiful memories, then you don't say anything.

Also, I will not make a saint out of everybody who dies. I want to be comforting, and sweet, and simple, and sincere, and brief. The worst thing to do with people who are mourning, sitting in an undertaker's or some chapel, is to start with the history of the world and go through the person's life history. In the early days there was a woman who wanted me to say something about her husband that he was a great philanthropist. He was a rich man, and he didn't give very much to anybody although he wasn't a bad fellow. And she said, "I hope you say more about him than you did about my brother-in-law." And I said, "Well, show me the checks, the stubs. I want to know what he gave."

And not too long ago I had a funeral where a very very wealthy person died, and I told the family that a philanthropist is one who gives buildings to universities and colleges, otherwise you don't go into this. I happened to know that the party wasn't too generous considering the amount of wealth, and people were there waiting for something like that--waiting for me to make him a hero, and they would have laughed inside. I wouldn't insult the dead man, the family, or myself by this kind of business. No. You know it takes great tact and feeling to handle people in sorrow, and even in joy like a wedding. A few little simple things are so much better than all this false talk.

I had a wedding recently. The kids want to do their own services these days which means write some stuff, and there's a limit to it. I've never had them ask too much, only one or two, and then I wouldn't let them put on a show. The boy wrote two or three sentences, and the girl two or three sentences. So well, that's harmless. Some instinct told me to have their part at the end and not the beginning. The whole service

- Magnin: doesn't take ten minutes--should be less. I always remember the old saying that those who need advice don't heed it, and those that heed it don't need it. So just before the benediction I said, "I know you want to say something to each other. Just go ahead and say it." And he read the words. He knew them. She got stage fright and couldn't say anything. So I whispered to her, I said, "Say I love you." She said, "I love you," and everybody was so pleased. [Laughter] So even there you use sense. You don't make a show out of the thing, talk much longer, especially if they have a lot of money. Funerals and weddings are sometimes measured by the amount of fee expected. Well, I don't work for fees and tips. I call them tips. I don't need them, and I don't want them, and so I'm absolutely independent.
- Chall: People also say that they find great joy just by being in your presence. How do you account for this? Your own general feeling of joy in life?
- Magnin: I like people, they like me. Some people don't feel joy, I don't know that all of them do.
- Chall: No, not all of them, but I've heard from some of the people who do, and that's perhaps why they told me. [Laughter]
- Magnin: I'll tell you. I understand people. I have a way of making everybody feel relaxed and at home.
- Chall: Is that because you understand yourself? Does this come from self-knowledge?
- Magnin: Yes. You've hit it, Malca. I know what I would like. You've hit it so correctly. I know how I would feel. Now the average person is a neglected person. He thinks he is. He has very few friends, real friends. He lives in a small circle. In his own mind he's a nobody, lonesome, probably has problems. I'll walk in the building--and I don't do it as a policy, it's not a conscious thing--and the same way I would talk to the wealthiest person in the country, I'll talk to every janitor in the building. I've got a word for all of them. Every waiter knows me around the town, in all the principal restaurants. All

Magnin: the waitresses. All of these people. I don't give them more than anybody else, but I have a word for them.

I remember, when I was a kid, watching Rabbi Levy. He was a very friendly man. Now maybe I get that partly from him, but I think it's just an understanding of people. You must make everybody feel that he's a person. He's entitled to that dignity. Now you don't have to slobber over him. You don't have to flatter him. I very rarely flatter people. Nothing like that. Just a smile, a handshake. Being a human being, that's all you need.

The Rabbinate as a Calling

Chall: In your long and very productive career here, have there been any projects that you wanted to succeed that didn't? Can you think of any frustrations that you encountered during your career here?

Magnin: No, I have no frustrations, and I have no regrets. It's been a very happy career, and a very lucky and fortunate one. ~~and~~ I met with a degree of success, and I wouldn't want to do it over again any different.

Chall: Have you ever influenced any young man to enter the rabbinate?

Magnin: I think I have in one or two cases, and maybe some without knowing it. But I've been wary about asking young men to go into the rabbinate, because it's a very difficult position. A man can be a lawyer, and be a little one or a big one, or a middle-class one. Everybody can't be a Louis Nizer or a Darrow, but there's a lot of opportunity between that and down on the bottom. A doctor can hang a shingle up on 94th Street, 120th Street, or some other part of any city and have a nice practice. They can't all be Mayos. You wouldn't expect this.

Magnin:

But in the rabbinate there's very little choice, very little leeway. You usually become rabbi of a small congregation. If you stick there all your life, it can become a deadly dull thing, I suppose, especially if you have any ability. And should you want it, there aren't enough big pulpits. Even the big pulpits are not necessarily free in the sense that you can say what you please or have the feeling of freedom. Most ministers don't want to say anything terrible and after all you're working for other people, for groups with all kinds of opinions, but they want to have the feeling of freedom, complete freedom.

The rabbinate requires a person who's a speaker, a thinker, not necessarily profound--not an Einstein--but a thinker. A rabbi must have charm, personality; he has to like people. He has to have a sense of humor. He has to be sensitive to people's sufferings. He has to be ready to help. He has to have time to study, and he has to know what to study, and how to use what he studies, and not just get up and be a schoolteacher in the pulpit or a dull bore. And how many people have charm, and snap, and spark in any profession? How many great actors are there? How many great lawyers are there? How many great artists are there? This is an art.

So I've hesitated to have a boy become a rabbi and maybe become bitter, and frustrated, and unhappy, because he may not be able either to have luck enough to get the right place, or because he may be the kind of person who wouldn't know how to handle it, or because he might have to be stuck in a small town with all the small town disadvantages all his life.

Chall:

Did these few whom you think you influenced, did they come to you asking for advice, or did you encourage them in a different way?

Magnin:

I don't remember the details at all. I think I've influenced more men already in the ministry than those I've influenced to go into the ministry, because every so often, we get letters in which they'll say, "Keep it up. I wish I had your courage." Or, "You're a unique person," or words to that effect. I think I have an unconscious influence.

Magnin: One man, for instance, wrote not long ago and he said he's just beginning to do now the things that I have done, which was a nice compliment. In other words he meant he's not afraid to be himself. But you have to be something to be yourself. After all if you haven't got certain gifts, to be yourself would mean to be nothing or less than nothing. You can't just tell people to be themselves.

Chall: Well, maybe you're influencing them the way Rabbi Hirsch influenced you in that sense?

Magnin: I think so. Maybe not as directly, but I think that's true.

Chall: Do you think you could have had the kind of career you've had any place else except Los Angeles?

Magnin: How would I know that? I think I could have fit into New York very well. I think I could have gotten along anywhere pretty well. I don't think it would have made much difference unless the people were inhuman or something, or freaks, or half men and half apes. [Laughter] I think I would have gotten along.

Chall: What do you think about the idea of women as rabbis?

Magnin: Well, I'll tell you something. There's no reason logically, why it shouldn't exist. You've got women lawyers, you've got women doctors, women judges, women business people. Theoretically, there's absolutely nothing wrong with it. It still jars me a little because I have a certain amount of traditional feeling in me and it's a little difficult for me to think of a woman rabbi. I knew Aimee Semple McPherson and I know Christian ministers who are women, yet it still is a little jarring, because the rabbinate, according to tradition, belongs to a man.

You know, women weren't supposed to go up to the altar. You know why don't you? Because of menstruation. She was supposed to be defiled in that period. A woman wasn't supposed to touch the Torah, and this was it.

That, of course, is of no concern today. But, what I mean is that, by tradition, I think of a

- Magnin: minister being a man. They can go out at any hour at any place; although I don't go out any hour, any place. But, I wouldn't say no, because why any more than woman doctors? So, they have a woman graduate from HUC. They're using a lot of cheap publicity. They're playing it up too much, and I'm getting sick of reading about it.
- Chall: You've said that there are some issues which you think the Central Conference of American Rabbis has been ignoring. What do you think are the vital Jewish issues which they are ignoring?
- Magnin: I think the rabbis should be interested in how to preserve Judaism and make it effective, but use common sense and psychology about it. I think their meetings should deal with rabbinical problems, too, and things that concern the rabbinate as a profession or calling (I used to think of it as a calling rather than a profession), and not try to solve all the problems of the world and cover the whole international field. That's all I mean. I think they could be a little more practical.
- Chall: What do you think are the areas?
- Magnin: The rabbinate requires brains and leadership. Most organizations are not known to have too much sense. You take a number of bright individuals coming together and they become a body of fools somehow or other. That's why I don't like committees. You can put that down. If you take five smart people and put them together instead of the intellectual quota rising, it seems to go down. I don't know why. It reaches the lowest denominator for some reason or other. And then they have to have something to do, there's certain politics. Some people have to speak whether they have anything to say or not. You can't run things on an ideal 100 percent basis. It isn't human. I'm just hoping that somehow or other they would have meetings that are a little more practical, that's all.
- Chall: What do you think are some of the questions that they should address themselves to?

- Magnin: I just stated it.
- Chall: Well, how would they talk? How can you get rabbis from varying kinds of communities with all kinds of synagogues to agree on problems like saving the synagogue or making Judaism meaningful?
- Magnin: They don't have to agree on anything. I don't know that they can. They should make some effort. I don't know. I have no answers to these things. I would say that the man who's in a position should know the failings, and virtues, and methods of the position he's trying to uphold, and they should just compare notes. I don't know. Years ago at one of the conferences--I was just a youngster then--I gave a paper. I read it not too long ago, and it's still good. I told them how I thought a conference ought to be run, what they should speak about and so on. I'm not interested in the details particularly, but the point is that I don't think it's necessary for them to pass resolutions on all sorts of national and international matters. Who reads them anyhow, and who cares what they say? Nobody cares what they say.
- Chall: Is there anything that you have been trying to accomplish in the Jewish community that you think the community either doesn't realize or doesn't appreciate?
- Magnin: No. I would like to see Jews be normal people. I like to see them be appreciative of their heritage, believe in God, and carry out a number of Jewish traditions. But I think they should act like people and not act as though somebody compels you to be a Jew either because you're sour grapes, or because you're ashamed to be otherwise, or some movement grows up that tells you that you have to do this or that.

I like people who are normal--who are themselves. You can be a Jew and an American, and an American and an internationalist at the same time. You can appreciate other nations and be a good American; you can appreciate other religions and be a good Jew.

The other day I went to a meeting. I gave the opening prayer. Johnny Green was the other Jew there. You know, the famous composer and

Magnin: conductor. It was the luncheon for the Easter Sunrise Service people. They have a big committee--a very powerful committee up in Hollywood--and I spoke at their luncheon. Why not? I mentioned Passover. I mentioned Easter. I don't know why I can't--why a Jew should not. I had them feel that being a Jew was something worthwhile, and that I still respected their belief. This is my philosophy in life. I'm living with the people. I'm not in a cage like an orangutan, barred up with people coming to look at me. I have to be with people.

Chall: You want the Jews represented in society at large then?

Magnin: Of course I do, their share of everything in proportion.

Jewish Authors

Chall: Now that we've talked about institutions, issues, and all sorts of things, let's talk about your opinions of some of the Jewish authors like Roth, and Bellow, and Malamud.

Magnin: Well, they're brilliant men. I can't see the stuff like Portnoy's Complaint and all this business. They call it art; to me it's a lot of art, plus pornography, or pornography through art. In fact in English literature we've never had many Jews in novels, outside of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, and through Dickens. But, lately, all ethnic things have come to the front.

Of course these writers are great writers who are interpreting . . . The Jew is interesting to the world. That's partly through Israel, too, but largely because of the colorfulness of some of these men like Ben Hecht and these people that played up the Jewish thing. It's getting to be quite a deal.

Chall: Well, it was very interesting, the culture of the eastside Jews.

Magnin: Right. Of New York, of the ghettos, the American ghetto.

Chall: That's part of the immigrant experience. The first major book of Roth's, Goodbye Columbus, did that bother you as it bothered so many Jews who said he was anti-Semitic? Did that particular set of stories upset you?

Magnin: I can't say particularly I liked them all. But nothing upsets me. So, somebody writes in another vein. I don't take everything so seriously.

Chall: It wouldn't be something that you would refuse to have reviewed in the Temple?

Magnin: No, of course not. I know the man who puts on "Bernie and Bridget." He's a very close friend of Henry's. I think it's boring. I don't think it's really funny, but I don't see any objection. The rabbis say it encourages intermarriages. You don't have to encourage intermarriage. When people are sleeping together at college, forty percent of them, what do you have to discourage or encourage? They're either going to remain that way or get married. So, you can't turn the hands of the clock back. It's silly.

Chall: Bernard Malamud. Have you liked his work?

Magnin: I don't read much fiction, to tell you the truth. I read mostly biography and autobiography. I read some fiction. Chaim Potok.

Chall: Yes, how do you like that?

Magnin: He spoke here recently. He's a charming man. He's a rabbi. Yes, he writes nice things on the Chasidim. I like the Chasidic stories.

Singer [Isaac Bashevis] is a great man; a genius. Beautiful. This is constructive and much nicer. But they all have their different ways of expressing themselves and their backgrounds.

Chall: There are all kinds of different Jewish experiences.

Magnin: That's right. I like them; I read them most of the time.

Chall: I came across a book of fiction about Los Angeles Jewish leaders which was supposed to represent actual Jewish people here in the thirties. It was, I thought, a bitter story. Rabbi Burns was the title, written by Eli Kandel. Do you remember it?

Magnin: No. My name is mentioned in many books that have been written about the movies. The Irving Thalberg book, The Life of Irving Thalberg. The 'Hollywood Rajah', which is the story of Louie Mayer. I'm in one on Jean Harlow, which is bad, because he didn't quote me correctly. This was sloppily done. The others were all right.

They have a story about me which isn't true, but it's harmless and funny. It's in a new book that came out not too long ago, Spencer and Kathy. I'm in that book where they tell the story about L. B. Mayer's funeral, and some remark was supposed to be made by Spencer Tracy. He was a great drinker. When he was in the robing room downstairs before the funeral I said, "Do you want some milk?" You see, because of the alcohol. He said, "No thanks." I said, "Well, Georgie Jessel, when he speaks at funerals, he takes a few drops of whiskey." So, the story in the book says, "Rabbi Magnin offered him a drink." He said, "No, if I take a drink I'll bury you instead of Mr. Mayer." It makes a cute story, but it isn't true. [Laughs]

I'm also in What Makes Sammy Run? He says, "If you go to a real temple you'll go to Magnin's." Or something like that. Well, I'm in most of these books, a dozen of them. It's funny.

The Movement to Save Soviet Jews

Chall: What your thoughts are on the whole movement to save the Soviet Jews?

Magnin: Well, naturally, I think every effort should be made, and I think they're making a lot of efforts. I'm rather fearful of one thing, I'm fearful of two things, very honestly.

Magnin: First of all that the Russians will get real mad. They've never had pogroms since the Czar. They've never gone into villages and killed people.

Chall: Do you think this might occur?

Magnin: I don't think it will, but if you get them damned mad they've got other tricks they can play. They're good at playing chess, you know.

Now, the second thing I'm concerned about, although they'll have to work it out, is that all these people going to Israel will not only swamp Israel and us financially, but if the Arabs ever got off their necks could you imagine the explosions that would come with all these different kinds of Jews together?

Chall: Do you think that it would be possible for the American Jews, at least, to ignore the problem?

Magnin: I didn't say they should. I've been for Israel before any of the Reform rabbis were. I've helped them all along. No. Again, I'm a mixture of a realist and an idealist.

Chall: What can we do about Soviet Jews then--their present push toward freedom?

Magnin: I'm for them. I don't go out crusading, put signs all over the place. I think that's nonsense.

Chall: Well, how else could it be done? I'm wondering whether it could be done in any other way?

Magnin: They're doing a very dangerous thing. They're getting Congress to interfere. Now, this can be a very dangerous thing because, after all, this is America. We have to deal with the Arabs, and with oil, and with business, and with wars, and with everything else. This could be very dangerous, but this is another matter. I don't want to get into that because I'm not sure in my own mind what should be done and what shouldn't be done. I'm not sure of a lot of things.

Chall: Well, I'm glad to hear you admit that because I think it's not an easy problem to solve.

Magnin: I'm not as cock-sure of most things as many people are. I wish I could be. I have conflicts because I realize the many sides of the question. I'm not a crusader. I never was.

Memorable Great Men and Women

Chall: Now in pictures on your walls here you're shown with all kinds of people who are well known, some of them very important. Can you think who have been the most memorable that you've met, and why you would consider them the most memorable?

Magnin: Well, I've got Einstein here. I've got Earl Warren here. President of the United States [Nixon]. Eisenhower over there. Pope John and Pope Pius.

Chall: These people--I want you to be mentioning them, because they stand out in your mind.

Magnin: Well, they do. Cardinal McIntyre, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, Mrs. Roosevelt, she's up there. General MacArthur, he's up there. The other room is full of them and pictures are all down the halls. I have the president of Mexico, and Tito. I'm shaking hands with all of them. If you look downstairs in those halls . . .

Chall: I have, but I thought that maybe a few of them would stand out particularly.

Magnin: Well, those are the ones who would stand out.

Chall: Do you feel differently about, let's say, Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt and some of these people you've just mentioned than you would of others whose pictures may not be up?

Magnin: Yes.

Chall: Do they give off a special aura or do you have a special respect for them?

Magnin: Well, I have a great respect for Mrs. Roosevelt. She was a wonderful person. And I knew her. Of

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
PASADENA

NORMAN BRIDGE LABORATORY OF PHYSICS

den 19. Januar 1931

Sehr geehrter Herr Rabbiner!

Wir gehen Ende dieser Woche für einige Zeit nach Palm Springs. Sobald wir zurück sein werden, wollen wir zusammen beraten, wann in Los Angeles die Begrüssung stattfinden kann. Wollen Sie die Güte haben, sehr geehrter Herr Rabbiner, und sich in etwa zehn Tagen mit uns ins Einvernehmen setzen. Wir wollen dann das Weitere besprechen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen, auch im Namen von Professor Einstein

Ihre

Elsa Einstein

19 January 1931

Dear Rabbi!

We are going to Palm Springs for a while, at the end of the week. As soon as we return we shall decide together when we will meet in Los Angeles. Would you be so good, dear Rabbi, as to get in touch with us in about ten days. At that time we will discuss this further.

With best regards in which Professor Einstein joins

Yours,

Elsa Einstein

Translated by Ann Lenway, Berkeley, 1974

Magnin: course, Einstein is I guess the most famous person I knew outside presidents and popes. He was a very simple, gentle person. I rode bicycles with him as you see in the picture. He was very plain--didn't care how he dressed--sense of humor; just like an old shoe, like a child in some ways. So big he could afford to be that way.

Chall: So they have special personalities that come through?

Magnin: Oh yes. There are others down the hall. If I were to go down and look around I could recall them better. Some of the most outstanding people--including some of the astronauts.

Finishing the Autobiography

Chall: What are you going to do about that autobiography you started?

Magnin: Nothing.

Chall: Leave it in looseleaf here?

Magnin: Nothing.

Chall: I would like to take a few pages and put them in this manuscript.

Magnin: I don't know. What I may do someday, instead of making it an autobiography, I could take certain passages and write them as little vignettes. I don't have to mention myself. It's not bad writing, it reads well. [Rabbi reads segments from the first few pages.]

Chall: You might call that "Scenes from Childhood." You'll have to do it yourself or it won't come out right.

Magnin: Yes, I'll have to dictate it to Esther Lewis, but I'm afraid I haven't got the time.

Chall: How far into this did you get?

Magnin: I got quite along to my contacts in Los Angeles; my year and one-half in Stockton. [Reads additional passages in the Cincinatti period.]

There's a lot of good stuff in there I could use as silhouettes sometime.

Chall: I guess when you get into writing about Los Angeles, it becomes more difficult?

Magnin: Yes, much more so.

Chall: It would be. Well, this is our last interview. Do you have anything else you want to put on the record?

Magnin: No. It's been a pleasure to know you and meet you. You're a very forbearing person, very patient, nice, charming lady, and it was a great joy to meet you. I appreciate your patience with me. Outside of that I have nothing to say.

Transcribers: Marilyn Fernandez
Jeanne Shizuru

Final Typist: Mary Millman

APPENDIX

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ABBREVIATED BIOGRAPHY
OF
RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN

Born in San Francisco, California, July 1, 1890

Married to the former Evelyn Rosenthal; children: Henry D. Magnin and Mrs. Mae Brussell

DEGREES:

University of Cincinnati - A.B.
Hebrew Union College - Cincinnati - Rabbi, 1914
D.D., Hebrew Union College, 1945
D.H.L., California College of Medicine, 1944
S.T.D., University of Southern California, 1956
LL.D., Wilberforce University, 1962
LL.D., Pepperdine University, 1973

POSITIONS:

Rabbi, Temple Israel, Stockton, California, 1914-1915 -- 1½ years
Rabbi, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles, California, 1915

Adjunct Professor of Homiletics, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Lecturer, author, civic leader

MEMBER:

Charter Board of Hollywood Bowl
Founding Board of Directors, United Crusade
Board of Directors, Southern California Visitors Council
Board of Directors, American National Red Cross, Los Angeles Chapter
Associate Vice President, Boy Scouts of America, Los Angeles Area Council
Board of Trustees, California College of Medicine
Board of Directors, Cancer Prevention Society, Inc.
Board of Directors, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
Chaplain, Beverly Hills Navy League
Board of Overseers, HUC-JIR, California School
Advisory Council, Los Angeles County Heart Association
Honorary President, Los Angeles Hillel Council
Honorary Chairman, Armed Forces and Veterans Service Council
Board of Directors, Los Angeles World Affairs Council - Council for International Visitors
Honorary member, March of Dimes, Los Angeles County Chapter
United Nations Association of Los Angeles
USO-Los Angeles Area Board of Governors
Founder Member, Los Angeles Amigos del Pueblo, official advisory committee of
El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historical Monument Commission-Grand Hidalgo
YMCA Citizens Endorsement Committee

PAST SERVICE:

Former lecturer, University of Southern California
 Past Grand President, Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, District #4
 Member, Mayor's Advisory Committee on Human Relations
 Past President, University Religious Conference
 Past Grand Chaplain, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, State of California
 Newspaperboy Hall of Fame

AWARDS:

Elevated to Thirty-third Degree, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry
 Received rank and decoration of Knight Commander of the Court of Honor by the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry
 Award of Merit, Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce
 "Man of Year" Award, Los Angeles Lodge, No. 487, B'nai B'rith
 "Man of Year" Award, Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce
 "Man of the People" Award, Children's Aid, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center
 Judge Harry A. Hollzer Memorial Award of the Jewish Federation-Council of Greater Los Angeles
 Distinguished Alumnus Award presented by the Rabbinic Alumni Association of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

HONORS:

Delivered prayer at Inauguration of President Richard Nixon, January 20, 1969
 At invitation of President Nixon, participated in Sunday Morning Worship Service at The White House, January 21, 1973
 Participated in inauguration of Governor Ronald Reagan, State of California, January 2, 1967; January 4, 1971.

FRATERNITIES AND CLUBS:

Theta Phi
 Independent Order of B'nai B'rith
 West Gate Lodge No. 335, F. & A.M.
 Al Malaikah Temple, A.A.O.N.M.S.
 Rotary Club of Los Angeles, No. 5
 Hillcrest Country Club
 Friars Club

PUBLICATIONS:

Contributed to Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge
 Contributor to a number of national periodicals
 Former contributor to King Features Syndicate
 Author of HOW TO LIVE A RICHER AND FULLER LIFE, Prentice-Hall, New York
 Former columnist, Los Angeles Mirror
 Columnist, Los Angeles Herald-Examiner

For additional data, consult Who's Who in America

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . . and darkness was upon the face of the deep; . . . And God said: 'Y'he or. Let there be light.' Vay'he or. And there was light."

This was not the light of the sun or the moon or a billion blazing worlds. It was the *Shekinah* . . . the Word . . . the Divine Presence that was to reflect itself on the human mind and soul.

This is the light that brought man out of the cave and endowed him with intelligence, morality and the yearning for freedom . . . that inspired prophets and sages through all the ages.

Thus, was the American ideal begotten at the very beginning of time. It was cherished by our Founding Fathers who were practical idealists.

Knowing history, they warned us against the dangers of ignorance, stupidity, apathy, selfishness, immorality and dissension within our borders and between nations. They knew that patience, courage, good will and cooperation were preferable to hysteria and emotionalism, and that there is no substitute for common sense.

The night is long and it is still dark as far as civilization goes. We will never be perfect, for man is not perfect but we are on the way. Our country is still great. It will be greater with hope in our hearts and work and dedication . . . rededication. There are a few faint streaks of pink in the sky. We await the dawn.

Almighty God, bless our country and him who will be our leader and our guide in the coming years.

"Our fathers' God, to Thee
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing;
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King."

Amen.

Delivered by RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN, D.D., at the Inauguration Ceremonies of President Richard Milhous Nixon, Washington, D.C., January 20, 1969

by

RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN, D.D.

Delivered at the White House Ecumenical Worship Service

Sunday Morning, January 21, 1973

My subject this morning is the ecology of the mind. In the spirit of Socrates, who was an apostle of clear thinking, and the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, I am making a plea for the conservation of our best intellectual and spiritual resources which are gradually being whittled away by onslaughts of pseudo-philosophy and generalizations, some of which are illogical and terribly unrealistic.

If the soil is important, so is the soul.

If we are to survive and life is to have any meaning at all, we must combine reason and faith, head and heart, logic and emotions. We must learn to blend the many sides of our nature in proper proportions. This is the key to wisdom.

There is an old East Indian fable that we should all take to heart in these days of confusion.

Three magicians, proud of their skill, wandering along a road, stopped for a few seconds to perform a miracle. Coming across the carcass of a tiger, they restored it to life with esoteric mumbo-jumbo and hocus-pocus. The beast that they revived immediately mauled and killed all three of them. Meanwhile, a simple, plain fellow, who felt honored to accompany them, had climbed a tree and, sitting on a branch, viewed the tragic fiasco in complete safety.

The moral of the story is plain. The magicians had knowledge but lacked judgment. The simple man lacked education but exercised plain common sense, and an ounce of common sense is worth more than a pound of shallow education.

Two and two made four ten thousand years ago and will add up exactly the same ten thousand years from now. The Ten Commandments were true when they were delivered and will remain true for all eternity. They are not fads and fashions to be accepted in one generation and abandoned in the next.

Progress demands change but all change is not progress. When the Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, this was change with progress.

Fascism, communism and totalitarianism in any form are the result of change but are hardly progress. These systems deny the basic human rights such as freedom of speech, trial by due process and the dignity of the individual.

Sensible people desire to conserve what is good and eternally true and do not tamper with principles that have been proved by history, philosophy and religion to be the foundation stones of our civilization.

There are no quick and easy answers; nor will there ever be utopia, considering human nature.

It takes brains, knowledge, time and often a lot of patience and courage to tackle difficult problems with efficacy.

Today, knowledge is abundant. The library shelves groan. Thousands of diplomas are passed out every year, yet so many are unhappy. They are pulled about here and there by conflicting theories and shallow ideologies promising to cure all their ills, real and imaginary.

Some of these ideas are expressed by sincere, well-meaning people who lack the ability to think clearly. Others by demagogues for selfish purposes. Still others by the frustrated and embittered who would message their egos by hypercriticism and rebellion. There are also those who write and speak for shock value.

Too many of us have been hypnotized by such words as "progress," "modern," "avant-garde," and "sophistication." Actually, merits and defects have nothing to do with age. Some old institutions and ideas should be abandoned or revised. Others again are eternally valid.

We don't redecorate the house by removing the foundation or burning it down to the ground.

We are all idealistic at heart but unless idealism is coupled with practicality, it is not efficacious. Good intentions are not enough.

Joseph in the Bible was a dreamer but he used his head and thus saved a nation from starvation.

On the other hand, Don Quixote, the fictitious man of La Mancha, was also a dreamer but he was a hopeless idiot. In the cause of justice, he made a mess of his own life and got into conflicts every five minutes with everybody he came across. He believed windmills were giants and Dulcinea, a vulgar, sooty-faced woman, was the acme of refinement and nobility.

I have read *Don Quixote* several times and I feel quite sure that Cervantes never intended him to be exalted as an idealist. His book was a satire on chivalry.

The formal address prepared by Rabbi Magnin

The stage play and film of THE MAN OF LA MANCHA is a lovely, sentimental story which appeals to our sense of poetry and compassion, but it is totally misleading. 299

Joseph was the dreamer of possible dreams, not the impossible ones. In the world of everyday affairs and in our daily relations with other people, false logic and pretty phraseology are of no value.

Today, we hear a lot about individualism and individuality. We are told to be ourselves, "to do our thing," as though there was some virtue to be self-assertive on any and every occasion.

Michelangelo did his thing when he created the PIETA.

So did the madman who entered St. Peter's with a hammer in his hand and tried to smash it to pieces.

Shakespeare did his thing when he wrote HAMLET. Einstein did his when he discovered the theory of relativity and espoused so many humanitarian causes.

This is quite different from every mediocrity and nincompoop asserting his opinions every five minutes in contempt and arrogance.

As a disciple of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ever since I was a mere boy, I have always advocated individualism. Emerson implied our best potentialities and not the worst.

Another concept today that is both stupid and harmful is the emphasis placed on the so-called "new morality." This is nothing more or less than the old immorality justified by rationalism and couched in scientific and highfalutin terminology.

Freedom has been confused with license. Love has become lust. Free love is not "for free." It is very expensive since the price is the break up of the family, the spread of venereal disease, heartbreaks and desertions often ending in suicide.

"Situational ethics" is hardly an improvement over the Decalogue since it makes every one of us judge and jury of our own acts. Naturally, we are slightly prejudiced in our own favor.

There is a happy medium between puritanism with its prudishness and intolerance on the one hand, and moral anarchism and nihilism on the other. It may be difficult to define pornography legally, but we all know what it is when we see it and hear it.

Times change but human nature remains much the same. "We can't go home again." We can't live like our forefathers did, nor should we try; but we can preserve and conserve all that was good in their day and combine it with what is worthwhile in ours.

T. S. Eliot, poet and philosopher, over fifty years ago saw the beginnings of disintegration that result from slovenly thinking, cold materialism and ineffective idealism. He made a fervent plea for the restoration of tradition with its poetry, dignity, integrity, responsibility and sentiment.

He particularly emphasized religion, asserting that without a belief in God, there is actually no foundation for morality or even for justice, compassion and peace.

In addition to inspiration, he regarded religion as a powerful force for self-discipline.

Some think of Eliot as having been a reactionary. To a certain extent this is true, especially regarding some of his theological concepts. Actually, what he was striving to do was to conserve the best in human nature and the highest status of culture from the caveman to his day.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh says that when she took her first plane ride, she noticed the sky and the birds in a way that she had never seen them before. Up until that time, she had been looking at mud puddles.

The genius and art of living should enable us to look at the sky without concentrating on or falling into mud puddles. Every star can be a pal and we can still keep our feet on the ground.

We are body and soul . . . flesh and spirit . . . more than beasts and much less than angels. Neither are we devils.

We are children of God, imbued with intellect and the divine spirit. With His blessing, may we go forward in the next four years in health of body and mind, in prosperity and in peace.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, we read:

"There is a time for everything under the heavens . . . a time to tear down and a time to build up."

NOW is the time to build up.

2 —B'NAI B'RITH MESSENGER — Friday, February 9, 1973

Magnin At White House

Nixon: 'He Has Given A Meaningful Sermon'

By TRUDE B. FELDMAN

*Israel B'nai B'rith Messenger
White House Writer*

The concluding event surrounding President Nixon's second inauguration was an interfaith worship service at the White House.

The President invited Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, Evangelist Billy Graham, and Catholic Archbishop Joseph Bernardin to invest the ushering in of his second term with a spiritual and solemn flavor.

It was the 37th Worship Service in the White House during Mr. Nixon's presidency.

RABBI MAGNIN captivated the audience with his flair to punctuate a sermon with short stories and quips. He leaned on the podium in the East Room — and, looking as relaxed and confident as he is in his Wilshire Bouie: ard Temple in Los Angeles — sermonized to President and Mrs. Nixon, Vice President and Mrs. Spiro Agnew, Nixon daughters Tricia and Julie, Mamie Eisenhower, Chief Justice Warren Burger, administration aides and Government officials.

The 350 guests also included persons who will serve in the executive departments and those who worked on the inaugural committees.

IN INTRODUCING Rabbi Magnin, Mr. Nixon pointed out that the spiritual leader had met Mrs. Nixon before he did. She attended the University of Southern Califor-

nia when Rabbi Magnin was a lecturer there.

"She, I remember, was affected by him, as were all the students through many generations at USC," Mr. Noxon said. "He is a remarkable man who has had an enormously inspirational effect on our young people."

WHEN HE rose to speak, Rabbi Magnin looked at Dr. Graham and Archbishop Bernardin and began: "I'm one against two here . . . so, I'll have to tell you something about the Old Testament . . ."

After citing some of his favorite portions, to the delight of the audience, Rabbi Magnin went on:

"And the Children of Israel left Egypt and came to the Red Sea and soon they heard the clatter and the wheels of chariots and became panicky and began to complain and wanted to go back to Egypt . . . some wanted to drown themselves in the sea, according to the Midrash. Moses lifted up his countenance towards God, and God said: 'Go Forward' and they went forward. There was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night . . . and they followed the cloud and the fire . . . and so under our great leader, our great President . . . who is a beautiful human being, we shall go forward, following not a cloud in the sky and a light there, but the light within your heart (he told the President) and our hearts, and nothing shall stop us with God's help . . ."

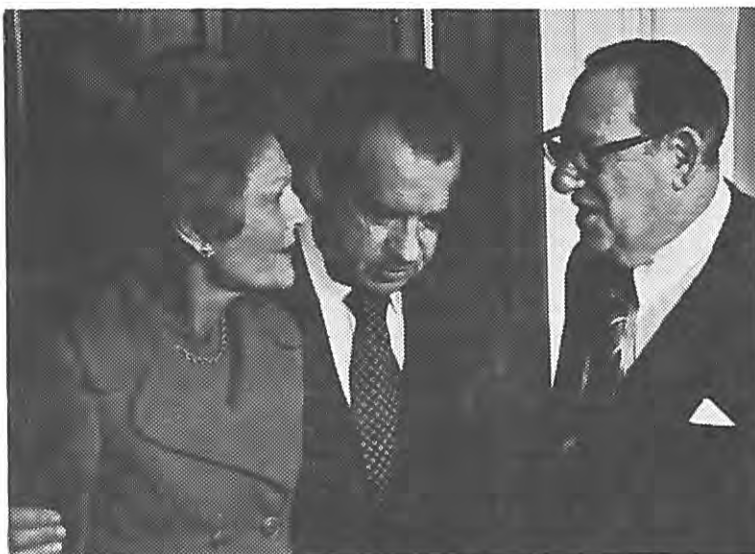
RABBI MAGNIN recalled that when Anne Lindberg took her first plane ride, she noticed the sky and the birds in a way she had never seen them before. Until then, she had been looking at mud puddles.

"The genius and art of living should enable us to look at the sky without concentrating on or falling into mud puddles," he said. "Every star can be a pal and we can still keep our feet on the ground. We are body and soul . . . flesh and spirit . . . more than beasts and much less than angels. Neither are we devils."

"TO FEEL, to have faith in, to believe in God, to believe that mystic something that transcends material and physical, because there IS something . . . and that something is God. We are children of God, imbued with intellect and the divine spirit. With His blessing, may we go forward in the next four years in health of body and mind, in prosperity and peace . . ."

RABBI MAGNIN concluded by citing: "In the book of Ecclesiastes we read that there is a time for everything under the sun . . . a time to tear down and a time to build up. AND NOW is the time to build up . . ."

PRESIDENT Nixon later told this writer that the entire service was a fitting one to mark the opening of his second term. "We tried to bring a very diverse group—like any group in any Administration and a representation from all over the Nation . . . as well as the



—Photo by Mel Chamowitz special for the B'nai B'rith Messenger

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE — Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin chats with President and Mrs. Nixon in the East Room of the White House after worship services.

clergymen who represented the three faiths . . ."

He added that Rabbi Magnin is "no stranger to us" . . . As always, he has given a meaningful sermon. He left a message with us which is worth thinking about and worth remembering . . ."

VICE PRESIDENT Spiro Agnew, who chatted at length with Rabbi Magnin during the reception, spoke of his admiration for him; and described his sermon as "directly to the point, cutting through to the heart of the matter in a few minutes . . ."

Chief Justice Burger said the Rabbi "cast a spell over the audience."

HERBERT G. KLEIN, communications director for the Executive Branch, said Rabbi Magnin "interjected into the Service inspiration and common sense and guidance, which was particularly appropriate in view of the President's Inaugural thoughts and his appeal to work closely with the people at home . . ."

Klein added that he and the President had heard Rabbi Magnin before, but that the key administration people were listening to him for the first time . . . and "his messages made a major impression on them . . ."

DURING A dinner interview at The Mayflower here, Rabbi Magnin said that no matter how far he has traveled and with all the honors and medals he has won, he would still describe as "thrilling" the honor bestowed upon him

by the President with this invitation.

"It's a rare privilege to be selected from thousands of clergymen," he said, "and I don't take it lightly."

RABBI MAGNIN also said that President Nixon has a "sensitive soul . . . and is a great human being. "I noticed his face light up as I spoke to the hushed audience. He was listening intently and I felt he and the others got the message," he said "I also feel the President cares about us, about our world and about peace. He wants peace badly and I just know he'll bring it . . ."

MRS. MAGNIN accompanied the Rabbi to the White House. They were invited with the Billy Grams and the Archbishop for coffee in the Nixon living quarters prior to the Service . . . with the Presidential family.

Mrs. Magnin said it was the first time she had been invited as a guest to the Executive Mansion since 1914 when Woodrow Wilson was President.

"**IT WAS A thrill for me to be** invited in such an intimate manner," she said. "The First Family was hospitable in a very refined way. I'll never forget this day . . . Imagine sitting with them in their own quarters, where there is much sentiment and American tradition . . . it felt wonderful."

Rabbi Magnin added: "They were sweet and cordial, and treated us like long, lost friends . . ."

Rabbi Magnin also delivered the prayer at the inauguration of President Nixon in 1969.

ALA

January 26, 1973

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D. C.
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
3663 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California

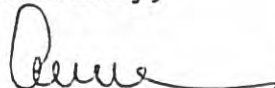
Dear Rabbi Magnin:

Your sermon was one of the finest I have ever heard. It made it very easy to believe the President's words in praise of one of the greatest teachers our country has produced.

I have written to the White House in hopes there may be a transcript of it.

I do hope that our paths will cross in the months to come.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Tobin Armstrong



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20201

January 29, 1973

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D.D.
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
3663 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90010

Dear Rabbi Magnin:

Your brief sermon at the White House worship service the other day was most impressive: incisive, witty, and wise. At points I heard -- or thought I heard -- notes consonant with thoughts I have from time to time tried to express myself, most recently in my final report as Secretary of HEW. It occurred to me that you might be interested in glancing through it, and I enclose a copy.

I hope that our paths cross again.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Elliot L. Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Elliot L. Richardson

Enclosure



NO. 8—EDGAR FOGEL MAGNIN

(Georges Schreiber, famed Belgian-American artist, has completed a series of 30 distinguished portraits of distinguished Los Angeles citizens for the Evening News. Herewith is published the eighth of his remarkable pencil sketches, drawn from life and autographed by the sitter. The remainder of the series will be published daily. Accompanying brief biographical word-portraits have been prepared by Tom O'Connor, Evening News staff writer.—Ed.)

By TOM O'CONNOR

Most non-Jews expect whiskers on their rabbis. Something out of Scott's Ivanhoe or Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice—a thin, stooped graybeard with palsied hands and rheumy eyes. In Los Angeles that unfortunate conception is not so prevalent: Edgar F. Magnin gets around.

For 21 years Rabbi Magnin has been getting around in Los Angeles, showing everybody just what a rip-snorting son-of-a-gun of a good fellow a rabbi can be. Success has crowned his efforts: today he stands pre-eminent in Los Angeles as—O rara avis!—the Popular Man. All friends, no enemies; hosts of admirers, maybe just one or two captious critics carping in a wilderness.

Beefy, bull-necked, florid, Rabbi Magnin looks younger than his 46 years, talks like a man much younger. That's part of the secret of his success. He can be impressively dignified when he dons vestments and orates to his flock; and he can orate—make no mistake about that.

But, it's second nature for him to unbend and be the hearty good fellow. He knows everybody who is anybody by his first name. He talks in a big voice and with ingratiating slang. He tells joke-book jokes about Izzy and Ikey.

He decided to become a rabbi at the age of 10, he'll tell you, because his own rabbi in San Francisco was "a colorful personality—a character out of Dickens—a man with a great heart and soul." Edgar Magnin is like nothing out of Dickens, but he's a colorful personality as color in the machine

age goes; and it's easy for his congregation to believe, seeing him in either of his two characters, that he's a man with a great heart and soul.

There's a basis—or perhaps a rationalization—for the things Edgar Magnin does and the way he lives in his own expressed view of life. He's the sort of person who thinks of himself as a "practical idealist." "You can't reform things all at once," he insists. "The slow method is the best. Human natures, not systems, need to be changed. That takes centuries. All we can do is sow a seed here and there."

And he'll tell you, too, why he doesn't make enemies: because he goes on the assumption that most people are decent. It is easy for a man who sees the

good in anyone to please everyone.

So thoroughly has he pleased everyone in his 20 years as Los Angeles' leading rabbi that he has not only a phenomenally rich temple—many of the Hollywood "great names" are on his list—an enthusiastic group of Jewish admirers, but he has also a place as a civic leader—a promoter of charities, a backer of all worth enterprises—more secure in prestige than most aspirants to such honor achieve in lives half again as long.

He is, in short, the sort of man for whom testimonial banquets are enthusiastically given and then gratefully received.

Rabbi Magnin Revered as 'Poet in the Pulpit'

BY MARY ANN CALLAN

God cannot be found on a microscopic slide, but in the hearts of men, said the bright-eyed man with the ample chin.

This distillation of truth, simply stated, is part of the character of the recognized leader of modern Judaism in the Western United States—Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin.

This year, when he turns 70 and enters his 45th year as director of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, he will continue to insist that religion, regardless of all its trappings, is still an affair of the heart, not the head . . . not of logic and ritual, but mysticism and maturity.

Richest Congregation

For being the grandson of successful merchants (I. Magnin's) and the spearhead in a practical project that now represents the richest and largest Jewish congregation in the western world, his conviction may seem contradicted in reality.

But he has not been lost in the trappings.

Says a staff member fervently, "If it's possible for a man to love another man, I love that man."

Rabbi Magnin himself goes to the beginning for his reasons for staying on the beam and not, to use one of his favorite expressions, "fiddling around" with superficialities.

"I have two strains, businessman and poet. A strange combination, but they don't seem to fight."

They didn't from the beginning. Young Edgar always wanted to be a rabbi, a "poet in the pulpit," where he still believes there is no place for mediocrity.

Superimposed on this



RABBI EDGAR F. MAGNIN

... the pulpit's no place for mediocrity.

"calling" was the influence of two men, Ralph Waldo Emerson and a Chicago rabbi "without ministerial claptrap who threw thunderbolts at his congregation."

Both said the same thing to him—be yourself, don't lean, own your own soul; feel God, don't explain him. One spoke through poetry, the other from the pulpit.

'Built-in Security'

Beneath this influence is what Rabbi Magnin likes to call a "built-in security" that gave him self-assurance, tolerance, belief in the right of others to express themselves and their talents.

Evidence? The fact that three men at the Temple, the rabbi and his two associates, have

accumulated 90 years of service together, bespeaking mutual respect and co-operation.

They work and move in an edifice built in 1929, hard to equal in structure and design, and with a congregation now 100 years old, numbering at least 2,200 families.

But that is the modern summary of Rabbi Magnin's influence. Fostering a religion primarily geared to American Jewish life, he has crossed the lines of narrow activity to become a leader in the cultural and educational life of the Southland.

Signs of this maturity were posted along his early road of life—his childhood in San Francisco, where he was born in 1890, his record at the University of Cincinnati

and Hebrew Union College, where he was graduated in 1914, and his marriage to Evelyn Rosenthal in 1916.

Not a Superman

These facts and figures can hardly explain his quick mind, sharp wit, human compassion, belief in the individual and the blessings of America—and that he is not a superhuman with a right to "preach down" to his congregation.

"None of us," he emphasizes, "has the right to live on the goodwill of people if we only put them to sleep preaching about the dead past."

He insists he does not preach but talks as an instrument of God relating the prophets to modern life and making their principles usable and tangible.

"With the help of a few scribbled notes," he explains, "I try to say what God wants me to say."

This, in essence, is what he believes religion should be—to feel what God wants you to feel and do.

He is sure this takes maturity and a willing and open heart.

Expanding Interest

In his darkly paneled office behind a magnificent carved, wooden desk, the rabbi speaks easily of his family (wife: two children, six grandchildren), the golf course, the musical life of the city, the charity drives . . . all an integral part of his always expanding interest.

He is apt to throw in a humorous anecdote about taking his grandson to European art galleries or about making him an honorary admiral in the Nebraska Navy.

Of such honors, serious or otherwise, he remarks, "Don't expect such things and you won't be disappointed."

But it seems these "unexpected" honors have come to him—by the bushful and many from non-sectarian sources.

Some who might call him unfairly "a successful businessman" in the world of religion would need only to look at the boxes of poetry, scraps of writing that fill an entire section of his bookshelves coming out of inspiration born of contacting people at the roots of their living.

He shrugs, "I have to write the words down and then I want to be rid of them."

Wrote Book

Prentice-Hall published a book of his in 1951 called "How to Live a Fuller and Richer Life," a title he abhors because "it sounds like 10 easy lessons to eternal life."

"I do not want to be thought of as a 'positive stinker,'" he puns.

Outspoken as a lecturer to rabbinical students, he regularly discourages those with "marks of mediocrity."

They don't belong, he states.

He also has lectured at SC, Brigham Young University and Reed College on the history of Jewish theology.

A many-sided life of a many-sided man, who is just as apt to protest roundly when he loses a ball on the course as any other golf enthusiast.

Sermon From Caddy

After receiving a sermon from his caddy recently on the futility of swearing, he retorted with a twinkle in his eye, "Look, boy, that's my 'racket.' Yours is to chase golf balls."

On the serious subject of sermons, he believes no rabbi should "have a corner" on the pulpit, but alternate with associates. "A man who talks all the time doesn't have much to say."

In fact, he would support a moratorium on all words—spoken, written or sung—for six months, "to give humanity some silence in which to think." This theoretical condition, of course, is his way of illustrating his point—a man should have something to say, based on thinking and feeling.

It is in the area of feeling that religion enters the heart and is expressed in man, and this is what the rabbi tries to say, personally and from the pulpit.

As the staff member said in the beginning, "I love that man."

God, it seems, has found an articulate instrument in Rabbi Magnin.

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Not Holier-But Holy

Southwest Jewish
Press - 6/11/64

Tribute to Magnin

By RABBI WM. MORDECAI KRAMER
Heritage Associate Editor

The other day I was called upon to introduce Rabbi Edgar Magnin at a meeting.

He was to speak and install Rabbi Herschel Lyman as my successor as President of the Reform Rabbis of the Southland.

Introducing Rabbi Magnin is something like showing a visitor from back East the glories of California.

When you live here you take them for granted. When you point them out, you realize just how great are these things that you take for granted.

Edgar Magnin is the Jew of the Golden West. He should never be taken for granted.

While his rabbinate is a very vital current event, he is already an historic figure. In the California story Edgar Magnin's is a very major role.

In the West he is first among his colleagues both in tenure and in fame. A suspicion arises that he shall rabbinically survive us all particularly in the current rabbinical roulette...

Edgar has courage. When a national Jewish agency made gratuitous theological statements through its secular misunderstanding of the emotional impact of the Church and State question, he stood up like one man become a majority to state an alternative and honorable Jewish position.

Edgar Magnin has been the leading figure striving to keep the society and Synagogues of Southland Jewry from becoming secularized.

He is a very earthy man who can speak like the lofty poet he also is. He can set us soar-

ing with dreams. He can, with gutty words, destroy false and fruitless worlds of make-believe.

What are some clues to this man? What are some of the sources of his strength?

His strength comes from many areas. He keeps busy smashing the idols of stupid self-aggrandisement and pastoral posturing.

He is loyal to his loves and his hates—both reflecting good

(Continued on Page 7)

More: Magnin Tribute

(Continued from Family Page)
values built on good instincts.

He has never lost the awareness of what the mass of men want, hunger for, and feel — although he does not ride with the herd.

He sees the Jew as a native part of the totality of man and not as an alien race set apart. This is manifest in the fact that while he is the rabbi of the Jews, he is also minister for the whole community.

This happy man has a wonderful sense of humor. It passes the test of including jokes about himself as well as others. He knows well the power of humor to ease tension and structure friendship.

He has been blessed with family, both personal and professional, who share his values but have their own unique and highly developed abilities in areas where he cannot or chooses not to serve. He is zealous of these relationships and not jealous of them.

Edgar Magnin is a believer.

He believes in this America of ours and in its accomplishments and its potentials.

He believes in the Jewish heritage and its ethical purpose.

Most of all, he believes in God with the simple faith of the fathers. God is no scientific abstract for him. His God has reality, is reality, and is present with love and comfort and guidance and forgiveness.

In a twentieth century, yet timeless way, Edgar Magnin is a holy man.

Not holier than thou, but holy.

Not holy in a juiceless, joyless way, but holy in that he sees life under God as lofty and lusty all at once.

Rabbi Edgar Magnin from his pulpit and via the mass media speaks to a "congregation" of two million each week.

His influence is far greater. Edgar Magnin can touch the individual heart.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PROFILE OF RABBI MAGNIN

A profile of Rabbi Magnin, written by Gene Handsaker, has been released by the Associated Press throughout the United States. This copy has been reproduced from the Rochester, New York, Democrat Chronicle.

Ministry's Old Techniques Long Discarded by This 'Good Natured Maverick'

A Minister Has No Private Line to God'

JULY, 1964

By GENE HANDSAKER
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES—He never buttons his ministerial robe. Sometimes he leans an elbow on the pulpit.

If another speaker bores him, he silently translates the dull monologue into Italian, Spanish or French—or surreptitiously studies population figures from a pocket calendar—to keep himself awake.

Next year Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin will complete 50 years with the same congregation, one of the biggest and wealthiest of his faith.

Yet this "poet in the pulpit" and "good-natured Maverick," as he has been called, has never written a sermon. He rarely announces a sermon subject.

* * *

STANDING under the soaring dome of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, which he helped build in 1929—he speaks spontaneously, from the heart.

To prepare, he reads endlessly, sometimes finding time for this by parking his car on a quiet side street. In the pulpit he ignores his notes.

If he runs dry, he stops. His preaching maxim is: "Don't ever bore them."

Blunt, warm-hearted, informal; heavy-set, with ample double chin; 73 but more like a vigorous 50, Dr. Edgar Fogel Magnin is—

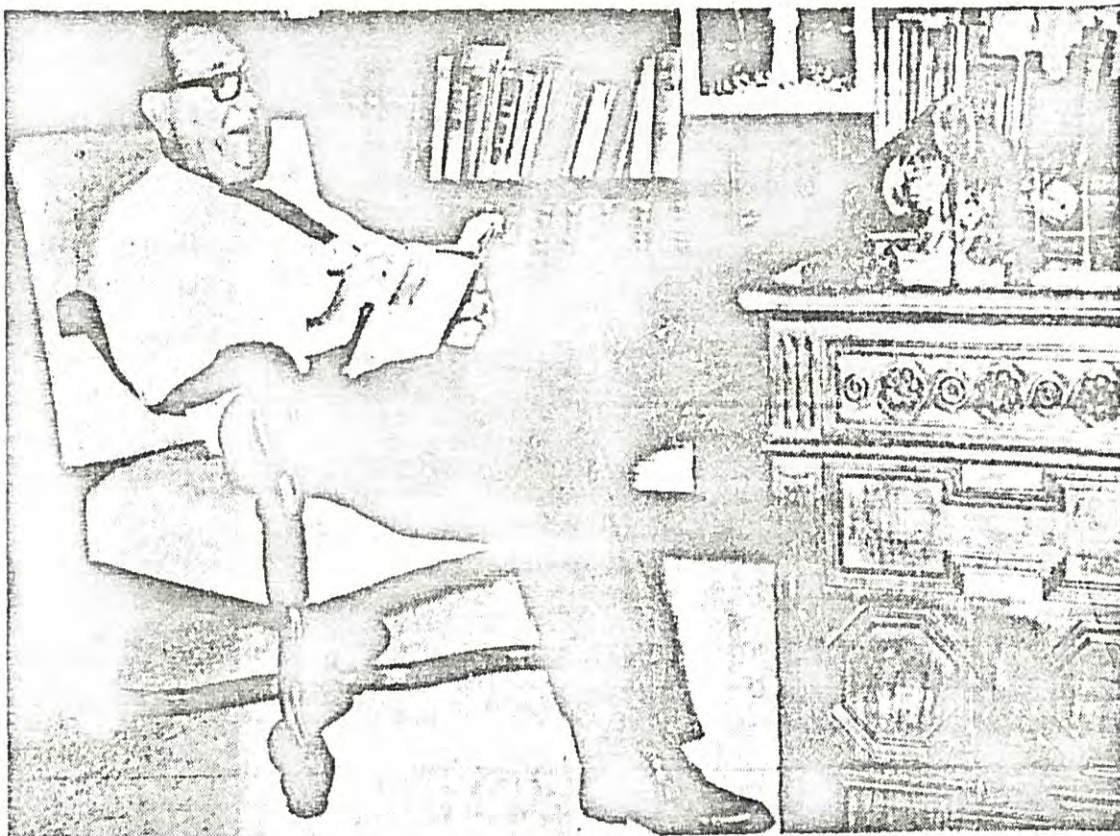
Spiritual leader of a 102-year-old congregation that includes 2,500 families, Jack Benny and Eddie Cantor . . .

Leader of Reform Judaism in the Western United States . . .

A "dear friend," in the words of James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles . . .

"A fine scholar, a real gentleman and a wonderful neighbor," says a nearby leading protestant pastor, Dr. William S. Meyer of Immanuel Presbyterian . . .

And, in the words of a grateful resolution by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, "one of



RELAXATION—"Poet in the Pulpit" Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, relaxes in the study at Wilshire Boulevard

Temple in Los Angeles. At 73 Rabbi Magnin is the leader of Reform Judaism in the Western U. S.

the great spiritual leaders of America."

* * *

THE RESOLUTION was voted after controversy threatened the traditional staging of the Nativity Scene last Christmas in Los Angeles' historic plaza.

The Anti-defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish service organization, had questioned the legality of putting the display on public property.

Up spoke Rabbi Magnin, himself a past district president of B'nai B'rith:

"Human relations are more important than legal technicalities. Jews respect the great teachings of the Christian religion. It has been a mutual relationship."

That settled it. The tableau went on as usual.

Over the years Magnin has remained singularly free of controversy and criticism. Los Angeles

newspaper files bulge with clippings of this luncheon or that dinner meeting honoring him for good deeds.

Twice each fall—at Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—the overflow from Magnin's Temple fills Immanuel Presbyterian's 2,000-seat sanctuary.

THIS IS a bit of reciprocity going back 40 years to when both congregations were located downtown. The Presbyterians' aging building was condemned, so the next Sunday they rented a theater.

"What foolishness!" Magnin said when he heard of it. "Our temple isn't used on Sundays. Come on over and use it."

The Presbyterians did, for several weeks, until they got new quarters of their own.

A tireless campaigner for humanitarian causes, Mag-

nin jokes: "I've been on the rubber-chicken and swiss-steak circuit for years. I've lost my gall-bladder and appendix, saving humanity."

His book-lined office is on the second floor of the temple, an imposing, tan-colored structure with marble, paintings, mosaics and stained glass in a complex that would cost \$13 million to reproduce.

The new, adjoining Edgar F. Magnin School of Religious Education has 44 gleaming, modern classrooms that serve 1,850 pupils on weekends.

* * *

MAGNIN, one leg up on a corner of his desk, his voice booming, impetuous, crackles with quotes like:

"I've long thrown out the old techniques of the ministry. A minister should be a human being. He hasn't got a private telephone line to God.

"I resent ministers who

know it all, who make themselves special agents of The Almighty, who talk in a falsetto, whining, monotonous voice through their adenoids."

In his half-century here he has seen a diminishing in anti-Semitism, he says, thanks partly to the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and, locally, the University Religious Conference, of which he is president, at UCLA. A dozen different religions use the same building — "we believe in disagreeing agreeably."

Retirement?

"Not as long as I stay well and my mind is fresh. The moment I find my mind getting sluggish or I'm a bitter old man or I've nothing new to say, they won't have to tell me. That's the day I'll quit."

He offered to resign as he neared 70, saying no man knows his own worth. The temple's board of trustees refused to listen.

Rabbi Magnin, Near 80, Scoffs at Retirement

Leader of Largest Reform Temple Happy Over \$1 Million Gift for Favorite School

BY DAN L. THRAPP
Times Religion Editor

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin leaned back in his leather swivel, contemplated his 80th birthday this week, the \$1 million gift because of it for his favorite school, and his 55 years of leadership of the world's largest Reform temple. He scoffed at the word "retirement."

"Why should I retire?" he demanded, his voice and manner every bit as vigorous as those of a mere 60-year-old.

"Look at Schweitzer! Churchill! George Bernard Shaw! Pablo Casals!

Touch of Regret

"Look at Moses! He was 120—I can't beat that, though, I guess!" he added with a touch of regret. Looking at him, one would not bet that he couldn't outlive the venerable Old Testament leader.

Rabbi Magnin admits that he never thought, when he was ordained in 1914, that at 80 he would still be actively leading a great temple with a membership of 2,500 families.

"I never looked that far ahead," he admits. "I never think of my age. It's a bad thing. I keep alive to what's happening, read everything. I want to keep ahead of these punks who think they're the enlightened generation."

He is one of the last to remain active of the great churchmen who did so much to stabilize Los Angeles' spiritual reputation after the spectacular evangelists had focused upon it a nationwide bemusement. He was a friend of all of them, and is as well known as any, a living monument within the community.

\$5,000 Theft

"These four clowns broke in here the other night," he reminisced, "and stole \$5,000 worth of junk — typewriters, business machines, my tape recorder, stuff like that. They loaded down their car so heavily they couldn't get past 5th and Catalina Sts., where the police accosted them."

"They would n't tell where they got the loot, but an officer played back the tape on the recorder where I was talking, and he said, 'That's Rabbi Magnin's voice!' so we got all the stuff back."

"How do you like that?" The four were booted on suspicion of burglary.

"I can't take myself seriously, or anybody else," said the rabbi. "Who is it that said, 'Life's too short to be small about it?'"

"But I'm too busy, really, too busy even to play golf regularly, although I

like to play nine holes about twice a week, when I can. I won't tell you what I shoot. The only thing that ever frustrated me was golf. It's too horrible. Exercise, that's all I care about it — talking, laughing, trying to keep young."

"Fellow said to me to the other day, 'Are you the son of the Rabbi Magnin I met 40 years ago?' I said, 'Yes.'"

The rabbi repeated his statement of five years ago that he would be the first to know when it was time to retire.

"I'll know it when my mind gets tired," he mused. "When I start repeating myself—that's a sign of old age. When I begin to reminisce too much.

When I can no longer appreciate young people. I'll know, when that time comes."

It may never arrive at all.

Denies Wealth

Rabbi Magnin rejected a sometimes-heard allegation that he is a rich man.

"Rich? I'm not rich," he said. "I'm comfortably well off, that's all. Money, beyond the necessities, never interested me. I turn back more fees from weddings and funerals than I keep. And I give money to some who appear to need it."

"The other day I married a cab driver and his girl, and then found he had only \$11. I said, 'What are you going to do for a honeymoon?' He said, 'We already had it.' I said, 'I knew you must have; that's why you're short.'"

Rabbi Magnin will be 80 Wednesday, and a permanent "birthday present" is being planned for him at the Hebrew Union College's new \$6 million California School, now under construction next to the USC campus at 32nd and Hoover Sts.

Atty. Martin Gang, chairman of the college's planning program, said a group of the clergyman's friends and admirers plan a \$1 million Edgar F. Magnin School of Graduate Studies at HUC.

The initial gift of \$100,000 was from Mrs. J. Y. Baruh, member of his temple, and daughter of the late Rabbi Sigmund Hecht, who was Dr. Magnin's predecessor at Wilshire Boulevard Temple more than half a century ago.

Rabbi Magnin was a founding father of the school in 1954, according to Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, dean.

The rabbi denies that

religion in America is in trouble today because of fading interest.

"You hear religion faces a revolution," he said. "That's a lot of baloney."

"It is true that, up to a point, it faces defiance. There is more defiance in every department of life. But actually there is not so much rebellion as people think."

"The good professional men, the honest houses of business, the worthy places of worship—they have no trouble."

"People come for what they want, and they find religion as necessary as sex. Adolescents always did wander away, although they were not so vocal in the past as now. Most of them come back. Except those who take drugs and go insane."

Feel for Music

"Where the leadership is right, the people will come, those who want religion. Some, of course, will never go for it. Some won't go for art, either—does that mean all art should be junked? Some have no feel for music. Does that mean symphonies are out? Of course not."

He said some adaptation to new forms of worship might be beneficial.

"It is one thing to experiment," he said. "It's another to go crazy."

"This temple is always flexible. I love ritual but I'm not a slave to it. Some 'youth services' are very nice, although they are not much different from traditional services."

"Sometimes they are pretty corny, full of third-rate poetry and all that, but the synagogue must adapt, and we do it. We are growing all the time."

Nixon Photo

His study walls are lined with signed photographs: from President Nixon, for whose inauguration Rabbi Magnin delivered the prayer; the late Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and many others. His secretaries have filled huge scrapbooks with mementos of his life. There now are about 30 of these books.

"I never look at them," confessed the rabbi. "Some day I'll give them to HUC for its library—they contain the Jewish history of Los Angeles for 50 years."

Rabbi Magnin said he could tolerate anyone but the supercilious and snobbish.

"Some of my colleagues out in left field are the biggest snobs in the world," he confided.

"They are the ones with the big mouths. I can't stand a phony, especially a pious phony. I can take a plain damned fool but not an educated fool. The guy with instant answers for every problem.

"I think, and my people seem to agree, that sanity is better—sanity and balance.

"The whole law of life is balance. Truth is between

the extremes. There is no such thing as instant answers. But there is plenty of instant talking.

"As long as people are what they are—and you and I will never live long enough to see them change much—the world is going to be what it is. Changing the 'system' means that only another humbug gets on top.

"Most of our trouble comes from fuzzy concepts. The worst devil in the world is the sloppy thinker. The more degrees he has, the worse he is. And I have quite a few degrees, myself!"

7/1/74

DEDICATION HELD AT 6TH AND BERENDO STS.

Giant Flag Salutes Patriotism, Faith in God

BY DAN L. THRAPP
Times Religion Editor

Independence Day came early to the corner of 6th and Berendo Sts. where a giant flagpole was dedicated Sunday with patriotic touches—plus an ecumenical plea for faith in God as the basis for faith in country.

"What a privilege not only to live in America, but to believe in that for which she stands," said Dr. William H. D. Hornaday, pastor of the Founder's Church of Religious Science.

Several thousand people crowded the intersection from which traffic had been cordoned off to watch the dedication and hear Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Msgr. John V. Sheridan, chairman of the ecumenism committee of the Roman Catholic Senate of Priests, and others.

A 30 by 20-foot flag was raised to the tip of a 65-foot stainless steel flagpole to climax the ceremony. It will be visible during the day and by artificial night lighting for blocks up and

down 6th St., a spokesman said.

"This flag was not given by the church as such," said Dr. Hornaday, "but by those members of our church who wanted a flag and raised the money for it by bazaars and in other ways."

Councilman John Ferraro, representing the city, noted that "too often in the recent past, patriots and those who loved the flag have been considered squares. God bless those squares. We need more of them."

Father Sheridan, observing that all people "have a common origin, common destiny, urged common destiny" urged his listeners to "show our gratification for the unique blessings of this land."

Superior Judge Billy G. Mills, a member of the board of trustees of Founder's Church, said he believed that "this is the first time this sort of dedication has ever happened."

Rabbi Magnin, who will be 84 today and still is active as spiritual leader of the West's largest Reform

temple, said that "if there was any time in history when there was a need for positive thinking, it's right now."

"We must distinguish between phoney patriotism and the real thing, between real religion and phony religion, between sophistry and horse sense," he said.

"We must bring our country back to a sense of decency. And humor. This is as true of the cultural as of the political or any other arenas."

He cited many crises the nation has met in the past.

"We always got through those situations," he said, "and we did so because most of the people of America are decent; their hearts are good. And most of them, or a very strong minority at any rate, believed in God."

The rabbi described his trips abroad and his tours of the great museums and art collections in other countries.

"But nothing I saw compares with the Statue of Liberty," he added.

"It is not a great statue

by artistic standards, but the old girl with the torch is still the most beautiful sight in the world.

"Everybody who lives here, if he has any brains at all, ought to get down on his knees every day and thank God for America."

Rabbi Magnin admitted that inequities and injustices exist in this country, but concluded that "in the main, every man gets a pretty square deal," which is better than he could expect in most other lands.

Officers of the Arcadia Elks Lodge No. 2025 paraded replicas of flags from the nation's past, from the banner that flew at Bunker Hill, to the rattlesnake on a yellow background flown by southern colonies in 1775 and 1776, and other early emblems.

The Salvation Army Congress Hall Band, directed by John Vorwald, and the choir of Founder's Church provided music. Boy Scouts of Arcadia Troop 127 assisted in raising the huge flag, with Eagle Scout Steve Ramsey of Temple City's Troop 169 leading the Pledge of Allegiance.

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D.D.
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
3663 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles 90010

November 14, 1974

Letters to the Editor
Los Angeles Times
Times Mirror Square
Los Angeles, California 90053

Dear Sir:

I would like to compliment the Los Angeles Times on the editorial - The General's Appalling Performance.

Naturally, as a Jew, I am concerned with the poison of anti-Semitism. But I assure you that I am also very much concerned as an American citizen if the defense of this country is placed in the hands of a man of such poor judgment.

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
Los Angeles,

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D.D.
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
3663 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles 90010

November 14, 1974

The Honorable Gerald Ford
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I am a Jew and an American and I hereby
file my protest against the behavior of
General George S. Brown in his recent
anti-Semitic remarks.

As a Jew, I naturally resent his false
statements.

As an American, I am terribly concerned
about the defense of this country resting
in the hands of a man of such bad judgment.

Best wishes,

Cordially,



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

311

6 DEC 1974

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, D.D.
Wilshire Boulevard Temple
3663 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90010

Dear Rabbi Magnin:

On behalf of President Ford, I am replying to your correspondence concerning the remarks made by General George S. Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during a meeting with Duke University law students on October 10.

As you may know, the President has rebuked General Brown for this incident. In addition, the President, during a November 14 press conference in Phoenix, Arizona, declared: "I think it ought to be said that General Brown has publicly apologized to those that might have been involved in the comments he made. I have no intention of asking General Brown to resign. General Brown has been an excellent Air Force Officer; he has been an excellent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He has made a mistake; he has recognized it. He is going to continue as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

General Brown has retracted his inaccurate and all-too-casual observations and has given a full apology for the incident. He has expressed his distress that he has unwittingly done the nation a disservice through his part in initiating this unfortunate controversy. As he himself has remarked publicly: "I am both awed and appalled by the divisiveness this incident has caused. I understand the upset and dismay that have been expressed." With typical forthrightness, he has taken positive steps both to correct his error and to heal any wounds that he may have inadvertently caused in the society to which he has been and continues to be so deeply dedicated.

In this process, General Brown has made it clear "that the strategic direction of the armed forces in the defense of America is my forte and is a full-time job. With this in mind, I intend to avoid even the appearance of dealing with anything else."

I enclose a copy of General Brown's statement which expresses his regret for his comments at Duke University.

Sincerely,

William E. Odom

William E. Odom
Executive Assistant

Enclosure



STATEMENT BY GENERAL GEORGE S. BROWN
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

I deeply regret my remarks at Duke University which are currently being reported in the press. They were both unfortunate and ill considered -- and certainly do not represent my convictions.

In particular, the remarks might mistakenly lead to the wholly erroneous inference that American citizens and groups do not enjoy in this nation the privilege of expressing their views forcefully. What are called pressures lie at the very heart of democracy. We in Defense know that: we experience pressures from contractors, pressures from those opposed to defense expenditures, pressures from foreign governments.

Moreover, my improper comments could be read to suggest the American Jewish Community and Israel are somehow the same. Americans of Jewish background have an understandable interest in the future of Israel -- parallel to similar sentiments among other Americans all of whom at one time or another trace their descent to other lands.

I do in fact appreciate the great support and the deep interest in the nature of our security problems and our defenses that the American Jewish Community has steadily demonstrated, and I want to reemphasize that my unfounded and all too casual remarks on that particular occasion are wholly unrepresentative of my continuing respect and appreciation for the role played by Jewish citizens which I have just reiterated to the Jewish War Veterans.

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Malca Chall

Graduated from Reed College in 1942 with a B.A. degree, and from the State University of Iowa in 1943 with an M.A. degree in Political Science.

Wage Rate Analyst with the Twelfth Regional War Labor Board, 1943-1945, specializing in agriculture and services. Research and writing in the New York public relations firm of Edward L. Bernays, 1946-1947, and research and statistics for the Oakland Area Community Chest and Council of Social Agencies 1948-1951.

Active in community affairs as a director and past president of the League of Women Voters of the Hayward Area specializing in state and local government; on county-wide committees in the field of mental health; on election campaign committees for school tax and bond measures, and candidates for school board and state legislature.

Employed in 1967 by the Regional Oral History Office interviewing in fields of agriculture and water resources, Jewish Community history, and women leaders in civic affairs and politics.