TELL NO ONE

LEO BAECK AND THE TERRIBLE SECRET

JOSHUA FRANKLIN

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Debórah Dwork, Chief Instructor

ABSTRACT

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Rabbi Leo Baeck has been revered as one the greatest Jewish figures of the twentieth century. He is praised for his theological genius, moral and ethical character, and his leadership during the Nazi era. He has not, however, been unanimously held in such high esteem. Leo Baeck has been criticized for withholding information from Jews in Germany and in the Theresienstadt ghetto about the transports to the east, which he knew were destined for Auschwitz. This study looks at what exactly Leo Baeck knew about the transports, and why he chose to keep his knowledge a secret.

Debórah Dwork, Ph.D.
Rose Professor of Holocaust History
Chief Instructor

Everett Fox, Ph.D.
Allen M. Glick Professor of Judaic and Biblical Studies
Second Reader

ACADEMIC HISTORY

Name: Joshua Franklin **Date: October 2007**

Place of Birth: New York, NY **Date: 5 May 1984**

Baccalaureate Degree: B.A

Source: Clark University **Date: May 2006**

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INTRODUCTION

The first series of transports to leave the Theresienstadt ghetto in fall 1944 began on September 27. Paul Weiner, an adolescent Czech-Jewish boy, was sad to see his father and his brother Handa sent into what was "unknown." Like for many others, the separation was difficult for him. The day before his father and brother's departure, he wrote in his diary, "I have difficulties thinking that I could live . . . without my father and Handa . . . . It makes me feel very sad."[1] Paul believed that these deportations were only the beginning. "It is almost a certainty that we will all go." He felt indifferent to whether he would be deported. "I personally don't care at all," he wrote. Unaware of what awaited deportees in the east, Paul recorded that "actually I'm looking forward to leave soon."[2] He debated whether or not he and his mother should volunteer for the next transport. "I think it would really not be too bad to volunteer," he thought at first. "Then I change my view . . . . The only obstacle is that we could not take with us too much luggage. It is for this reason that we completely discard the idea of leaving."[3] Paul and his mother feared resettlement because the process of moving was traumatic. On the one hand, they wanted to be reunited with their family, but on the other, the idea of leaving their belongings behind was too harrowing. Paul's mother even developed anxiety and distress because "somebody told her that the men [who had been deported] lost all their luggage."[4] She feared that her husband and son would arrive somewhere in the east without their belongings. Paul and his mother did not know the truth about the east.

The slaughter in the east was beyond the realm of rationality. The Germans were sending the transports from Theresienstadt to the death factory Auschwitz-Birkenau,

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[1] Paul Weiner Diary, 26 September 1944, courtesy of Paul Weiner.
[2] IBID, 2 October 1944.
[3] IBID, 30 September 1944.
[4] IBID, 7 October 1944.

where those aboard the trains fell victim to the Nazis' plan to murder European Jewry systematically. The Nazis gassed everyone who was unfit for slave labor upon arrival. Those who survived a selection were incorporated into the camp labor system and most often worked and starved to death. Fewer than 4 percent of those who were deported from Theresienstadt survived.[5] Auschwitz was the largest of six death camps, and one of many places that the Nazis carried out the murder of European Jews.

Only a select few members of the Jewish leadership in Theresienstadt had any knowledge about Auschwitz and the atrocities that the Germans and their allies were committing in the east. Among them was Rabbi Leo Baeck, former head of the German-Jewish community, and a spiritual leader of the Jews in Theresienstadt. Baeck had first learned about the atrocities in the east while he served in Berlin as the president of the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (National Association of Jews in Germany). He had at that time made a principled decision to remain silent about the information he had learned. While the Germans carried out the deportation of German-Jews, he kept silent about his knowledge and cooperated with Nazi orders for the Jewish leadership to help facilitate the process. After he was deported to Theresienstadt in January 1943, the trains continued to roll out from the ghetto, and Baeck continued to conceal what he knew from the general population until the end of the war. He survived in Theresienstadt while most of those who were deported did not.

In this study, I have endeavored to document how Leo Baeck came to gain information about the Holocaust as it was unfolding, and why he chose to keep this a secret. Among the uncertainty, confusion, and speculation that clouded the awareness of

[5] The Germans also sent transports in earlier years from Theresienstadt to other death camps and ghettos in the east. See: Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt* (London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD, 1953), 250-251.

the German-Jewish community and Theresienstadt inmates, Baeck knew and understood that the Nazis were deliberately and methodically murdering deported Jews in death factories throughout the east. As a leader, his conclusion to withhold this information was based upon a conscious assessment that ignorance was in the best interest of the community. This choice, however, was a "choiceless choice," a decision that did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation in which Baeck lacked control.[6] The best option, he determined, was to tell no one.

SECRECY, DECEIT, AND SILENCE

To keep a secret is to conceal information or evidence from reaching others and to do so intentionally, in order to prevent the outside party from learning it, from possessing it, making use of it, or revealing it.[7] Secrecy does not necessarily involve deception of the outsider. Deception is the facilitation of a plan to deceive a group that is not a part of the inner group who possesses a secret. The Nazis, for example, tried to deceive European Jews by camouflaging their actions and by telling the Jews that the east was simply "resettlement." The Nazis, in other words, actively tried to mislead the Jews, thereby deceiving them.

The passive aspect of keeping a secret, the form of secrecy that Leo Baeck practiced during the Holocaust, was silence. Baeck did not try to deceive his coreligionists, but chose to abstain from revealing his knowledge about the east—he

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[6] Lawrence L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 72.
[7] Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the ethics of concealment and revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 6.

chose silence not deceit. The English language does not make the distinction between keeping silent in terms of secrecy and keeping silent in terms of passive quietness. Silence is both a method of concealing a secret and the inaction of speaking. While the term silence can have multiple meanings in English, the German term makes a clear distinction between concealing information, "*Verschweigen*,", and not speaking, "*Schweigen*." As people become conscious of distinct concepts through language, perhaps Baeck, a native German speaker, was influenced by his distinction between "*Schweigen*" and *"Verschweigen"* in a way that a native Anglophone would not be. In the context of this study, I will therefore use the word "silence" as Baeck would have perceived it, in terms of "*Verschweigen."*

LEO BAECK

Leo Baeck (05.23.1873-11.02.1956) was born and grew up in the small town of Lissa, at that time located in the German province of Posen and now in Poland. One of eleven children, Baeck was a member of a typical German-Jewish middle class family that lacked money and stressed education. Samuel Bäck, Leo's father, came from a traditionally eastern European Jewish background and rabbinical education; yet unlike most ordained rabbis of the time, he also pursued a secular university education and received a doctorate in philosophy. Following in his father's footsteps, Leo Baeck also embraced both the traditions of eastern Jews and the secular world of western scholarship. Leo Baeck completed his rabbinical training at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and also at *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (The

Teaching Institution for the Study of Judaism), and later completed a secular education at the University of Berlin.[8]

After his studies, Baeck became a pulpit rabbi. His first positions were in Oppeln and then in Düsseldorf. In 1912, he took a post in Berlin as a rabbi for the Jewish community and as a teacher at the *Hochshule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where he previously had been a student. In 1914, Baeck volunteered as a chaplain in the German Army for the duration of the First World War. After serving his country, he returned to Berlin to resume his duties.

During the Weimar era (1918-1933) Leo Baeck came to attain a position of unusual influence not only in the Jewish sphere of Germany, but nationally and internationally. He emerged as a rabbi, teacher, scholar, author and, during the Nazi era, as a leader of the German-Jewish people. After miraculously surviving the Holocaust, Baeck lectured in the United States at the Hebrew Union College in College in Cincinnati for several years. He eventually settled with his family in London, where he died of natural causes in 1956.

SCHOLARLY WORKS OF AND ON BAECK

Leo Baeck was a prominent Jewish figure in the twentieth century. A theologian and a philosopher, his writings have become popular for both a general Jewish audience as well as for scholars of theology. Baeck's first and most renowned book was *The*

[8] The *Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* became later known as the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. H.I. Bach, "Leo Baeck" *The Synagogue Review* XXXI (January 1957), 138; For a comprehensive biography of Leo Baeck, see: Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1978).

Essence of Judaism,[9] a polemical critique of Adolf von Harnack's *The Essence of Christianity.*[10] He published numerous essays before and after the Second World War and most of these articles have been compiled as Leo *Baeck Werke*.[11] His scholarship has also been amassed and published in *Judaism and Christianity*[12] and *The Pharisees and other Essays*.[13] He began to write his second and final book, *This People Israel*,[14] while he was a prisoner in Theresienstadt and completed it on his deathbed. *This People Israel* is a theological and philosophical documentation of the Jewish people's four-thousand-year history. Among Baeck's many writings, he seldom discussed the Nazi era in any detail, and he never wrote autobiographically.

After Baeck died, scholars sought to analyze his theology, philosophy, and biography. One of his students, Albert Friedlander, wrote the first major analysis of him, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt*.[15] Friedlander's book explores Baeck's biographical history briefly; his focus is a comprehensive analysis of the scholar's writing. Walter Homolka, author of *Jewish Identity in Modern Times: Leo Baeck and German Protestantism,*[16] analyzed Baeck's writing within the specific context of how Leo Baeck perceived Judaism as a classical world religion compared to Christianity. The

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[9] The original German publication first appeared in 1905 and was reissued in a revised and expanded form in 1922. Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism* (New York, Schocken Books, 1967).
[10] Adolf con Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1950; Harper & Brothers, 1957).
[11] Leo Baeck, Leo Baeck Werke. ed. Albert H. Friedlander, 6 vols. (Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus,1996-2003).
[12] Leo Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity: A Modern Theologian's Discussion of Basic Issues Between the Two Religions* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958).
[13] Leo Baeck, *The Pharisees and other Essays* (New York, Schocken Books, 1947).
[14] Leo Baeck, *This People Israel: The meaning of Jewish existence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).
[15] Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).
[16] Walter Homolka, *Jewish Identity in Modern Times: Leo Baeck and German Protestantism,* 2 vols. (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).

most comprehensive biography of Baeck remains *Days of Sorrow and Pain*[17] by Leonard Baker, who focused on his activities during the Holocaust. An edited collection of articles in the book *Leo Baeck: Leadership and Thought,*[18] also provides a biographical discussion of the leader during the Nazi era.

In the vast literature written about Leo Baeck, the issue of his knowledge about and concealment of the atrocities in the east has been addressed only briefly. Baker and Friedlander each dedicate about two pages to a discussion of this subject and their analyses merely scratch the surface of this complex issue. Avraham Barkai also reviewed this matter in *Leo Baeck: Leadership and Thought,* but his examination, too, is very brief. Eric Boehm's short biographical article about Leo Baeck, "A People Stands before God,"[19] served as the primary source for Baker, Friedlander, and Barkai. Based upon a series of conversations Boehm had with Baeck, this article emerged as the sole recorded interview that Leo Baeck gave concerning his knowledge and silence about Auschwitz. Numerous scholarly works of the Holocaust including the seminal work of Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews,*[20] have called attention to Baeck's knowledge about Auschwitz by citing Boehm's article. This interview is not the sole source of information in this matter, however. Evidence from other sources corroborates and adds to what we know about Baeck's knowledge and silence about the Holocaust as it was unfolding.

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[17] Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1978).
[18] Avraham Barkai, ed., *Leo Baeck: Leadership and Thought 1933-1945* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Center for Jewish History, 2000). In Hebrew.
[19] Eric H. Boehm, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 281-300.
[20] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Baeck learned about the situation in the east from numerous sources at various junctures in time throughout the war. In this study, I have utilized published and unpublished memoirs, diaries, testimonies, and archival material in order to reconstruct the network of connections that informed Baeck about the situation in the east while he was president of the *Reichsvereinigung* in Berlin and also while he was imprisoned in Theresienstadt. In addition to illuminating when and from whom Baeck learned about the atrocities in the east, my analysis examines how Baeck expressed his logic of silence through a critique of his writing and philosophy. This examination yields answers to some of the complex questions that survivors and historians have asked about his secrecy.[21]

THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

Previous studies about Leo Baeck have provided a comprehensive analysis of his life and philosophy. They have examined Leo Baeck through the question: "who was Leo Baeck and what was his philosophy?" Answering these questions, the authors stumbled upon the issue of Baeck's knowledge and silence about Auschwitz and the east, but they did not scrutinize the subject. My study is also a biographical and philosophical analysis of Leo Baeck, but from a new angle. I examine his biography and philosophy to explore the question: "what did Baeck know and why did he remain silent?"

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[21] Notwithstanding the material that I have uncovered in this study, I have been limited by my lack of proficiency in German. My translator for this project, Marianne Salinger, helped me to make many discoveries using German documents, yet there is still a significant amount of material that I could not review or obtain because of my linguistic handicap. In the future, I shall seek to break the language barrier, and return to archival documents and literature that I was not able to examine.

In the first chapter of this work, I look at Baeck's leadership role from 1933 to 1945. The intent of this chapter is to introduce how his authority and function as a leader of the German-Jewish people fluctuated at different periods of the Nazi era. Assessing how Baeck responded to the Nazis within the context of gaining information and concealing his knowledge, I illustrate how his role, function, and ability as a Jewish leader affected his capability to react to the Nazis.

I explore what the general population knew in comparison to Leo Baeck in Chapter 2. In order to highlight how significant it was that Leo Baeck understood the crimes the Germans and their allies were perpetrating in the east, it is crucial to outline what others did not know. I examine the question of their ignorance and the difference between information and knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I deal with how exactly Baeck came to learn about the atrocities in the east. Examining chronologically when and from whom he learned about various massacres and the operation of death camps in the east, I develop a picture of the network of connections and circumstances that informed and enabled Baeck to ascertain the fate of transports to the east.

Knowing what he did, why did he keep silent? In Chapter 4, I seek to explain Baeck's rationale for withholding information from the general population. Exploring his philosophy in a context of justifying silence, I seek to present Baeck's voice through his writing. Further, I look at Baeck's actions in terms of a reflection upon Jewish theology and upon balancing consequences of one action versus the other.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I turn to the controversy surrounding Baeck's decision to keep information secret from the public. I aim to balance criticism and praise in order to

present an impartial critique of how his policy of silence should been seen within the context of other Jewish leaders' responses to the Nazis.

What information did Baeck have and how did he understand it? Where and from whom did he receive this information? Why did he choose to keep this information secret? How should we understand his silence? The answers to these questions can be interpreted in many ways. As Baeck did not address these questions directly in his lifetime, we will never know his position with complete certainty. Piecing together shards of evidence and analyzing his biography and philosophy, I have attempted to be the voice of his silence.

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“The Pope of German Jews”

In early May 1945, Major Patrick Dolan, an American OSS (Office of Strategic Services) agent received an order to "Slip out of Prague, travel forty kilometers to Theresienstadt . . . and find someone named Leo Baeck." Unaware of the importance of his target, Dolan asked, "Who the hell is Leo Baeck?" The answer came quickly, "Leo Baeck is the Pope of the German Jews."[1] From 1933 until he was deported to Theresienstadt in January 1943, Leo Baeck led the German Jews as the head of the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland* (National Representation of Jews in Germany) and the subsequent organization, the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (National Association of Jews in Germany). Baeck had also taken on authoritative positions while an inmate in Theresienstadt, although not until the later years of his imprisonment. His leadership was both spiritual and political. "From him there emanated a power of representation . . . [that was] benevolently wise and aristocratically worldly . . . . The authority with which Baeck spoke and acted was not a powerful church, but *das Gebot*, the Commandment about which his thinking had turned for a lifetime," noted Fritz Bamberger, one of Baeck's rabbinical colleagues.[2] Baeck had not only been the leader of German Jewry, he was also as Eva Reichmann has labeled him, a symbol of German Jewry.[3] "Long grown into a symbol, the symbol of German

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[1]Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 1-2.

[2] Fritz Bamberger, "Leo Baeck: The Man and the Idea," *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture* 1 (1958).

[3] Hannah Arendt went so far as to say that "in the eyes of both Jews and Gentiles Dr. Baeck was the 'Jewish Führer.'" Critics of Hannah Arendt, however, have attested to the negative implications of the term "Jewish Führer." Minister Gaston D. Cogdell wrote in a letter to the New Yorker Magazine, which first published Arendt's label, that "the impression conveyed here is 'if the German Führer was a monster, what kind of a monster must the Jewish Führer have been.'" Gaston D. Cogdell to Mr. Fleischmann, 22 April 1963, in the collection of The American Jewish Archives; Arendt's label is clearly taken from: Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 466. "The Jewish 'Fürher' in Berlin, as one of Eichmann's people called Rabbi Leo Baeck." Hilberg cited: Eugene Levai, *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (Zurich and Vienna, 1948), 123. After looking at this source it becomes clear that Hilberg made a mistake. The source referenced that "in Berlin the Jewish

Jewry, a man like Leo Baeck could never rest content to be no more than a symbol. Unbowed by suffering, he remained the leader and champion of his German Jews."[4]

In this chapter, we will explore Leo Baeck's leadership. As head of the *Reichsvertretung* and the *Reichsvereinigung*, Leo Baeck was a leader who played a decisive role in the fate of the German Jews. In this position, he further stood as a symbol of German Jewry. In Theresienstadt, however, Baeck played a minimal role in the Jewish administration, while remaining the prominent symbol of the German Jew.

PRESIDENT OF THE *REICHSVERTRETUNG*

With the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party in 1933, it became clear to the German-Jewish community that they needed an umbrella organization to centralize authority for contesting the new regime's threat. Dr. Ernst Herzfeld, a prominent Jewish leader at the time described this situation in his memoirs.

> The Jews of Germany who saw themselves faced with an onslaught by overwhelming forces and exposed to a struggle for life and death, lacked a central body with authority to hold negotiations or act as their spokesman . . . . Very soon all those who realized the responsibility they carried, reached the conclusion that the situation could not continue without a central administrative body.[5]

'Führer,' lacking obedience, had been sent to Dachau for a few months and was now more pliable." In addition to the fact that Leo Baeck's name was not mentioned, Baeck was never sent to Dachau, nor was he still in Berlin in 1944, the time in which Dieter Wisliceny, Eichmann's aide wrote this note.

[4] Eva G. Reichmann, "Symbol of German Jewry," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 2 (1957), 21.

[5] Large sections of Dr. Ernst Herzfeld's memoirs entitled "My Last Years in Germany, 1933-1938" were reprinted in an English translation in: K.Y. Ball-Kaduri "The National Representation of Jews in Germany – Obstacles and Accomplishments at its Establishment" *Yad Vashem Studies* II (1975), 160.

Herzfeld began to plan a coalition with two other Jews, Georg Hirschland, chairman of the Essen Jewish Community, and Hugo Hahn, a prominent rabbi in the German community. They started by gaining the support of the *Kehillot* (Jewish communities), and then followed up by rallying the support of the majority of Jewish organizations throughout Germany such as the *Central-Verein*, the Zionist organization, the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* (Aid Association of German Jews) and the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten* (National League for Jewish Frontline Soldiers).[6] In addition to uniting the German-Jewish communities and organizations, they pondered, "who would be capable of rallying all the forces and guiding them? . . . . Only Dr. Leo Baeck, the Berlin Rabbi, was considered eligible," noted Herzfeld. "Dr. Leo Baeck was farsighted and endowed with great diplomatic skill."[7]

Baeck had emerged as a prominent Jewish theologian at the beginning of the twentieth century when his book, *The Essence of Judaism,*[8] was released and became popular. Before the Nazi party came to power in 1933, he had also earned acclaim as the president of the B'nai B'rith, chairman of the Rabbinical Association, a board member of the *Keren Hayesod* (Palestine Foundation Fund), a member of the executive board of the *Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens* (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith), a board member of the Jewish veterans' group, and a professor at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) in Berlin.[9] It follows that he was not only a great rabbi and a spiritual

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[6] Ibid, 160-165.
[7] Ibid, 160.
[8] Leo Baeck, *Das Wesen des Judentums* (Berlin : Nathansen und Lamm, 1905). *The Essence of Judaism* has been published with various revisions and translations.
[9] Baker, 161; K.Y. Ball-Kaduri, "The National Representation of Jews in Germany – Obstacles and Accomplishments at its Establishment" *Yad Vashem Studies* II (1975), 163-164.

leader of the Jewish people, he was also a great scholar and political figure in Germany. Then too, Baeck commanded the respect of almost all segments of the German-Jewish community. As Albert Friedlander has explained, Leo Baeck "express[ed] the attitude and thinking of the majority; and he was respected by those who did disagree with him . . . . Many factions existed in the German-Jewish community of the twentieth century. Baeck stood above all, and all turned to him."[10] His well-rounded Jewish character, lack of political affiliation, great diplomatic skill, and impeccable moral and ethical stature made him the undisputed candidate to lead the German-Jewish people through the organization that came to be known as the *Reichsvertretung der Juden*. Taking on this position, Baeck became both the leader and symbol of German Jewry in the final years preceding its destruction.

The *Reichsvertretung* was officially established on 17 September 1933 under the leadership of Rabbi Leo Baeck; Otto Hirsch (1885-1941) served as executive director and Siegfried Moses (1887-1974) Hirsch's deputy.[11] The *Reichsvertretung* was the first organization in the history of Germany that sought to represent the entire German-Jewish population.[12] Until 1939, it remained a voluntary organization that lacked official status; thus it typically operated outside the influence of the Nazi government. The leaders of the *Reichsvertretung* established a policy with a threefold purpose. First, it defended the

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[10] Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 35.

[11] Other members of the executive committee included Rudolf Callmann, Rabbi Jakob Hoffmann, Leopold Landenberger, Franz Meyer, Julius Seligsohn, and Heinrich Stahl. IBID, 263.

[12] A preceding organization founded in 1932 known as the *Reichsvertretung [or Arbeitsgemeinschaft] der Jüdischen Landesverbände* was also at first led by Leo Baeck. This organization, however, was only similar in name to the new *Reichsvertretung der Juden*; the foremost organization had attempted to forge closer cooperation among the regional state federations, but was unsuccessful and thus disolved. Avraham Barkai and Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Volume 4: Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945*. ed. Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 260.

emancipation rights of the Jews in Germany. In a proclamation of the *Reichsvertretung* on 28 September 1933, the German-Jewish leaders expressed their belief that the German Jews were an integral part of the German nation. Calling "for the understanding assistance by the authorities and for the respect of our non-Jewish co-citizens, whom we join in love and loyalty to Germany," the declaration responded to the boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933 and the subsequent laws that excluded Jews "from the practice of law and offices in federal government, state and community, and other public legal bodies . . . [and] all academic professions."[13] The *Reichsvertretung's* second objective was to provide social welfare services to the German-Jewish community; this included economic aid, welfare assistance (especially for the sick and the elderly), and educational and occupational training. The third goal of the *Reichsvertretung* was to promote the emigration of young Jews. As Dr. Hertzfeld noted:

> We considered it axiomatic that the young people want a future and have a right to one—and that they would not find it in Germany. According to our estimates, 6-10,000 Jewish youngsters completed their schooling every year; our first concern would therefore be to give them vocational training and then to enable them to emigrate.[14]

The goals of the *Reichsvertretung* were ambitious but necessary in order to preserve German-Jewish life. By taking on the role of president of the *Reichsvertretung*, Leo Baeck assumed a demanding responsibility; he also risked a great deal personally.

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[13] For the entire text of the "Proclamation of the (New) Reichsvertretung, September 1933," which contains the position and requests of the German-Jewish leadership to the Nazi state, see: Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 57-59.

[14] Ball-Kaduri, 165.

He became the leader of a minority people besieged by the overwhelming pressures and persecutions of a totalitarian state.

Baeck assumed many political responsibilities as the leader of the German Jews. Within the *Reichsvertretung*, he resolved disputes between conflicting factions: Zionist, non-Zionist, Liberal and Orthodox. He endeavored to act upon what he viewed to be the best interest of the German Jews. Outside of the internal debate of the *Reichsvertretung*, Baeck contended with the Gestapo in an effort to gain legal status for Jews and ease the emigration process. The *Reichsvertretung* sought to solve the problems Jews faced within the confines of legality. In the view of the Jewish leadership, it was best not to offer the Nazis an opportunity to accuse the Jews of lawlessness. Because the Gestapo continuously monitored the activities of the Jewish leadership, "Leo Baeck was very careful, always trying to gauge the reactions of the Germans," noted one member of the *Reichsvertretung*.[15] Still, however, Baeck constantly challenged the authority of the on-looking Gestapo. This courage in the face of totalitarian threat is reflected in the famous prayer that he composed for all Jewish communities in Germany to be read on the eve of Yom Kippur, 10 October 1935.

> At this hour the whole House of Israel stands before its God, the God of Justice and the God of Mercy . . . . We stand before our God and with the same courage with which we have acknowledged our sins, the sins of the individual and the sins of the community, shall we express our abhorrence of the lie directed against us, and the slander of our faith and its expressions: this slander is far below us . . . . We are filled with sorrow and pain. In silence we will give expression to all that which is in our hearts, in moments of silence before our God. This silent worship will be more emphatic than any words could be. [16]

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[15] Ibid, 170.
[16] For a complete text of the prayer, see: *Documents of the Holocaust*, 87-88.

The Nazis learned of the prayer and banned it. They sent a letter to all the rabbis in Germany informing them that the Gestapo would arrest anyone reading it in services. In an act of collective defiance on the part of the German rabbinate, many read the prayer regardless of the consequences. The only man who was arrested was Leo Baeck.[17]

In addition to his official duties as the president of the *Reichsvertretung*, Baeck worked to persuade German Jews to emigrate. He helped German-Jewish youth, and the aspiring students of the *Hochschule*, with particular interest. In the summer of 1939, Leo Baeck, along with Otto Hirsch, brought a transport of Jewish children to England. They could have remained, yet both insisted on returning to Germany despite the rising danger. Baeck believed that the emigration of German-Jewish youth trumped the need of the general German-Jewish population. "My policy was to send the young to other countries and for the old to [represent and protect the Jews]," he noted years later.[18] And he elaborated, "both for ourselves and for all the other Jews we are responsible, but [the] youth is our hope, . . . the younger ones . . . will now bear the torch."[19]

Emigration, however, was curtailed by the number of countries willing to accept German Jews as immigrants. Baeck recalled that "our success in promoting emigration of children was limited by restrictive immigration laws in most countries. England, which forbade sending groups of children to Palestine, was herself far more generous than any other country and allowed transport after transport to come to her own shores."[20]

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[17] Leo Baeck was released after twenty-four hours of imprisonment due to pressure from abroad. The Gestapo soon also arrested Otto Hirsch, who was released after eight days of imprisonment. Baker, 206-208.
[18] "Tasks & Possibilities," *Time Magazine* (1 June 1953).
[19] This quotation was found in an excerpt of Leo Baeck's writing from 1953. The contents of this excerpt appear in a letter from Rabbi Nathan M. Landman to Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, 6 November 1971. In the American Jewish Archives, SC-638.
[20] Eric H. Boehm, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 286.

American immigration policy, on the other hand, made it extremely difficult for Jews in Germany and throughout Europe to obtain visas to the United States. Influenced by native antisemitism and a fear that newcomers would not be able to find employment because of the Great Depression, the American government barricaded its once welcoming "golden door." Despite its stringent immigration policy, President Roosevelt organized an international effort to solve Europe's refugee problem. The Evian Conference, in which delegates from thirty-two nations debated the refugee problem, was held from 6 July to 14 July 1938. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, no country was willing to open up its doors to the Jews. Although there is no concrete evidence that indicates Roosevelt's motivations for the conference, scholars tend to believe that the Evian conference was designed to protect America's image, not to help Jewish and political refugees in Europe.[21] In response to the failure of the international community to help the German Jews, Leo Baeck declared, "*Nichts ist so schlimm wie das Schweigen* (Nothing is so terrible as silence)." "Without that cowardice, all that happened and followed after would not have happened," he later noted.[22]

Recognizing the indifference of the international community to the plight of the Jews, the Nazi state launched the November Pogrom only a few months after the Evian conference. If there had been any bit of optimism about the security of Jews in Germany until that point, it was shattered by the state-sponsored, centrally organized pogrom against Jewish property on 9 November and the subsequent state-sponsored centrally

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[21] Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W Norton, 2002), 124-125; David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (New York: Pantheon Books: 1985), 44

[22] Leo Baeck, "A reprint of remarks he had made in 1953" Leo Baeck Institute Archives, AR 4151, Folder D.

organized action against the people on 10 November.[23] Years later, Leo Baeck recalled the event:

> How often have the scenes of that night returned to us, whether we wished it or not, that night, fifteen years ago, when the great blasphemy took place — the destruction of the synagogues. Once again we seemed to hear, even though we stopped up our ears, the voices of those who shouted to us: "The synagogues are burning!" What is it that was then destroyed? Not only were the synagogues demolished, but with them there collapsed the pillars and supports of a human bond in which we had trusted. One thing, we thought, would still bind us all together: a reverence for that place to which men come in order that they may be made one with the Eternal, raised above the narrowness and hardship of their everyday life, where the invisible is made known to them and the infinite silence embraces them. . . . Many can remember how they stood in the street that night. A fearful, oppressive silence lay over the town. But then the silence began to speak and when this happens, its language is powerful and overwhelming.[24]

The November Pogrom marked "a violent end . . . to a culture of great Jewish significance."[25] It also brought an abrupt end to the independent and voluntary nature of the *Reichsvertretung*. On 10 November 1938, the Nazis closed down all of the offices of Jewish organizations and arrested most of the leading Jewish officials; Baeck was placed under house arrest. After a few days, the Nazis ordered him to restart the activities of the *Reichsvertretung* in order to accelerate emigration.[26] This reactivation, however, was at the Gestapo's order, and thus the previous voluntary nature of the German-Jewish leadership had transformed into the Gestapo's command. Just as the nature of the *Reichsvertretung* was transformed, so too was the nature of Baeck's leadership. The German Jews had chosen him to lead the community as the head of the *Reichsvertretung*, and now his role had transformed into the leader of the Jewish people who was to carry out the command of the Nazis. Still, he never ceased to hold the respect and admiration of his people throughout the

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[23] Dwork and Van Pelt, 101.
[24] This particular excerpt written in 1953, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the anti-Jewish excesses of the 9th November 1938. Leo Baeck, "Excerpts from Baeck's Writings" *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* II (1957), 36-37.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Barkai and Mendes-Flohr, 346.

war. He remained a symbol of German Jewry.

THE *REICHSVEREINIGUNG*

The Nazis officially transformed the name and role of the *Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland* to the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* on 4 July 1939. The *Reichsvertretung* had been established by the free decision of the German Jews and a democratic Jewish council had decided its policy. Although the structure and leadership of the *Reichsvereinigung* remained the same, control of its policy and functions shifted to the Nazi state. The Nazis did not create the *Reichsvereinigung*; rather they hijacked the *Reichsvertretung* in order to manipulate its functions for the interest of the regime. Membership was now mandatory and all other Jewish voluntary organizations were dissolved by Nazi decree. The Security Police ordered that the *Reichsvertretung* must "form a so-called National Association of Jews [*Reichsvereinigung*]. At the same time, it must take steps to assure that all existing Jewish organizations disappear. Their entire facilities are to be placed at the disposal of the *Reichsvereinigung*."[27] The *Reichsvereinigung* no longer represented a voluntary democratic coalition of Jewish *Gemeinden* and independent organizations; rather it was an amalgamate of those whom the 1935 Nuremburg Laws deemed Jewish. Leo Baeck remained the leader of the German Jews as the head of the *Reichsvereinigung*, and his authority extended to every German Jew. He was, however, running an organization with an expanded agenda that served the interest of the Gestapo.

The *Reichsvereinigung* faced even greater challenges than the *Reichsvertretung*. It took on many of the tasks that had previously been carried out by the local Gemeinden, and

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[27] Wolf Gruner, "Poverty and Persecution: The Reichsvereinigung, the Jewish Population, and Anti-Jewish Policy in the State, 1939-1945," *Yad Vashem Studies* XXVII (1997); cf. "Chef der Sipo und des SD (Müller)-Runderlass," 5 February 1939, Yad Vashem Archives, 051/0S0BI, no. 8 (500-2-87), fols. 1-2.

it assumed the responsibility for every Jew in Germany, not just those who were voluntary members of the Jewish community. The initial priorities of the *Reichsvereinigung* focused on maintaining social welfare for the Jews in Germany and helping them emigrate. By 1939, those Jews who remained were poverty-stricken. Welfare had been provided by the state, but was increasingly limited by anti-Jewish policy. The formal establishment of the *Reichsvereinigung* in July 1939 accelerated the shift of welfare burdens from the Nazi state to the Jewish organization.[28] Along with the reallocation of responsibility, the *Reichsvereinigung* secured a significant increase in its budget.[29] This new revenue enabled the *Reichsvereinigung* to provide welfare for the increasingly poor Jewish population.[30] A successful welfare program was not, however, a cure for the situation of German Jews, it was merely a band-aid on a terminal wound. Emigration seemed to be the most effective treatment for Nazi oppression. From November 1938 to the start of the World War II in September 1939, roughly 78,000 Jews emigrated from Germany. Another 42,000 left between September 1939 and the fall of 1941, when the Nazis prohibited further emigration.[31]

When the Nazis initiated the "Final Solution" in the fall of 1941, they abandoned their policy of forced emigration and instigated the deportation and annihilation of German Jewry (See Chapter 2). The *Reichsvereinigung* became the regime's tool to facilitate this process. Before the onslaught of the deportations in the autumn of 1941, the functions of the *Reichsvereinigung*— from emigration to social welfare—were in the common interest of the Nazis and the Jews. The order to participate in the deportation process, however, posed an utterly new situation for the *Reichsvereinigung* that was not at that time completely

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[28] Gruner, 13.
[29] The increase in budget came from a number of sources. Once established, the Reichsvereinigung was authorized to collect dues from its compulsory membership. The organization was further funded by an increase in support of Jewish organizations abroad. Further, from the spring of 1939 on, income from the newly introduced "emigration tax" levied on every Jewish emigrant was also allocated to the Reichsvereinigung. Gruner, 14.
[30] Barakai and Mendes-Flohr, 349
[31] Marion Kaplan, Between Dignity and Despair : Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132; Barakai and Mendes Florhr, 329-334.

understood.

Leo Baeck and Moritz Henschel (1879-1947) were the only members of the Reichsvereinigung executive board to survive the war. In the nine years that Leo Baeck lived after his release from Theresienstadt, Baeck kept silent about this era. Henschel wrote briefly about the Reichsvereinigung, but not in any detail. Thus, no comprehensive account of the activities of the *Reichsvereinigung* has been written by any of its members.[32] Many who knew Baeck have speculated that his involvement with *Reichsvereinigung* activities troubled him deeply. "I believe it probable that Dr. Baeck, more and more, suffered because the *Reichsvereinigung* was so deeply involved in the world of the deportation preparations," said Jacob Jacobson, a close friend of Baeck and associate of the Reichsvereinigung. Another colleague noted, "Dr. Baeck was responsible for actions which oppressed him internally, but which however, he had to allow to be pushed through by his chief executive [Paul Eppstein]."[33] It is unclear what Baeck's specific role was in the deportation process, but Baeck's political status in the Reichsvereinigung had deteriorated with Eppstein's ascension to power. Herbert Strauss, a student of Leo Baeck at the *Hochschule* observed that Baeck's "power had been diminished with Eppstein's rise within the operational hierarchy of the *Reichsvertretung* (*sic*!) and he never had control over the quite independent *Gemeinde* administration."[34] Jacobson similarly saw that "the *Reichsvereinigung* was or became more and more Dr.

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[32] For an explanation of Baeck's suppression of his experiences, see: Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri, "Leo Baeck and Contemporary History: A Riddle in Leo Baeck's Life" 6 *Yad Vashem Studies* (1967), 121-129; see also: Ernst Simon, "Comments on the Article on the late Rabbi Baeck" *Yad Vashem Studies* VI (1967), 131-134.

[33] Baker, 272.

[34] Herbert A. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm: Growing up Jewish in Germany 1918-1943* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 127.

Eppstein."[35] The shift in Baeck's status appears to reflect a voluntary avoidance of business that had become an emotional burden for him. As the leader and symbol of the German-Jewish people, Leo Baeck watched all of his efforts to help and maintain Jewish life in Germany disappear along with his community.

When more than 800 staff members of the German-Jewish community were deported as part of operation *Gemeinde-Aktion* in October 1942, it became clear to the rest of the *Reichsvereinigung* that they too would be deported eventually. Leo Baeck had had many chances to emigrate and escape but, as the symbolic, spiritual, and authoritative leader of his community, he refused to abandon those who were left in Germany. In the wake of the November Pogrom and again in 1940, Baeck reiterated: "As long as there is a single, humble Jew left alive in Germany, my place is here with him."[36] On 6 January 1943, the Gestapo arrived at Leo Baeck's apartment in Berlin with orders to deport him to Theresienstadt; Baeck no longer had a choice in the matter.[37] He was put on a train destined for Theresienstadt the next day. Hildegard Henschel, the wife of Moritz Henschel remembered the significance of his deportation.

> When on January 26-27 [*sic*!], 1943, the three popular functionaries of the Jewish community, Dr. Paul Eppstein, Dr. Leo Baeck and Mr. Phillip Kuzover . . . were all deported to Theresienstadt, the faith in the continuation of any kind of Jewish activity or Jewish institutions, was shattered for ever [*sic*!].[38]

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[35] Jacobson, Leo Baeck Institute Archives, ME 329. Translated by Marianne Salinger.
[36] "Tasks & Possibilities."
[37] For a detailed account of his deportation, see: Boehm 290-291.
[38] Quoted in: K.J. Ball-Kaduri, "Berlin is "Purged" of Jews" *Yad Vashem Studies* V (1963), 271; the date of the deportation was actually January 27-28.

THERESIENSTADT

Theresienstadt was originally built by Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II in 1789 as a military fortress to protect the road leading from Dresden through Lovosice to Prague, as well as the major river route — the Label. [39] Theresienstadt was never needed as a military fortress, however. The Nazis put its fortifications to different use during their "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Question." They used Theresienstadt as a model ghetto to display to the Red Cross and other members of the international world community. And they used it as a transit camp to imprison "privileged" Jews between 1941 and 1945, until their eventual deportation to death camps such as Auschwitz. Five categories of German Jews were eligible for the of deportation to Theresienstadt: those over sixty-five and their spouses; invalids from the First World War and recipients of significant German medals in that war; Jewish partners in mixed marriages; Jews of mixed religious parentage; and high officials of the *Reichsvereinigung*.[40] Rabbi Leo Baeck, sixty-nine years of age at the time of his deportation on 27 January 1943, a veteran of the First World War who had received the Iron Cross First Class, and the head of the *Reichsvereinigung*, was well qualified for the privileged status of being sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

That same day, a protocol arrived in Theresienstadt from Berlin. "By order of the SS General Eichmann, SS Major Moehse announces: Senior Jewish Officials from Berlin, Vienna and Prague will arrive in Theresienstadt tomorrow. . . . For the present Theresienstadt will be run by a board of three: Dr. Eppstein, Dr. Loewenherz and

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[39] Vojtech Blodig, *Terezin in the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" 1941-1945* (Helena Osvaldova: Nakladateslstvi Oswald, 2003), 11

[40] Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1978), 283.

Edelstein. Dr. Eppstein will be the head of this board."[41] Eichmann later recalled that Baeck was one of the Jewish officials recognized as a prominent figure, but it remains a mystery as to why exactly Eppstein was appointed to become the Elder of the Jews at Theresienstadt and not Baeck, who was not to receive any preferential treatment nor a position in the Council of Elders. It seems even stranger that when asked about that protocol, Eichmann responded: "Loewenherz, I still remember his name, but I have forgotten the names of the others, except for Rabbi Baeck."[42] In other words, Eichmann had recalled the name Leo Baeck (who was not even mentioned in the order) and not Eppstein, whom Eichmann's deputy had appointed Elder of the Jews. Although no documentation has yet been discovered to clarify the matter, it seems likely that Baeck may have refused to participate in another Jewish administrative body that was under Nazi control. His position as the head of the *Reichsvereinigung* had caused him a great deal of distress; he headed a community in which he had little power to relieve the agony of his people. Still, although he did not hold any political position in the camp's Jewish administration, he remained the symbolic leader of German Jewry during his imprisonment. He never ceased to be a rabbi, a teacher, and an inspiration to *all* the Jews of Theresienstadt. H.G. Adler, a close friend of Baeck, and later a historian of the camp, described how the prisoners of Theresienstadt viewed him:

> Rabbi Leo Baeck . . . was universally respected among all prisoners and regarded with ever higher esteem for his readiness to help. He never withdrew from the camp, but it did not seem to exist near him; none of its filth could touch him. Peace emanated from him . . . . he always held himself ready for new tasks;

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[41] Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt* (London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD, 1953), 42.
[42] "The Trial of Adolph Eichmann" Session No. 82 (29 June 1961) <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/people/e/eichmann.adolf/transcripts/ftp.py?people/e/eichmann.adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-082-01>

> tenaciously, bravely, he never refused them . . . . Incorruptible, he saw weakness and corruption in his surroundings. He exerted his influence against them, particularly through the purity of his own example . . . . He was a shining beacon in the salt tear ocean of despair.[43]

The reverence for Leo Baeck transcended the German-Jewish community at Theresienstadt. Gonda Redlich, a Czech Jew, for example, wrote in his diary, "He truly seems to be a special, moral personality, a man of exceptional depth."[44] Heinrich Liebrecht, a Catholic who was imprisoned at Theresienstadt noted: "His prominence grew naturally out of his character . . . . Dr. Baeck was . . . farsighted . . . and a link between those of different religions and ideas."[45] "Everybody who gets to know him, either in a private capacity or through his duties, loves him," a Dutch Jew recalled years later, "I myself think that one of the few good things in Theresienstadt was that I got to know him."[46] The same qualities that enabled Baeck to unite the different factions in the *Reichsvertretung*, earned him the respect of Jews of all stripes in Theresienstadt.

At the start of his incarceration, Leo Baeck was assigned to cart a garbage wagon. After turning seventy on 23 May 1943, however, he was relieved of this and assumed the duties of a rabbi. Baeck took on the responsibility of caring for the sick, visiting the elderly, and for maintaining Jewish education in Theresienstadt. Against camp regulations, he secretly instructed children in Jewish studies; he taught them the Hebrew alphabet and told them stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs, and of the prophets.[47] In his second year of imprisonment, Baeck joined many other scholars in delivering lectures

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[43] H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945; das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr J.C.B.), 249-250; translated by: Friedlander, 45-46.
[44] Saul S. Friedman, ed. *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 121.
[45] Boehm, 230.
[46] Baker, 315.
[47] Joshua Loth Liebman, "A Living Saint: Rabbi Baeck" *The Atlantic Monthly* (June, 1948), 42.

to the adult population of the camp. He later recalled:

> There were great scholars there from all the countries of Europe. They joined in giving lectures on many subjects—literature, history, economics, mathematics, philosophy, law, and astronomy. We gradually expanded these into an extensive scheduled lecture program, and ended up with a veritable small university . . . . The SS tolerated the surreptitious lectures but they had an ironclad rule against the education of children.[48]

Baeck choose a role in which he could lead and care for his people more effectively by being their rabbi than by participating in a *Reichsvereinigung*-like Jewish council. Choosing to abstain from a political position, Baeck kept his distance from Paul Eppstein—the Elder of the Jews— and his successor, Benjamin Murmelstein.[49] It was only in December 1944, when the Council of Elders was utterly depleted, that Baeck was obliged to become a member.[50]

Both the Germans and the Theresienstadt inmates understood Baeck's importance as a German-Jewish leader and as a man of great international repute. The Germans recognized Baeck's former status as head of the *Reichsvereinigung* and conferred upon him the status of a "prominent," a label for those whom they considered to have a special value.[51] Unlike the majority of the Theresienstadt population, who lived in crowded quarters with bunks stacked up to three tiers, Baeck was given a two-room apartment.

The Council of Elders made Baeck an honorary member without any official

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[48] Boehm, 291.
[49] According to Jacob Jacobson, Baeck opposed the leadership of Eppstein because he abused his position of power to seduce women. Despite the fact that Baeck headed Murmelstein's advisory committee (the Council of Elders), they had little contact with each other. After the war, however, Baeck sent Murmelstein a letter thanking him for his service as the Elder of the Jews. Jacob Jacobson "*Bruchstuecke 1939-1945;*" Adler, 249.
[50] Baker, 313.
[51] Ibid, 287.

duties. The Council of Elders was headed by a Chief Elder, also known as the Elder of the Jews, who had deputies and used the Council as an advisory group. Different members of the Council were in charge of specific offices of the Ghetto administration including the economic department, food distribution and production, housing, and health.[52]

Leo Baeck's honorary membership in the Council of Elders should not be interpreted as an official role in the Jewish administration. Some historians have made this error. Max Mannheimer, for example, noted that "the most prominent member of [the Council of Elders] was Dr Leo Baeck, the venerated Rabbi from Berlin, a personality of almost prophetic stature."[53] Here, Leo Baeck's "prophetic stature" is confused with prominence in the Council of Elders, of which he was not even an official member until the last days of the camp's existence. Ruth Linn, a more contemporary historian, similarly described Baeck as "a central member of the ghetto's Jewish Council."[54] She further asserted incorrectly that Baeck was "involved against his will, with constructing lists of deportees from Theresienstadt since 1941" (Baeck did not arrive until 1943).[55]

Baeck's symbolic status has caused many to assume erroneously that he held some sort of official authority at the time of the deportations. He did not. Nor was he involved with the selection of deportees from Theresienstadt. That task fell upon the Transport Committee, a body composed of representatives from the Council of Elders

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[52] For detailed breakup and analysis of these departments, see: Sarah Kavanaugh, *The Jewish Leadership of the Theresienstadt Ghetto: Culture, Identity and Politics,* Unpublished Dissertation (University of South Hampton, 2003).
[53] Max E. Mannheimer, "Theresienstadt and From Theresienstadt to Auschwitz," *Jewish Survivors Reports: Documents of Nazi Guilt* (Jewish Central Information Office, 1945), 3.
[54] Ruth Linn, *Escaping Auschwitz: A Culture of Forgetting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 16.
[55] Ibid, 131.

and the Department Heads. Baeck had no official responsibility in either.[56] It wasn't until December 1944 that Baeck became an official member of the Council, at which point transports no longer departed from Theresienstadt. Perhaps the most accurate description of Baeck's main function in the camp comes from Jacob Jacobson, who claimed to be the closest contact to both Baeck and Eppstein from their days in Berlin through their times in Theresienstadt.

> Dr. Baeck, although he was an honorable member of the Council of Elders, played no decisive role in the effective leadership of the ghetto, but he seemed at that time, and still today, as the good conscience of the camp; as the personification of the good spirit of a religiously oriented Judaism. When on the Sabbath in festive garments and in straight posture he strode through the camp to the synagogue in the Magdeburger barracks, one had the feeling that it was a holiday. . . . His caring was for the young and the old, the neglected and the handicapped, but externally the most remarkable effect came from his lectures.[57]

Between his arrival at Theresienstadt in January 1943 until December 1944, Leo Baeck did not hold any position in which he was involved with or had significant influence over the decisions of the Jewish self-administration. This point is critically important. He was a leader of the Jewish community in Theresienstadt, but only in the symbolic and spiritual sense. He was "the super rabbi," as one of the inmates called him, but he was not in any way a leader of an administrative body as he had been when he was the head of both the *Reichsvertretung* and the *Reichsvereinigung*.[58]

In the fall of 1944, the Nazis began to deport Jews from Theresienstadt on a

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[56] Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstad* (London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD, 1953), 24.
[57] Jacob Jacobson "*Bruchstuecke 1939-1945*" Leo Baeck Institute Archives, ME 329. Translated by Marianne Salinger.
[58] Golly Dowinsky, interview by Rivie Zeiler and Margaret Agne, *Fortunoff Video Archive*, MS 1322, 23 October 1992.

massive scale. On 27 September 1944, before the trains began to roll, there were 29,530 inmates in Theresienstadt; by 29 October 1944, the day after the last transport, only 11,076 remained.[59] The Nazis prepared for the liquidation, murdering Paul Eppstein, the Elder of the Jews, and replacing him with Benjamin Murmelstein, a Viennese rabbi. Their intention was to eliminate those who had information about the transports and to annihilate all able-bodied men who could potentially fuel an uprising.[60] Council of Elders members who were not deported, were stripped of their positions.[61] The last transport to leave from Theresienstadt to the east departed on 28 October 1944. Shortly after, the Nazis appointed a new Council of Elders consisting of 13 elderly men, including Leo Baeck, on 13 December 1944. The core of this Jewish council comprised one representative of each of the five main nationalities in the ghetto; Baeck represented the German Jews. In addition to taking on the position of the head of the welfare department, Baeck was also named the nominal president of this council. [62] According to Adler, Baeck brought a new morality to the Theresienstadt leadership; it was a welcome change from a corrupt, to an honorable Council of Elders.[63] Although Baeck had always been a symbolic leader and representative of German Jewry in Theresienstadt, it was not until he was officially appointed to the Council of Elders that he was able to have a decisive role in the Jewish self-administration. And at this point, the Council of Elders' main function

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[59] Lederer, 158.
[60] If Leo Baeck had an official status in the Council of Elders at this time, it is likely that he would have been deported to Auschwitz with the other members of the Council of Elders. It is possible that another incident inadvertently protected Baeck. Shortly after he arrived in Theresienstadt, another German rabbi, whose name was spelled Beck, died of natural causes. The report was sent to Gestapo headquarters in Berlin that the famous Leo Baeck had passed away. The Gestapo thus did not make an attempt to deport him along with the other prominent Jews, because they believed that he was dead. Liebman, 41.
[61] The first transports to leave Theresienstadt during the autumn deportations was a transport of 5000 able bodied men out of a total male population of 11,804. Lederer, 148; 16 prominent ghetto men who had important positions in the Jewish self-administration were also deported. Adler, 254.
[62]Kavanaugh, 131
[63] Adler, 254.

was to provide social welfare services to the inmates.

The International Red Cross announced on 22 April 1945 that they would take charge of the ghetto and protect the prisoners until it was liberated.[64] Although the Russians did not arrive until 8 May 1945, the structure and organization of the ghetto disintegrated. Benjamin Murmelstein resigned as Elder of the Jews on 5 May 1945, and a small council headed by Baeck was established in order to help repatriate the prisoners. At this point, however, the inmates of Theresienstadt faced a new threat—a typhus epidemic. As Baeck recalled, "we were in two prisons in reality; one made by the Germans and one because of the typhus."[65] When the Russians liberated the camp, they quickly established a quarantine to control the spread of the disease. Toward the end of May, at the same time that Baeck was helping to control the epidemic, Patrick Dolan arrived in Theresienstadt in order to bring the rabbi to England. Yet just as Baeck had refused to leave behind the Jews left in Germany, he now refused to abandon the sick people for whom he felt responsible. "No, not now," he told Patrick Dolan, "I am responsible for the many unfortunate persons at Theresienstadt."[66] Baeck did not leave the camp until 29 June 1945, at which point the epidemic had been contained.

Leo Baeck did not play a decisive role in the Jewish administration of the ghetto until its last days. Yet he never ceased to be a symbol to and a leader of the Jews imprisoned in Theresienstadt. In Berlin, he had been a leader of the German Jews; in Theresienstadt, he became a spiritual leader and symbol, leader to thousands of Jews from all parts of Nazi-occupied Europe.

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[64] Theresienstadt, Daily Order No. 68. Lederer, 189.
[65] Baker, 5.
[66] Boehm, 298.

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WHAT THEY KNEW

> During my lifetime I have often made prophecies, and people have laughed at me, more often than not. In my struggle for power the Jews always laughed louder when I prophesied that, one day, I should be the leader of the German state, that I should be in full control of the nation, and that then, among other things, I should find the solution to the Jewish problem. Today I am going to make another prophecy: if international-finance Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed once more in plunging nations into another world war, the consequence will not be the Bolsheviazation of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation [*Vernichtung*] of the Jewish race in Europe.[1]
>
> --Adolph Hitler, 30 January 1939

When Hitler delivered this speech from the Reichstag on 30 January 1939—the sixth anniversary of his rise to power—neither German Jews nor the rest of the world paid much attention to his clearly expressed threat to annihilate European Jewry. Exactly two years later, Hitler reiterated his speech almost verbatim. And again on 7 September 1941, about a month before the deportations of German Jews began, a special publication of the propaganda department of the National Socialist party, the *Wochensprüche* (Weekly Words of Wisdom), circulated a copy of the speech on a massive scale.[2] German Jews were not oblivious to the words of Hitler, but they understood them within the context of the traditional persecution of Jews. Although the Nazis had harassed the Jews more relentlessly and harshly than any other political regime since the beginning of the Enlightenment, there is a large gap between oppression and Hitler's threat of total annihilation. German Jews believed that like other tyrants, the Nazis would pass. As the Jewish tradition of the Passover Haggadah has timelessly related, "It is not only one group that has risen up against us to destroy us; rather, in every generation, they rise

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[1] Lawrence D. Stokes, "The German People and the Destruction of European Jews" *Central European History* VI (June 1973), 180; Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 410; cf. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 1 February 1939; *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 31 January 1939.

[2] Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 68.

against us to annihilate us. But the Holy One blessed be He saves us from their hand!" The calculated genocidal intent may have been present in Hitler's declaration, yet the Jews could not at that time recognize the possibility of its manifestation.

Not even Hitler himself understood in 1939 that the answer to the Jewish question would be total annihilation. At that point, he and the other Nazi leaders viewed other options to be more viable. The Final Solution, the Nazi genocidal policy, emerged out of a series of non-genocidal "solutions" to the "Jewish Problem." The Nazis' first solution was to endorse a vigorous policy of forced emigration. After the Germans conquered Poland, they turned to the idea of forced ghettoization of Jews in a sector of Poland. And after France capitulated to Germany in June 1940, a plan to relocate Jews to the French occupied colony of Madagascar became the Nazis' primary solution to the "Jewish Problem." Although through 1940, Nazi leaders had already made many allusions to the destruction of European Jews, and had already killed approximately 100,000 Jews through violence, disease, and starvation, the actual implementation of a genocidal practice did not start until June 1941.[3] Along with the commencement of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, "Operation Barbarossa" on 22 June 1941, the systematic murder Jews in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe began to be carried out. Under the directives of Heinrich Himmler—who planned to use the murder of Jews as a vehicle to prove himself to Hitler—the division of the SS known as the *Einsatzgruppen* followed the advancing German army and began the initial murder of Jews in the east. When Operation Barbarossa was planned, the Germans had expected to conquer the Soviet Union in two months; they soon found this expectation to be a mistake of overzealous ambition. The Germans were running weeks behind schedule, and they knew that if they

[3] Hilberg, 1321.

did not defeat the Red Army quickly, then they would find themselves in a two-front war. Frustrated with their lack of success, the Wehrmacht (the German army), the Order Police, and the Security Police began to join the *Einsatzgruppen* in fighting the war against the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy. The mass murder of Jews was moving toward a general policy.

In the summer of 1941, the Germans had engaged in genocidal practice, yet the "Final Solution" to the Jewish Question was not clear; there was no official policy. By October 1941, the idea and conception of the Final Solution had taken its form, but still a plan for how to carry it out did not yet exist. Over the next few months, the Germans came to organize how, when, where, at what rate, and with what exceptions the task for murdering European Jews was to be accomplished.[4] After formulating a concrete policy, the Germans drastically accelerated the process of genocide in the year of 1942. While they had murdered roughly 1,100,000 Jews in Europe throughout 1941, they killed approximately 2,600,000 Jews in 1942.[5]

If Hitler broadcast his idea about annihilating European Jewry, the regime did not publicize their actual genocidal policy and actions to world. Rather, they used many tactics to hide their actions and to persuade the public that the Jews were simply being relocated to the east. The Nazis masked the meaning of "deportation" with euphemisms such as "evacuation to work in the east," "resettlement," or "departing."[6] The perpetration of the genocide, moreover, took place outside of the borders of the Reich in an effort to conceal the process of annihilation of the Jews from the German public.

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[4] Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 373.
[5] Hilberg, 1321.
[6] Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 184.

From the start of the Final Solution until Germany's defeat in 1945, the Germans and their allies murdered between five and six million Jews in Europe. This chapter will explore what the German-Jewish public knew and understood about the transports from Germany and the massacres in the east. Furthermore, it will discuss what the inmates of Theresienstadt knew and understood about the transports.

GERMAN JEWS: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

The totalitarian nature of the Nazi regime enabled it to control and suppress information about mass-killings in the east and to protect its genocidal policy. Still, this "wall of silence" could not effectively protect the transmission of information about the massacres in the east.[7] A great deal of information spread to the German public—both Jewish and non-Jewish—through various sources. Information, however, does not correlate directly with knowledge. Although the German public received information about the atrocities in the east, they were typically unable to understand and internalize what they heard. German Jews in, particular, had trouble believing that their own state had enacted a policy to murder them.

Jewish and non-Jewish Germans did not generally receive information to the same extent. Jews in Germany had unequal access to information compared to non-Jews because they were segregated. Jews were not allowed to own radios and had no relatives in the military or official government positions. Still, Jews clandestinely received information through many of the same networks as non-Jews.

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[7] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 17.

News about mass-killings in the east reached the German public in a number of ways. The most common was through soldiers who witnessed the atrocities. The *Einsatzgruppen* units that facilitated the massacres were sworn to secrecy about their crimes, yet they worked in close cooperation with the Wehrmacht. A large number of soldiers on the eastern front in this way witnessed the massacres; many had even taken pictures of the killings.[8] Many civilians—journalists, railway workers, technicians and others—also witnessed the massacres; most of them were not bound by oath. When the soldiers and civilians on the eastern front returned home on leave or because the job that took them there was done, they brought the first news of the situation in the east.

While reports about the shootings of Jews in the east were fairly common, information about the annihilation centers in the east—Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz—was less available. Because the secret of these death factories was fairly well guarded, evidence suggests that the German public knew less about them than of massacres. Like the *Einsatzgruppen*, the SS who worked in these camps were sworn to secrecy under threat of severe penalties if they were to leak information. Although many workers at the death camps who were not SS—railway and telephone workers—were not under oath, their knowledge was most probably limited to the fact that Jews were being killed; they were less apt to comprehend the scale and systematic nature of the killings.[9]

Rumors about Auschwitz and other death camps nonetheless reached the German public. Quite a few survivors have claimed to have heard bits of information about these

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[8] The photographing of the massacres tended to be a common practice until Heydrich ordered in November 1941 the prohibition of photography other than by authorized photographers. These photographs were deemed top secret. Laqueur, 20.

[9] Stokes, 184

camps. Victor Klemperer, for example, had heard that Auschwitz was deadly, but did not have any detailed information. "In the last few days I heard Auschwitz (or something like it), near Königshütte in Upper Silesia, mentioned as the most dreadful concentration camp. Work in a mine, death within a few days," he wrote in his diary on 16 March 1942.[10] Helmut Grunewald claimed years later that before he was deported to Auschwitz in March 1943, he had heard by December 1942 that "people were being murdered in Auschwitz and in Poland . . . . And it was also already known that Auschwitz was very clearly an extermination camp."[11] On the other hand, Armin Hertz, a Jew from Berlin, recalled that he had no idea. "We had never heard of Auschwitz. We didn't know that a place like Auschwitz existed."[12]

Scholars have tended to disagree as to the extent to which information about the annihilation camps was known among Jews and non-Jews in Germany. Historian Lawrence Stokes has noted, "It may be doubted . . . whether even rumors of Auschwitz as a Jewish extermination center had circulated widely throughout Germany."[13] At the same time, Eric Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband have contended that by the end of 1942, news about Auschwitz "had spread far and wide among the Jewish population both inside and outside of Germany."[14]

Most scholars agree, however, that information about Auschwitz or mass murder in the east was often too difficult for the Germans, particularly Jews, to believe. Survivors have often testified that despite having heard some information about

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[10] Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the NaziYears, 1942-1945* (New York: Random House, 1999), 28-29.
[11] Eric A Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, *What We Knew: Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005), 97-98.
[12] Ibid, 31.
[13] Stokes, 185.
[14] Eric A Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband, 308-321.

massacres of Jews, they could not believe what they heard. Ernst Levin noted, "It was filtering out that transports were leaving for the east from the ghettos. It was known at that time that these transports went directly to Treblinka or Auschwitz . . . . But people didn't want to talk about it . . . . Many of them still considered themselves German. They didn't believe it primarily because they didn't want to believe it."[15] Likewise, Inge Deutschkron recalled that she had heard about gassings and executions by listening clandestinely to the BBC in November 1942; yet she and her mother refused to believe the "literally unbelievable."[16] Information was not knowledge. Most Jews lacked the detailed information and the mindset to believe the horrors. People tend to believe what they want to be true, and not what they fear.

DEPORTATIONS FROM GERMANY

The Nazis first began to deport German Jews from Germany in February and March of 1940; more than 12,000 Jews from Stettin and Schneidemühl were deported to the environs of Lublin Cracow, Radom, and Warsaw.[17] In October of the same year, Jews from Alsace-Lorraine, Baden, the Palatinate, and Saarland were also "resettled;" they were deported to unoccupied France where the Vichy government incarcerated them into the Gurs concentration camp.[18] In response to this series of deportations, the leaders of

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[15] Johnson and Reuband, 73.
[16] Kaplan, 195.
[17] Some 18,000 Jews with Polish citizenship were deported on 28 October 1938 from Germany. Avraham Barkai and Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times: Volume 4: Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945*. ed. Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 438; [17] Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 63.
[18] After much debate about what to do with the German Jews the Germans had deported to France (25 October 1940), they were sent Gurs, in the Pyrenees. Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy*

the *Reichsvereinigung* declared a general day of fasting and mourning. Although it is clear that the leaders of the *Reichsvereinigung* and the German-Jewish community in general were grieved by the deportation of their coreligionists, they did not yet equate "resettlement" with certain death. The Final Solution had not yet unfolded and there was no reason to believe that the Nazis would murder those whom they had deported from Germany. Thus, those German Jews whom the Nazis had deported did not expect their death, and at that time, their assumption was correct.

The first large-scale transports from Germany began around the time when the Nazis' genocidal policy was solidified. The Gestapo summoned the heads of the German-Jewish community on 1 October 1941, the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur, to inform them that all Jews in Germany were to be "resettled" to the east.[19] This was the beginning of the final expulsion and murder of the remaining Jews in Germany. The large-scale deportations began with the "evacuation" of German Jews to the Lodz ghetto on 16 October 1941. At this time, hardly any German Jews had heard stories about atrocities in the east. Willy Cohn was one such rare case. He wrote in his diary in the summer of 1941, "gruesome, barley conceivable [news] that 12,000 Jews had been shot in Lemberg."[20] Yet like most Jews who heard news about the east, Willy Cohn was unable to internalize the "barely conceivable" information. He regarded what he heard as rumor. Few if any Jews in Germany had ascertained knowledge about the situation for Jews in the east in October 1941.

France and the Jews (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 11; Of those German Jews who were deported to Gurs, fifteen hundred died before the camp was liberated in September 1944 and an additional two thousand had been murdered at Auschwitz after being deported in the summer of 1942. Barkai and Paul Mendes-Flohr, 363.

[19] Barkai and Flohr, 360.

[20] Quoted in: Kaplan, 194.

During the "resettlement" operations in Berlin, the mood was sad, but not grim; German Jews did not at first believe they were to be taken to their deaths. One German-Jewish official reported the conditions of the first transport leaving from the Levetzowstrasse Synagogue, one of the transport depots in Berlin: "the condition of the deportees was surprisingly calm. Naturally one did not know where the transports went, what it truly was."[21] When more information later arrived about the conditions for Jews in the east, the attitude of the German-Jewish deportees changed.

The Nazis sent the German Jews to a variety of locations, not all of which meant certain death. About 9500 Jews from the Altreich were sent to Lodz. The subsequent transports to Kovno, Riga, and Minsk totaled about 20,000. Various estimates claim that about half of the latter group was murdered immediately upon arrival and the remainder was confined to ghettos.[22] By March 1942, transports from Germany started to be sent straight to Auschwitz, where almost all were killed.

Reports of the murder of German Jews who had been "evacuated" reached the community in Germany soon after the events unfolded. On 13 January 1942, Victor Klemperer noted in his diary, "Paul Kreidl tells us—a rumor, but it is very credible and comes from various sources—evacuated Jews were *shot* in Riga, in groups, as they left the train."[23] Information about the fate of those whom the Nazis had deported circulated throughout the community, and German Jews who were to be sent on future deportations slowly began to suspect their fate. Still, many found it comforting to deny reality. Hannelore Mahler, a *mischling* (a person whom the Nazis deemed to have partial Jewish ancestry) deported to Theresienstadt in September 1944 recalled, "we didn't want to

[21] Quoted in: Baker, 270.
[22] Barkai and Flohr, 364.
[23]Klemperer, 5.

believe it, because we could have been next. In retrospect, we said that we had suspected it and left unspoken . . . [but] in effect, we knew nothing.[24] Despite the fact that Jews may have had suspicions or heard rumors, they still could not or chose not to believe that the Nazis had implemented a genocidal policy to destroy European Jewry in its entirety.

Although most German Jews were unaware of the situation in the east, many thought that it was better to be transported to Theresienstadt than to any other location. They suspected this for two reasons. First, they deduced that since the Germans sent transports of privileged Jews to Theresienstadt, it would be a better destination. Those German Jews who were either over the age of sixty-five, had earned the honor of Iron Cross First Class in the First World War, were disabled war veterans, or were "prominent personalities," were deported to Theresienstadt. Second, elderly Jews were deceived into believing that they would be provided perpetual care at Theresienstadt if they signed away their possessions and property. Some Jews even believed they would arrive at "Theresienbad"—Theresien Spa.[25] The speculation about Theresienstadt was, in part, true. Theresienstadt was the least life-threatening place of all the ghettos and camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, but as we will later see, it was no resort.

It is clear that the majority of German Jews knew something about the horrific atrocities that the Nazis were perpetrating in the east. But information was not the same as knowledge. Years later, many survivor testimonies claim they knew what was going on, but they may confuse what they heard with what they knew. Most had some information, but it was speculative and imprecise. Thus they could not interpret the

[24] Johnson and Reuband, 119.
[25] Barkai and Paul Mendes-Flohr, 375.

information correctly. Few German Jews accurately processed the information that they received into knowledge. Those who came to suspect that "resettlement" most likely led to death did not understand the full scope of the Nazi plan for the total annihilation of European Jewry.

KNOWLEDGE OF JEWS AT THERESIENSTADT

Although Jews who arrived at Theresienstadt were more fortunate than those who were deported to any other location, the ghetto was by no means a safe place, and for most, it was not the last stop. Theresienstadt was a transit station for most Jews between their hometowns and Auschwitz. Of the 140,000 Jews who arrived at Theresienstadt, approximately 87,000 were "resettled in the east." From the establishment of the ghetto in November 1941, the threat of deportation loomed over the population of Theresienstadt, which was uncertain what awaited them in the east.[26] They knew, or believed, that it was better to remain in Theresienstadt and feared selection for a transport. They had heard rumors, and understood that deportation to the east meant severe hunger, even pogroms; but systematic mass annihilation was neither known nor believed.

Inmates in Theresienstadt had little contact with the outside world and were largely cut off from receiving news. Those who arrived on transports carried news in, and some inmates also had illegal contact with Czech gendarmes and the population from the surrounding Czech villages. There were also smuggled German newspapers that kept the

[26] The first transport to leave from Theresienstadt was on 9 January 1942 and was sent to Riga. Of the 1000 deportees, 102 survived. See: Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt* (London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD, 1953), 250.

inmates informed on the war, yet these papers did not contain any information about the plight of Jews throughout Europe.[27] Among the population of Theresienstadt, there were even a few Jews who had themselves been in the east for a time and then wound up in Theresienstadt; they certainly knew first-hand about the atrocities of the Germans and their allies, but the Germans silenced and segregated them from the rest of the ghetto population because they knew too much.[28] Information about the death camps, which were the destination of every transport leaving Theresienstadt after May 1942, was not known until the last days of the ghetto's existence.[29]

The main source of information in Theresienstadt about the east was letters from deportees to their loved ones who remained in the ghetto. Deportees carried stamped postcards or letters that they threw from the train with the hope that an ordinary person or railway worker would find and benevolently mail them. According to Norbert Troller, whose friends had been deported to the east, "We agreed on code words containing geographic information or warnings in phrases and words only we should understand. Of the thousands of those deported, a few messages miraculously reached their destinations. After being decoded the messages confirmed our worst fears." In spite of this information, however, Troller reflected that "man hopes and hopes and deceives himself as long as there flickers one spark of life in him and as long as nothing is proven to the contrary."[30] The information from the postcards, whether definitive or vague, was thus not processed into knowledge.

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[27] Lederer, 145-146.
[28] This group of inmates were children who had arrived at Theresienstadt in August 1943 from the Byalistok Ghetto. They were later deported in October of 1943. Lederer, 95.
[29] From 10 May 1942, all Jews from Theresienstadt were transported either to Treblinka, Auschwitz, or Bergen-Belsen. See: Lederer, 250-251.
[30] Norbert Troller, *Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 49-50.

Then too, the Nazis forced the inmates of Birkenau's Theresienstadt Family Camp (located in Sector BIIB) to write postcards to family and friends still in Theresienstadt in order to foster the belief that the transports went to a work camp called "*Arbeitslager Birkenau bei Neuberun."* Many of those who wrote these postcards used codes in an effort to convey information about the almost certain death at Auschwitz. Avi Fischer sent a coded message to his brother in Theresienstadt using Hebrew words to portray the conditions of the camp. "Arrived safely. *Kol Lakach* [all have been taken] behaved well. *Sack Anna* [Danger] has grown. *Sofie* [my end] is near."[31] The Hebrew teacher who deciphered the message decided that it was meaningless. Because the Jews in Theresienstadt remained optimistic, they could not recognize the horrific implications of the ambiguous messages that read: "if you come here, don't ride in vehicles, walk;" or "don't come here, people die of unnatural causes."[32] Despite the codes, the Nazi plan to sedate concerns by using these letters to assure the recipients of the well being of those deported, was, in fact, accomplished. The postcards also served to deceive the Red Cross, whom the Nazis feared would inquire to the Theresienstadt prisoners about the deportees during their visit to the ghetto in June 1944.

Paul Eppstein, the Elder of the Jews at Theresienstadt, delivered another ambiguous message to the Theresienstadt inmates on 19 September 1944, shortly before the October transports began. American Air Force planes had flown over Theresienstadt and given the inmates premature hope. Addressing a large group of inmates, Eppstein warned about the troubles ahead. "We are like a ship that sees the long-awaited harbor from a distance. We can recognize our friends on the shore. But we still must steer

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[31] Ruth Bondy, *Elder of the Jew: Jacob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 429
[32] Ibid.

through unseen reefs. We should not be deceived by premature celebrations."[33] Eppstein's warning was clear, but he revealed no information. Eight days later, he was arrested and murdered in Theresienstadt's Small Fortress.

The inmates of Theresienstadt lacked specific information about those whom the Nazis had transported to the east, but at the same time, they dreaded the prospect of deportation because of the uncertainty it posed. As H.G. Adler has described: "what were people afraid of? Of the unknown *and* of the loss of the familiar in Theresienstadt, which one clung to, as little as one liked, as much as one hated it; but the fear of the alien was stronger, filled with the horror of unconfirmed rumors, doubtful knowledge and uncertain forebodings. To the end, few had detailed knowledge of the true terrors in the East."[34] One survivor of Theresienstadt, a woman in her teens during her imprisonment, reflected years later on the intuitive understanding of the Theresienstadt inmates about the transports.

> I think you knew pretty well . . . . Even if you weren't certain or didn't know exactly how, you knew the transports weren't good. It really was a very dreaded thing. Some people had some words, they had some ideas; but even if you didn't know exactly what was going on, it was quite dreadful. I cannot recall any of my friends or relatives leaving without our saying goodby [*sic*!] in such a way as if we really did not expect to see each other again.[35]

The inmates' isolation and the Germans' deception led few to believe that the transports meant almost certain death. During the deportation period, only a handful of people knew the truth; select members of the Council of Elders such as Benjamin Murmelstein, Paul

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[33] Saul Friedman, ed. *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 149n15.
[34] Adler, 279. Translated by Marianne Salinger
[35] Quoted in: Baker, 312.

Eppstein, Otto Zucker, and Leo Baeck had learned about the transports and Auschwitz in detail.

It wasn't until after the transports from Theresienstadt had already ceased—a short time before the liberation of the camp—that the population learned about Auschwitz. On 23 December 1944, four-hundred Slovak Jews from the Sered labor camp arrived in Theresienstadt with information about Auschwitz. Their knowledge confirmed the Theresienstadt inmates' worst fears; they even knew about the gas chambers. Still, the ghetto inmates did not believe the stories from the Slovaks. As Zdenek Lederer, historian of Theresienstadt and a former inmate has pointed out, "the prisoners of Theresienstadt did not give full credence to the repots of the Slovaks, [but] they began to suspect that there might be some truth in them."[36] Even though the Slovaks revealed the truth, it was still simply too difficult for the inmates to believe the unbelievable.

Transports of Jews who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz, many of whom were former inmates of Theresienstadt, returned to the ghetto in April 1945. It was then that Theresienstadt inmates learned and absorbed information about the horrors of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and the camp at Ragun near Dessau. As Lederer has explained, "their arrival shocked Theresienstadt's prisoners beyond words. Seeing their state and hearing the reports of the newcomers they knew now that the grim facts were more horrible than the worst rumors they had heard . . . . The gulf between reality and illusions had been bridged—now all not only knew the truth but also believed it."[37]

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[36] Lederer, 169.
[37] Ibid, 186.

The inherent qualities of human nature—"a love of life, a fear of death and an understandable inability to grasp reality in the greatest crime in the history of mankind"[38]— blinded the German Jews and the Theresienstadt inmates from recognizing what the Germans and their allies planned and enacted. Information was readily available, but the ability to absorb it was beyond most people's ability. It wasn't until the final days of the war, when the Allies had already secured victory that the Jews of Theresienstadt understood the significance of being sent to the east. What would have happened had they been able to grasp the reality of their fate much earlier? Was there anybody who knew and had the capability to convince them about the destination of the transports? These questions will be explored in later chapters as we discuss Leo Baeck and the extent to which he knew and understood the situation that German Jews in Germany and Theresienstadt inmates faced.

[38] Louis De Jong, "The Netherlands and Auschwitz" *Yad Vashem Studies* VII (1968), 54.

-3-

WHAT LEO BAECK KNEW

"The thousand-year history of German Jews has come to and end," announced Leo Baeck in 1933 at the first meeting of the *Reichsvertretung*.[1] These words seem almost prophetic in retrospect. Leo Baeck was correct. The Nazis' ascension to power marked the beginning of a series of events that would lead to the destruction of the German Jews. In 1933, however, no one, not Baeck nor even Adolf Hitler, understood that the regime would later enact a policy to murder European Jewry in its entirety. Leo Baeck recognized in 1933 that the Nazis had denied German Jews a place in German society; Jews soon lost their rights as German citizens, and were excluded from German cultural and social life. As the situation in Germany continued to deteriorate throughout the 1930s, Leo Baeck understood that Jews could no longer live safely in Germany. This was no secret. But when the Germans surreptitiously embarked on a genocidal campaign against European Jews, Baeck received reliable information about the situation clandestinely. He came to realize that his statement from 1933 was truer than he had imagined at that time.

It is impossible to gauge fully what Leo Baeck knew and understood about the Holocaust as it was unfolding. But a number of sources reveal bits of information about what he knew, when he heard it, and from whence it came. As we have seen, information is not knowledge—not for ordinary Jews and not for Baeck. To what extent did Baeck believe the information? Did he understand the Nazi plan for the annihilation of European Jewry? In this section, we will try to piece together various sources of information to answer these questions.

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[1] Quoted in: Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 75.

THE DEPORTATIONS

When the large-scale deportations of German Jewry began in October 1941, the Germans and their allies had already begun slaughtering Jews throughout the east. News about these massacres had scarcely, if at all, reached the Jews back in Germany. Previous small-scale transports had left from Stettin to the east in February of 1940; the destinations of these transports were the districts of Cracow, Radom, and Warsaw. Another small-scale transport of 160 Jews from Schneidemühl was sent to Lublin on 12 March 1940. [2] "We had no means of knowing, at first, how badly off the deportees were," said Baeck. The first news that he had received, "was post cards [*sic*!] from Lublin and Warsaw. From them we gathered that the deportees were wretched, that hunger and disease were widespread, and that the Polish Jews were trying to help, in such contacts as they had with the deported and while they themselves still could."[3]

The descriptions from these postcards did not describe accurately the tragic fate of those who had been deported in the early small-scale deportations. An anonymous Berliner, on the other hand, had learned of the deportees' dire situation, and sent a report to the Reich Chancellery and German Foreign Office. Allegedly based upon the findings of a Polish-Jewish relief committee, the Quakers, and the Red Cross, the report provided a horrifying description of the deportations from Stettin and Schneidemühl. "The deportees were forced to march on foot from Lublin in temperatures of -22 degrees centigrade in deep snow to villages without food or lodging. By the time the

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[2] Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 63.
[3] Quoted in: Eric H. Boehm, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 289.

Schneidemühl deportees had arrived, 230 of the Stettin Jews had already died."[4] There is no evidence to suggest that in October 1941, at the start of the large-scale deportations, Baeck or the *Reichsvereinigung* knew anything about the fate of the Polish and Russian Jewry or the fate of the early transports from Stettin and Schneidemühl.

When in October 1941 the Gestapo ordered the *Reichsvereinigung* to participate in and facilitate the deportation of German-Jewry, they did not understand the ramifications of their actions. Beate Meyer, historian of the *Reichsvereinigung*, has noted that the Berlin Gestapo made three clear points to the officials of the *Reichsvereinigung*: "1. They were asked to treat the information as highly confidential. If they leaked any information, they would risk their lives; 2. They had to deceive the members of the Jewish community by describing the operation as simply an 'evacuation,' and 3. They were told the 'relocation' would take place in any case, whether the Jewish representatives decided to cooperate or not."[5] The last point convinced the German-Jewish leadership that it would be in the best interest of the Jewish people to cooperate. As Leo Baeck noted:

> I made it a principle to accept no appointments from the Nazis and do nothing which might help them. But later, when the question arose whether Jewish orderlies should help pick up Jews for deportation, I took the position that it would be better for them to do it, because they could at least be more gentle and helpful than the Gestapo and make the ordeal easier. It was scarcely in our power to oppose the order effectively.[6]

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[4] Browning, 64.
[5] Beate Meyer, "The Inevitable Dilemma: The Reich Association (Reichsvereinigung) of Jews in Germany, the Deportations, and the Jews Who Went Underground," *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime: Essays by Three Generations of Historians*, ed. Moshe Zimmerman (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2006), 298-299.
[6] Boehm, 288.

The Gestapo deceived the *Reichsvereinigung* into believing that only part of the community was being "evacuated," and that their deportation was merely "relocation." Moritz Henschel, president of the German-Jewish community in Berlin and a member of the executive board of the *Reichsvereinigung*, stated in his postwar testimony (later read at the trial of Adolf Eichmann): "The notification about the evacuation of 1 October 1941 was as follows: Partial evacuation, nothing bad in character, not to the *Generalgouvernement* (General Government), but to Litzmannstadt (Lodz). On 4 October, transports of 1,000 persons each left [for] Litzmannstadt. There was a ghetto there, there were packages, money, news; luggage was permitted; the first transports left in passenger carriages."[7] Clearly, when the *Reichsvereinigung* first assisted the Gestapo in the deportation process, they did not know or understand that the Final Solution had recently taken its shape. In addition to the fact that the *Reichsvereinigung* most likely did not have any information about the murder of Soviet and Polish Jewry, the idea that the Jews of Europe were to be eventually deported to secret camps designed to perpetrate mass murder was inconceivable.

THE FIRST INDICATION

After the war, Baeck described when he first came to learn of the atrocities in the east. This important testimony was recorded by Eric Boehm and published in his article

[7] Like Baeck's explanation for cooperation, Henschel stated, " the idea that guided us was: If we do these things, they will be carried out better and more humanely than if they do them, and that was correct; direct transport by the Nazis was always extremely brutal." "The Trial of Adolph Eichmann", Session 37, *The Nizkor Project*. <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-037-03.html>

"A People Stands before God."

> I got the first indication of the scope of Nazi bestiality in the summer of 1941 [sic! see more below]. A Gentile woman told me that she had voluntarily gone along with her Jewish husband when he was deported. In Poland they were separated. She saw hundreds of Jews crowded into busses which were driven off and came back empty. The rumor that the busses had a gassing mechanism was confirmed by the apparatus attached to all but one of them. This one carried a group to bury those who were gassed; afterward the gravediggers were shot. Similar stories were told by soldiers who came back on furlough. Thus I learned that the lot of Jews shipped east was either slave labor or death. It was still later that I first heard the name Auschwitz mentioned in connection with atrocities.[8]

This passage has left many questions unanswered. Who was this gentile woman? When and to where was she deported? What camp or location used gas vans at that time? What else did Baeck hear from soldiers on furlough to corroborate this story? And how did this shape Baeck's understanding of the Nazis' plan to annihilate European Jewry?

First, it is crucial to point out that the original date transcribed in this testimony was "the summer of 1941," a date that has been cited many times in scholarly works, but is a significant error.[9] The Nazis had first developed gas vans in 1940 and utilized them to kill mentally disabled Germans whom they viewed as race contaminants. Inmates from asylums in East and West Prussia and the Wartheland were gassed in these trucks that *Sonderkommando* (special squads) operated. This operation was headed by SS-

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[8] Boehm, 290

[9] After speaking with Eric Boehm, the author of *We Survived*, he agrees with my assessment that this date is, in fact, an error. Phone conversation with Eric Boehm, December 2006. The incorrect date is cited in and requires attention in: Ruth Bondy, *Elder of the Jew: Jacob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 373; Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 269; Arnold Paucker and Korad Kwiet, "Jewish Leadership and Jewish Resistance" *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, David Bankier, ed. (Jerusalem: Berghahn Books, 2000), 383; H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945; das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr J.C.B.), 152; Beate Meyer, "The Inevitable Dilemma: The Reich Association (Reichsvereinigung) of Jews in Germany, the Deportations, and the Jews Who Went Underground," *On Germans and Jews under the Nazi Regime: Essays by Three Generations of Historians* , ed. Moshe Zimmerman (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2006), 308.

Hauptsturmführer Herbert Lange.[10] From Baeck's testimony, it is clear that the woman's report described Jewish victims who had been deported to Poland, and not mentally disabled Germans whom the Nazis gassed within Germany. Thus, the gas vans from the woman's description were not a part of the T4 program. The gas vans she witnessed were probably those that the Nazis used in the first annihilation center, Chelmno (known to the Germans as Kulmhof). Chelmno began to operate on 8 December 1941.[11] Between 8 December 1941 and 15 January 1942, 6400 Jews from Kowale, Panski, Kolo, Bugaj, Dabie, Izbica Kujawska, and Klodawa were murdered at Chelmno, but no German Jews had yet been victims of the gas vans other than the previously mentally disabled. The first German Jews (who had previously been deported from German to the Lodz ghetto) were sent to Chelmno and murdered on 17 January 1942. From this point, German Jews figured prominently among the victims at Chelmno.

In short, this gentile woman could not have witnessed the murder of Jews in gas vans at any point in 1941. This date was either not recorded correctly or Leo Baeck himself did not remember the correct year. As we have seen, the large-scale deportations from Berlin didn't start until October 1941, and none of the previous small-scale transports ever made it to Chelmno, nor were those German Jews gassed in vans. It is most probable that the woman witnessed the gassings at Chelmno sometime in early 1942, and escaped to meet with Baeck in the summer of 1942 (not 1941). The identity of the women, however, remains a mystery. No woman is known to have ever escaped from Chelmno, yet it is possible that since the woman was a gentile, she was separated from

[10] Browning, 188-193.
[11] The gas vans had previously been tested on 26 Novemeber 1941 on Jewish inmates in the labor camp Bornhagen (Kozminek), where the Jews of the Kalisz region had been ghettoized in 1940. Browning, 417.

the Jewish prisoners and witnessed the killings as a bystander.[12]

As Baeck noted in his testimony, German soldiers on furlough from the east corroborated the woman's information. Baeck says no more on this matter, but Jacob Jacobson, a friend of Baeck's and associate in the *Reichsvereinigung*, later elaborated on Baeck's relations with German soldiers.

> What happened in Poland was no secret to me. During my office hours appeared one day a First Lieutenant; he is today a university professor in Western Germany . . . . He wanted to obtain an introduction to Dr. Baeck through me. I led him of course immediately to Dr. Baeck as I had found out that this officer was a close relative of the leader of the cultural circle with whom Dr. Baeck had close relations. I believe that it was the intent of this officer to enlighten Dr. Baeck about the massacres in Poland.[13]

On another instance, Jacobson recalled a different soldier who became a close acquaintance of both Leo Baeck and his.

> During this time I had a *jour fix* on Saturday afternoon in the house of Mr. Taub, a common acquaintance of Professor Täubler and Rabbi Baeck, a gentleman whom I also took on in the *Gesamtarchiv*. A constant guest was a former Artillery-Major . . . . From this officer, who had good connections, we received regular news about the war situation. He created maps that I brought to Dr. Baeck on a regular basis.[14]

This retired soldier may have been Gustav Noske, the famous leader of the Kiel mutiny

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[12] The only known escapee, a male, was Jakobv Grojanowski, who escaped in late January of 1942. He told the story of the atrocities that he had witnessed to Jakub Szulman, a rabbi in Grabow, and Adam Czerniakow, the head of the Judenrat at Warsaw. Sir Martin Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Traveling in Search of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 373.
[13] Quoted in: Jacob Jacobson "*Bruchstuecke 1939-1945*" Leo Baeck Institute Archives, ME 329. Translated by Marianne Salinger.
[14] Ibid.

during the First World War, and later, a member of the anti-Nazi resistance movement.[15] Whatever the identity of these two soldiers, the fact that Baeck had direct contact with each of them indicates that he must have received some details about the atrocities in the east. The First-Lieutenant most likely provided Baeck with personal experiences from the front, and the former Artillery-Major, who had "good connections," gave Baeck "regular news," and even provided him with maps.

In 1955, shortly before his death, Leo Baeck revealed to four people—Hans Liebeschütz, Robert Weltsch, and Hans and Eva Reichmann—that he also had contacts with the German resistance movement that unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. " I was in constant touch with the men of the Resistance, my contact was a well-known industrialist in Stuttgart, whose name I should prefer not to mention without his permission. This gentleman had connections both with Goerdeler and the Army, but I knew only a few names of the men whom I met through this agency."[16] These contacts would have certainly been a fruitful information network. The resistance movement had learned in the fall of 1942 that the Nazi regime was in the process of annihilating European Jews in death camps throughout the east. This information helped to spark initiative in the resistance movement.[17] It seems quite likely that Leo Baeck, who "was in constant touch" with the resistance, would have received some type of indication about the atrocities in the east. This is a speculative, but nonetheless plausible conclusion.

The Jewish and non-Jewish German population mainly received their information

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[15] Jacobson noted that "In one of the post-war trials, I believe it was about the Kiel Process, he placed himself protectively before other officers." It seems possible that this retired soldier was the Gustav Noske who became famous for the Kiel mutiny during World War I.

[16] Hans Reichmann, "Forward: The Fate of a Manuscript," III *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1958), 361.

[17] Christof Dipper, "20 July and the "Jewish Question," *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1941*. ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1999) 483-484.

about the situation in the east from secondhand sources such as rumor and BBC transmissions. Without specific details from firsthand witnesses, they discredited the rumors and British reports. Leo Baeck, on the other hand, got information from a number of sources that were either firsthand and or credible. He received information from a Chelmno escapee who had given him specific details about the annihilation camp; Wehrmacht soldiers, one of whom presumably had witnessed firsthand the massacre of Jews in the east; and it also is likely that his resistance contacts informed him about the atrocities in the east. Rumored information may have leaked to the German public, but Leo Baeck had concrete knowledge about what was happening in the east. Before he was deported to Theresienstadt, he had all the information he needed to understand he Nazi plan for the destruction of European Jewry.

AUSCHWITZ

Baeck first learned about Auschwitz a few months after he arrived in Theresienstadt in January of 1943. In a testimony given after the war, he described how a prisoner had given him detailed information about the death factory.

> One day in August of 1943 a fellow inmate came up to me. He introduced himself as a Czech engineer by the name of Grünberg and asked to talk with me alone. He bound me to silence. Then he spoke.
>
> 'I have to tell someone. I was waked last night by my best friend whom I had not seen for a long time. I knew that he had not been sent to Theresienstadt, so I asked how he got here. He cut me short, and told me to listen carefully. He had to tell me. I had to know. But first I must promise not to tell anyone else.
>
> He was half Jewish and had been sent east. He ended up in the huge camp of Auschwitz. Like everyone there he went through a process of selection and was assigned to do slave labor. The others were led away and gassed to death. He

> knows that definitely; everyone at Auschwitz knows it. He was sent to a labor camp from which he escaped and made his way back to Prague. How had he gotten into Theresienstadt? A Czech policeman outside took a bribe.' We talked for a short while and then he left. He was much excited and said 'he wanted to warn me and save me.'
>
> So it was not just a rumor, as I had hoped, the illusion of a diseased imagination . . . . Rumors of all sorts were constantly spreading through the ghetto, and before long the rumors of Auschwitz spread too. But at least no one [else] knew for certain.[18]

Just as Baeck's testimony about receiving information regarding Chelmno leaves many questions unanswered, so too does this recollection. Who was Grünberg? Who was the Auschwitz escapee who came back to Theresienstadt in August 1943 to warn Grünberg? These two questions have raised doubt about the authenticity of this testimony.[19] To what extent did Baeck then understand (August 1943) the genocidal plan of the Nazis? Why did he remain silent about this information? We will address this last question in the following chapter.

There are a few possibilities as to who the inmate Baeck called "Grünberg" may have been. Two male Czech prisoners with the surname Grünberg were in Theresienstadt in August of 1943: Edmund Grünberg (12/10/1882) who arrived in November 1941 on Transport F from Brünn, and Karel Grünberg (06/13/1888) who arrived at Theresienstadt in March 1942 on Transport Ae from Brünn (and was murdered in Auschwitz on 16 October 1944).[20] Nothing more is known about these two Grünbergs. The Czech historian

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[18] Boehm, 292-293.
[19] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 148; Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri, "Leo Baeck and Contemporary History: A Riddle in Leo Baeck's Life" 6 *Yad Vashem Studies* (1967), 124-125.
[20] A list of Terezin inmates can be found in: Miroslav Kárný, *Terezín Memorial Book : Jewish victims of Nazi deportations from Bohemia and Moravia 1941-1945* (Praha : Terezín Intitiative, 1996).

Miroslav Kárný adduced another suggestion as to the identity of Grünberg. He assessed that "Gruenberg was most likely the engineer Julius Grünberger (7/13/1900), who came with the transport AK (Aufbaukommando)" from Prague to Theresienstadt.[21] Kárný's assessment is most probable for two reasons. First, Julius Grünberger held the formal title of an engineer (*inženýr* in Czech) that carried the abbreviation "*Ing*." Thus, when Leo Baeck recalled the man, he described him as "a Czech engineer named Grünberg." Second, unlike the two men with the surname Grünberg, Julius Grünberger was a member of the Council of Elders (head of the technical department), and was in Baeck's circle of acquaintances within the swarm of about 46,000 other inmates. Julius Grünberger, who was one of the original members of the Council of Elders, had a more prominent position in the Council than Baeck, who was only an honorary member. According to Norbert Troller, Julius Grünberger even played a decisive role in the creation of transport lists.[22] The question thus arises: if Julius Grünberger was the Grünberg from Baeck's description, why did Grünberger then remain silent about his knowledge of Auschwitz? Is there a hierarchy of responsibility? Would Grünberger perhaps be more culpable? Julius Grünberger was murdered in Auschwitz on 10 December 1944, so we will never know if and why he chose to speak to Baeck.

The identity of the Auschwitz escapee who came to Theresienstadt in 1943 also cannot be ascertained, but there are a few likely possibilities. It is most probable that he escaped sometime earlier in 1943. And in all likelihood, since Grünberg(er) was Czech, the escapee who was his "best friend," was also Czech. During the existence of

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[21] Miroslav Kárný, "Die Flucht des Auschwitzer Häftlings Vítêzslav Lederer und der tschechische Widerstand" 1997 *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente*, 180n33. Translated by Marianne Salinger.
[22] Norbert Troller, *Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 49.

Auschwitz, 230 escape attempts were noted, about 80 of which were successful; those who were caught were sent to the infamous Block 11 and executed.[23] The vast majority of the inmates who escaped from Auschwitz during the first half of 1943 were either Polish or Russian; there were very few escapees who were Czech. There is therefore a very short list of noted escapees who would fit the profile of Grünberg(er)'s informer.[24] Two prisoners— whose nationalities are presumably Czech— escaped from Auschwitz in the evening of 12 March 1943, Jan Sarapata and Aleksander Martyniec. These two prisoners had been sent to the camp on 14 June 1940 because of active participation in the resistance movement.[25] The only other known Czech prisoner to escape Auschwitz successfully during this time period was Gottlieb Krbeček (06/01/1919) from Brünn, who broke out on 15 April 1943.[26] Nothing more is known about him, but it crucial to point out that like Karel and Edmund Grünberg, Krbeček was also from the city of Brünn; this fact raises the probability of their connection. Still, we can only guess as to who was the Auschwitz escapee that informed Grünberg(er), and we don't know who Grünberg(er) was either.

Regardless of who told Baeck this information, and who brought the information to Theresienstadt, it is clear that Baeck learned detailed information about Auschwitz that was not known by the general population. Baeck knew that Jews were either selected for labor—as in the case of the man who escaped— or gassed to death. Baeck, like many, clung to optimism; at that time he may have overestimated the chances for survival.

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[23] Erich Kulka, "Five Escapes From Auschwitz," *They Fought Back: The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe*, ed. Yuri Suhl (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 201.
[24] In a conversation with Debórah Dwork, Auschwitz historian, she noted that if Grünberg's informant had escaped from a labor detachment from one of Auschwitz's subsidiary camps, the escapee might not have been recorded. Further she stressed the point that although Grunberg was Czech, the Auschwitz escapee who was his best friend may not have been Czech, but German.
[25] Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle 1939-1945* (London: I.B Tauris & Coltd Publishers, 1990), 351.
[26] Ibid, 376.

"Death was not certain for all," he recalled to Eric Boehm shortly after the war. "There was selection for slave labor; perhaps not all transports went to Auschwitz."[27]

Baeck was correct in that not all transports went to Auschwitz. Before August 1943, transports had gone to other locations in the east such as Riga, Warsaw, Lublin, and Treblinka, and after Baeck's meeting with Grünberg(er), there had been a few small-scale transports that went to Bergen-Belsen. This was no cause for celebration, however. The Jews on these transports suffered a lower survival rate than those who went to Auschwitz.[28] The dual possibilities for deportees may have clouded Baeck's understanding of how many Jews the Nazis were murdering at Auschwitz at this time, yet this new information substantiated what Baeck had learned about Chelmno, "So it was not just a rumor or, as I had hoped, the illusion of a diseased imagination," noted Baeck.[29] If there had been any doubt to what Baeck had learned in Berlin, it was now not only corroborated but further elaborated.

SIEGFRIED LEDERER RETURNS TO THERESIENSTADT FROM AUSCHWITZ

Siegfried Lederer (03/06/1904) arrived at Theresienstadt on 18 January 1942 with Transport R from Pilsen (Czechoslovakia).[30] After the Germans destroyed the Czech city of Lidice in reprisal for the assassination of Himmler's direct subordinate and right-hand-man, *Reichsprotektor* Reinhard Heydrich, Lederer, along with 32 other Theresienstadt

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[27] Boehm, 293.
[28] Lederer, 250.
[29] Boehm, 293.
[30] Miroslav Kárný, *Terezín Memorial Book : Jewish victims of Nazi deportations from Bohemia and Moravia 1941-1945* (Praha : Terezín Intitiative, 1996), 265, 272

inmates were assigned to bury the corpses of the murdered men of Lidice.[31] The Nazis presumably thought that these inmates knew too much about the atrocity, and sent all of them to the east. Siegfried Lederer left Theresienstadt on a transport destined for Auschwitz on 18 December 1942.

Lederer survived the selection at Auschwitz and became an inmate of the camp. He joined an underground movement of Jewish prisoners who worked with the inmates from the Theresienstadt Family Camp in section B-II-b to send word back to Theresienstadt about the true nature of Auschwitz. The underground decided that it would take a well-informed eyewitness in order to convince the Jews of Theresienstadt that the transports were sent to Auschwitz, a death factory used to annihilate over a million Jews.[32] On 5 April 1944, Siegfried Lederer fled in an SS uniform together with his accomplice, Victor Pestek, a guard from the family camp who planned to use Lederer's contacts in Bohemia to help a Jewish inmate with whom he was in love to escape.

Lederer secretly entered Theresienstadt on 20 April 1944. In the book *Escape From Auschwitz*, the author Erich Kulka has attempted to reconstruct who Lederer met and what he said to the inmates. An embellished account, Kulka's work must be approached with caution. According to Kulka, after making his way into the ghetto, Lederer awakened his friend and coworker from the Theresienstadt Fire Brigade, Leo Holzer. As Kulka constructed the scene:

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[31] Siegfried Lederer's experience during the Holocaust, see: Erich Kulka, *Escape From Auschwitz* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1986).

[32] Vrba and Wexler, who escaped two a few days after Lederer, were a part of the same resistance network. In their report, they estimated 1.5 million Jews murdered at Auschwitz.

> Holzer put on his coat and quietly went downstairs [to find a small circle of friends and members of the Council of Elders] . . . . The first [to arrive was] George Petschauer of the *Gettowache* [Ghetto Guard]. Then Fischer from the Transport Administration, Schliesser from Economic Management, and Sax from the locksmith workshop. The last to come was the rabbi, a member of the Elder's Council [later noted as Rabbi Leo Baeck].[33]

After recounting the horrors about Auschwitz, Lederer and those in the room discussed what to do and how to inform the people of Theresienstadt without raising panic. They considered how transports could be prevented. Lederer's suggestion was simple: start a rebellion and set fire to the Ghetto. The idea of an uprising, however, did not go over well with this group of Theresienstadt inmates. Baeck had remained quiet, but now he spoke. According to Kulka, Baeck was in utter denial about what he had heard. Baeck presented Lederer with a postcard that Fred Hirsch (who had been in charge of educating the youth) had written on 25 March 1944. Baeck argued that the postmark, which was after the date that Lederer claimed the September Transport had been gassed to death, was concrete evidence of their well-being.[34]

The dialogue that Kulka presented is a clear literary embellishment. Obviously, Leo Baeck would not have Fred Hirsch's postcards on him when awakened. Historian Miroslav Kárný has pointed out the problematic nature of this "historical" dialogue.

> The inmates of the family camp truly had to write postcards a few days before March 8th, with the date of March 25th. Also the prisoners who were destined for the gas chambers. The postcards were to firmly convince the addressees that their authors were still alive on March 25th. However, I searched in vain for proof that such cards from Birkenau already reached the ghetto in Theresienstadt at the time of the first visit of Lederer in Theresienstadt. I looked at the archives in Auschwitz, in Theresienstadt, in the Jewish Museum in Prague, in Beit

[33] Kulka, 115-116.
[34] Ibid, 117.

> Theresienstadt in Givet Chaim and some private collections of inmates' cards, found several dozen postcards with the date of March 25, 1944, however not in a single case were the addressees in Theresienstadt. Also not in a single preserved Theresienstadt diary did I find a notice that postcards from Birkenau arrived before Lederer's first visit in Theresienstadt. Likewise is Hirsch's presumed report about the children's block in Birkenau neither in Theresienstadt nor in Swiss documents to be found. Every concrete trace is missing.[35]

Did Lederer even meet with Baeck? Leo Holzer, who arranged the meeting, claimed in a testimony years later that Baeck was not present among the dignitaries at the conference, but that he brought the message to Baeck. "I personally brought Lederer's message to Dr. Eppstein and Dr. Baeck," noted Holzer. "The Chairman of the Elder Council, Dr. Eppstein, beseeched me to keep silent about it, otherwise the nearly 35,000 inhabitants of the Theresienstadt ghetto will be threatened by a catastrophe."[36] From Holzer's testimony, we learn that Eppstein was also not present at the meeting, but with an authoritative hand, decisively ruled to keep this information silent. Even if Baeck was not was not present at the gathering, he still received another piece of information about Auschwitz that corroborated what he had already known.

ONE AND THE SAME

Amidst the complex evidence surrounding what Baeck knew about the east, there have been a few historians who have mistakenly looked at the Grünberg(er) and Lederer scenario, and seen them as one event. Is it possible that, than Linn was unknowingly correct in amalgamating what Baeck learned in August of 1943 and April 1944? Could

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[35] Miroslav Kárný, "Die Flucht des Auschwitzer," 167-168. Translated by Marianne Salinger.
[36] Quoted in: Miroslav Kárný, "Die Flucht des Auschwitzer," 168-169. Translated by Marianne Salinger.

Baeck have simply misremembered the details and dates? After all, Baeck never mentioned Lederer in any of his post-war writings or testimonies. Since there were members of the Council of Elders at the meeting, perhaps Lederer could have been Julius Grünberger's informant? Like Julius Grünberger, Leo Holzer, the man who introduced Baeck to Lederer, was also an engineer; perhaps "Grünberg" was simply an alias for Leo Holzer? These scenarios, although highly doubtful, are certainly within the realm of possibility, yet evidence suggests— beyond a reasonable doubt— Baeck first learned about Auschwitz in August of 1943 from Grünberg, and then was told again later about Auschwitz when Lederer returned to the ghetto.

CONCLUSIONS

Leo Baeck's knowledge about the massacre of Jews in the east and, more specifically, about the annihilation centers was not gained from one source. Leo Baeck developed knowledge and understanding of the plight of European Jewry as information arrived and source after source corroborated that the Germans and their allies were systematically murdering European Jewry. Baeck was perhaps the twentieth century's greatest Jewish thinker; he was anything but naïve. He certainly was able to believe and comprehend the overwhelming evidence brought before him. By the time that he was deported to Theresienstadt, he had already learned about Chelmno and he had also received reports from German soldiers on the situation in the east. At this point, Baeck had the capability to understand the genocidal policy of the Nazis, but he may not have developed a full comprehension of it. Still, Baeck knew enough to conclude that the

Nazis would murder most of the Jews who had been sent to the east, and also those who were to be sent on future transports. After he learned about Auschwtiz in August of 1943, he without a doubt understood the magnitude of the genocidal situation. The corroboration of information from Siegfried Lederer in April 1944 served only to diminish any possibility of hope that he may have had about the fate of the transports. By the time the ghetto was liquidated in the autumn of 1944, Leo Baeck had a complete understanding of Auschwitz. He knew that those who were to be transported from Theresienstadt were on their way to a death factory.

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The Voice of Silence

Amidst the ignorance, disbelief, speculation, and confusion, Leo Baeck knew for certain what awaited deportees sent to the east. With this knowledge, Baeck made a conscious decision to tell no one. Although he may have been skeptical about the information that he first received, he—unlike many German Jews who heard only rumors—got detailed corroboratory evidence from numerous sources that enabled him to ascertain the truth. Baeck was not in denial about what he eventually learned to be fact. Denial involves active avoidance of acknowledgement whereas Baeck actively concealed information.[1] Why did he choose to remain silent? Survivors and historians have pondered this question for decades. Baeck never addressed this issue directly in any of his many post-war writings. Other people with whom he had contact, however, have adduced his explanation. Although each of these testimonies is problematic, they appear to present an explanation of Baeck's actions that is consistent with his philosophy and with each other.

Shortly after the war, Eric Boehm interviewed Leo Baeck. He recounted what he learned in the chapter "A People Stands Before God" in his book *We Survived*. According to Boehm, Baeck told him:

> I went through a hard struggle debating whether it was my duty to convince Grünberg that he must repeat what he had heard before the Council of Elders, of which I was an honorary member. I finally decided that no one should know it. If the Council of Elders were informed the whole camp would know it within a few hours. Living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder. And this death was not certain for all: there was selection for slave labor; perhaps

[1] Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

> not all transports went to Auschwitz. So I came to the grave decision to tell no one. [2]

Although there are some historians who question the authenticity of Boehm's account, Baeck himself—who survived six years after the article was published—knew about it and never denied that these were his words.[3] The veracity of this testimony is supported by H.G. Adler's reference to it in his book *Theresienstadt*, of which Baeck was an editor.[4] Although these may not have been Baeck's exact words, they apparently convey his outlook.

Heinrich Liebrecht, a friend of Leo Baeck while in Theresienstadt, adduced another account by Baeck about his silence. After Theresienstadt was liberated and former inmates returned from Auschwitz, Liebrecht met with Baeck. In Liebrecht's memoirs, he claimed that Baeck gave him the following explanation of his decision:

> whether [all the transports went] to Auschwitz, I did not know for certain. But I did know that the goal of the Gestapo was to kill those not able to carry out hard labor immediately and let those able bodied workers be annihilated through hunger and deprivation for the war machine. I struggled at that time in torment of conscience. Should one shorten the torment of the transports by a self-imposed massacre [uprising] or give the survival of some, even perhaps only a few, a

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[2] Eric H. Boehm, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 293.

[3] Walter Laqueur has argued "this account has been disputed by some who knew Baeck well." Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 148. Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri commented that "it is hard to believe that he himself wrote it, for usually his style is lucid and his exposition well-planned. Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri, "Leo Baeck and Contemporary History: A Riddle in Leo Baeck's Life" *Yad Vashem Studies* VI (1967), 125.

[4] H.G. Adler, *Theresienstadt, 1941-1945; das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft. Geschichte, Soziologie, Psychologie* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr J.C.B.), 152. Adler's wife noted that her husband and Baeck "discussed every significant detail of the Theresienstadt book. Most importantly, they talked over every moral judgment and ethical implications of this incredible camp." It is thus hard to believe that if this explanation and information were false, Baeck would have not insisted on any change. Albert H. Friedlander, "Leo Baeck in Theresienstadt/Terezin," *What Kind of God: Essays in Honor of Richard L. Rubenstein*, eds. Betty Rogers Rubenstein and Michael Berenbaum (Lanham, University Press of America, 1995), 73.

> chance. I finally told myself that even if a single one survives, he couldn't be sacrificed.[5]

The similarities between Boehm and Liebrecht's accounts seem to be consistent with regard to certain facts. Both claimed that Baeck knew about slave labor selection. And each indicated Baeck's difficulty in deciding to withhold this information. They agree that Baeck weighed the negative and positive effects of his choice and decided that suppression was the best option. But each offers a different philosophical rationale for his silence, both of which converge with his philosophy and with rabbinic theology.

In this chapter, we will look at how Baeck's philosophy elaborates the ideas that "living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be harder," and "even if a single one survives, he couldn't be sacrificed." We shall also examine the consequences and benefits of ignorance in Theresienstadt versus the counterfactual possibility of widespread knowledge. After the war, Baeck proclaimed: "[when] the silence begins to speak . . . its language is powerful and overwhelming."[6] This chapter endeavors to be the voice of Baeck's silence.

HOPE

Looking at Baeck's theological and philosophical approach to morale, we see a full explanation of why living with hope was better than living in the expectation of death and a rationalization of its crucial importance for survival. In the face of destruction, Leo

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[5] This conversation was recounted years after it actually happened and thus its accuracy is questionable, but it seems to be consistent with information presented by other sources. Heinrich Liebrecht, trans. Marianne Salinger, *Nicht mitzuhassen, mitzulieben bin ich da: mein Weg durch die Hölle des Dritten Reiches* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1990). 186-187

[6] Quoted in: Leo Baeck, "Excerpts from Baeck's Writings," II *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1957), 37.

Baeck never lost hope, and he believed that neither should Jews who might be deported. For Baeck, hope was twofold. First it was the sheer spirit and expectation for survival. Second, and most important, the "hope above all hopes, the one which includes and unites all human beings within it," was faith in the One God. Referencing the biblical Daniel, Baeck equated the Nazi years of terror with an eschatological verse. "God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end" (Daniel 5.26). But Baeck insisted, "that must not be the last word. The last word, the decisive word is the word of hope—true, genuine, lasting hope . . . . This hope speaks forth from the eternal commandment, from the eternal 'Thou shalt' of the word of God, which conveys commandment, solace and confidence in one." Baeck's concept of the eternal commandment—"Thou Shalt!" was a generalized unconditional commandment to do good as a person understands it. This idea was central to his religious philosophy, and was radically different from other more traditional approaches to Judaism.[7] Believing that hope was a commandment of God, Baeck thus appealed to his people to have faith and to "live as if there will be a tomorrow."[8]

Baeck believed that without the expectation of continuity and perseverance, life would have no direction and thus no meaning. If the Theresienstadt inmates learned that death was near, they would not have been able to endure. Baeck preached this philosophical approach to the Theresienstadt inmates in an academic lecture on 15 June 1944, less than two months after Siegfried Lederer returned to Theresienstadt from Auschwitz.

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[7] Michael A. Meyer, "The Thought of Leo Baeck: A Religious Philosophy for a time of Adversity" *Modern Judaism* 19.2 (1999), 2.
[8] Quoted in: Leonard Baker, *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 257.

> [An] equal emphasis is placed on "life" and on "continuity. Taking "life" first: this does not merely imply an aimless vegetating, a state of random movement swinging vaguely to and fro at the will of external impulses, but an existence that has become aware of itself, conscious of its yesterdays and tomorrows, of the paths leading up and those leading away from it, conscious of what has gone before and what is still to come, conscious of its course of destiny.[9]

The continuity of the Jewish people depended upon Jews' hope for survival and expectation of a future.[10] Baeck continued later in the lecture, "a people dies when its spirit dies . . . and this is a most terrible death, if the mere brute force of existence is then still left to this people and everything, the cycle of existence, the cycle of power, is turned into soullessness, into senselessness, when all pursuits of existence move as if in convulsive jerks, in whose coils the people then collapses." After the war, in an article on "Life in a Concentration Camp," Baeck elaborated on this lecture to the Theresienstadt inmates. He explained his belief that physical survival was impossible without the endurance of the mind, and that the mind dies when hope dies. Thus the inmates of Theresienstadt faced two different struggles: mental endurance and physical survival. "Whether one survived in a concentration camp, outwardly depended on circumstances: disease, torture, annihilation could destroy one's life. But whether inwardly one saw it through, essentially depended on whether these two remained alive: patience and imagination . . . . A human being does not die until he no longer sees anything but the

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[9] A typescript of this lecture was found in one of Leo Baeck's books, which he had left to the Leo Baeck College. It is the only known transcription of any of his lectures from Theresienstadt to survive. Leo Baeck, "The Writing of History," *The Synagogue Review* (November 1962), 1.

[10] Albert Friedlander, one of the great scholars of Baeck's theology, saw the language as a direct metaphor to the transports of Theresienstadt. "Seen together with 'continuity,' a structure with its own definite lines which are in no ways accidental, Baeck comes to present a view of history which has the most direct relationship possible to his listeners and to himself: What *is* a concentration camp if not a way station to a senseless death where outside pressures move the inmates to and fro in senseless movement?" Friedlander's metaphoric analysis, however, was overreaching.

past and the present moment."[11] In Baeck's view, inmates who lost the ability to imagine the future would be equally as doomed as those who were deported. He believed that if he were to destroy their hope, he would be murdering them in a slower more brutal manner than death by gas.

Through his lecture's spiritual guidance, Baeck sought to raise the morale of the inmates. Years later he commented that "all those hours [of lectures and prayer in Theresienstadt] were hours in which a community arose out of the mass . . . . They were hours of freedom. Hours like that, too, nourished imagination and resilience. They gave to many the strength to go upright through the uncertain."[12] Baeck did not simply preach that life was meaningless without hope. He actively tried to inspire and boost the morale of the inmates. Proclaiming the power of the human spirit—the essence of hope—Baeck metaphorically prophesized that the Jewish spirit would prevail over the Nazis. He implicitly related Jewish history to the situation of the Jews of Theresienstadt by describing their struggle as "a wrestling of the spirit, of faith and ideas, a conflict between spirit and power, between faith and egotism . . . . With their faith, fervor and zeal, and with a sense of justice that also seeks to give the opponent his due . . . the human spirit is superior and survives because, even if it has not got the might, it still possesses the power."[13] Baeck's words are clearly a reformatted reconstruction of the prophet Zechariah, who proclaimed to the people Israel in the word of God that their triumph would manifest itself: "not by might, and not by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). Baeck tells the people that they do not have the might, but their redemption is not only in their own spirit, but foremost in the power of faith (in God).

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[11] Quoted in: Leo Baeck, "Life in a Concentration Camp" *Jewish Spectator* 11 (July 1946), 12.
[12] Quoted in: Leo Baeck, "Life in a Concentration Camp," 13.
[13] Leo Baeck, "The Writing of History," 6.

Leo Baeck's words were coded, complex, and only lucid in retrospect—they were, as Fritz Bamberger described, "private conversations with God."[14] Nevertheless, his surviving lecture stands as a clear representation of his perception that hope and spirit were essential in a time when death loomed over the Theresienstadt inmates.

Baeck's emphasis on hope was not a product of concentration camp life, but part of a philosophy that was reinforced by his life in Theresienstadt. Stressing the importance of hope was nothing new for him. In his first book, *The Essence of Judaism*, Leo Baeck emphasized that the Jewish people have constantly maintained hope and optimistic faith during the struggles of their 4000 year existence. "History, with all its anguish . . . practically demanded that Israel should pray and hope . . . . Without the strength of this belief, the history of Israel would have ended quickly." Baeck demanded that the Jews should not be discouraged about their plight because God determines history. "It is not the human element but the Divine which makes history . . . . The prophets did not understand God through history; they understood history though God."[15] Grounded in his religious faith, Baeck believed that the Jewish people should have hope in justice, because God is just. In Theresienstadt, Baeck lived by the philosophy he had formulated years before the Nazi party even entered the realm of German politics.

While we will never know whether Baeck's policy of concealing information and promoting hope was the best decision, contemporary sociologists, such as L.A. Gottschalk, have tended to stress the importance of hope in association with positive physical and mental health. According to modern social theory, hopelessness has been

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[14] Quoted from a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Community of Berlin. Fritz Bamberger, *Leo Baeck: The Man and the Idea* (New York: The Leo Baeck Institute, 1958), 2.
[15] Quoted in: Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 95.

identified as a significant risk factor for mental disorders, specifically in depression and suicidal behaviors. The Theresienstadt inmates' ignorance about the genocidal horrors was thus, in theory, beneficial to their physical and mental health. A Red Cross report written after the liberation of Theresienstadt corroborates this theory. "The fact that they [the inmates who were not deported] knew nothing of the fate that awaited those who were deported to the east allowed the population to keep up their morale during this time and to be disciplined."[16] One inmate noted after the war that "had we known what they [the transports] really meant we would not have been able to endure."[17] Baeck inspired hope, and hope enabled many inmates to withstand the horrors of concentration camp life. "Countless personal experiences testify that it was [Baeck's] presence alone which brought comfort to the harassed and the tortured," noted Eva Reichmann.[18] But in a sense, it wasn't Baeck himself, but rather his message of optimism.

SURVIVAL OF THE CORE

Despite Baeck's efforts to arouse optimism, he knew that hope alone could not guarantee survival for every inmate of Theresienstadt. He recognized that most of those whom the Nazis would deport would be gassed or worked to death. It was beyond his ability to save everybody, but he understood that it was his responsibility to save as many lives as he could. Baeck and the Jewish leadership in Theresienstadt therefore aimed to preserve the core of the ghetto population.

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[16] Baker, 312.
[17] Ruth Bondy, *Elder of the Jew: Jacob Edelstein of Theresienstadt* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 375.
[18] Eva G. Reichmann, "Symbol of German Jewry" *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* II (1956), 21.

This policy was adopted by many of the Judenrats throughout the European ghettos. As Jacob Gens, head of the Judenrat of the Vilna ghetto noted, "with a hundred people, I save a thousand people. With a thousand people, I save ten thousand people."[19] The manifestation of this ideology was often a "rescue-through-work" strategy in which the Jewish leadership believed that as long as the ghetto inhabitants were useful to the German war machine, they would not be targets of annihilation, and in this way, only those unable to work would be killed. In Theresienstadt, however, there was no industry and the Jews did not provide the Nazi leadership with any economic benefit. The inmates were of use to the Nazis only as showpieces for the international community, and as such they were expendable. The strategy of the Jewish leadership in Theresienstadt developed into rescue-through-ignorance. Knowing that not all the inmates could be saved, the leadership believed that the core of the community could survive by avoiding the exposure of the Nazis' darkest secret—Auschwitz.

Leo Baeck was many things—"rabbi, teacher, scholar, author, a leader of his people and a great voice of humanity"—but he was foremost, a rabbi, and in this sense, a rabbinical thinker.[20] Rabbinic ideology influenced the actions of many traditional Jewish leaders, including Baeck, who although a liberal rabbi, held traditional values. Baeck was a master of Jewish texts. For him and many others, the issue of sacrificing part of the community for the good of the whole was influenced by rabbinic literature.

The Jewish ethical position on sacrificing part of the community for the good of the whole has always aroused controversy. The Talmud (a compendium of discussions on Jewish law, ethics, customs and history) has established that one life is not worth that of

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[19] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 134.
[20] Fritz Bamberger, "Leo Baeck: The man and the Idea" *The Leo Baeck memorial Lecture* 1 (1958),1.

another. If someone is given the ultimatum "Go and kill so and so; if not, I will slay thee," the Talmud advises that you let yourself be killed rather than commit murder, because all lives have equal value: "who knows that your blood is redder? Perhaps his blood is redder."[21] But the sacrifice of one life for many lives, or many lives for the core of the community is a more complex issue. The debate around this conundrum centers on the ruling of the famous medieval rabbi and commentator upon Jewish law, Maimonides.

> If gentiles said to Israelites: "surrender one of you to us so that we may put him to death; otherwise we will put you all to death," they should all suffer death rather than surrender a single Israelite to them. But if the gentiles specified an individual, saying: "surrender that particular person to us, or else we will put all to death," they may give him up, provided that he was guilty of a capital crime, like Sheba son of Bichri [who rebelled against King David. (II Samuel 20:1-22)]. [22]

Historian Isaiah Trunk has shown how this ruling was a major component of the policies of many Judenrat councils throughout Eastern Europe, most particularly those influenced by traditional Jewish values. In its application of rescue through sacrifice, however, two contradictory interpretations emerged. One held that "if a Jewish community . . . has been condemned to physical destruction and there are means of rescuing part of it, the leaders of the community should have the courage to assume the responsibility, to act and rescue what is possible."[23] The second interpretation held that the Jews should refuse to participate and let the Nazis choose who was to be deported.[24] Most secular leaders considered Maimonides inapplicable to the Jews' contemporary

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[21] b. San 74a.
[22] Maimonidies, *The Laws and Basic Principles of the Torah*, 5.5.
[23] Quoted from: Rabbi Abraham Duber Cahana Shapiro of Kovno. Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), xliii-xliv.
[24] Ibid, 426.

dilemma, but their practical solution was nonetheless consistent with sacrificing a part for the good of the whole.

Baeck—an expert on the writings of Maimonides—never commented directly on this ruling, but his actions and writings have indicated that he endorsed the interpretation of survival of the core at the cost of sacrificing others. And his policy of nondisclosure appears to have been influenced strongly by this understanding. Disclosure would cause despair among the entire community, and threaten its wellbeing. The possible consequences of revealing the truth—an uprising, increased, escape attempts, and rise in suicides—would jeopardize further the survival of the total populace. Standing idly by during transports, moreover, was not directly sacrificing all those who were deported; some of them—as Baeck understood—would be selected for slave labor and perhaps would survive. Baeck did not necessarily equate deportation with sacrifice, and could not ascertain how many people would be killed for the good of the whole. The Jewish leadership had no idea when the transports would stop, and therefore did not know how many Jews they would need to give up in order to satisfy the Nazis' thirst for blood.[25] Baeck recounted: "I told myself if even a single one survives, one can not sacrifice him."[26] There was solace in such hope. After the war, Baeck expressed relief that Heinrich Liebrecht had survived. "I cannot tell you what it means for me that some, even though only a few, from here to Auschwitz transported, survived. It removes many sad

[25] Quoted in: Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York : Holmes & Meier, 1983), 1036.
[26] Liebrecht, 187-189

thoughts from me whether I did the right thing at that time."[27] Baeck valued each human life that survived, for in his view, "every man is a world in himself."[28]

In the end, the sacrifice was great. In the fall of 1944, about three-fifths of the ghetto population was deported, only a small fraction of which survived. The remaining core was smaller than the sacrificed, but Baeck and the Jewish leadership were powerless to change the overall outcome. In the next section, we will explore the counterfactual possibility that disclosure of knowledge would have resulted in an even greater sacrifice.

COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY

As we have seen, Leo Baeck's judgment and rationale was based largely upon his own theological ideals as well as traditional rabbinic philosophy. As the historian Michael Meyer has argued, Baeck's actions were a manifestation of his Jewish theology. "Leo Baeck lived the faith he had expressed and elaborated in his theological writings long before Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and whose ramifications he continued to develop in the decade after his liberation."[29] He came to his decision to keep silent through a "hard struggle," and it was not solely a reflection of his ideals.[30] In addition to evaluating his ethical and ideological position, Baeck weighed the consequences of silence versus speaking out and came to the decision that silence was best. A counterfactual reconstruction of Baeck's enacted alternative—to speak out—yields

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Leo Baeck, "The Shema," The Leo Baeck Institute Archives, AR 4151, Folder D.
[29] Michael A. Meyer, "The Thought of Leo Baeck: A Religious Philosophy for a Time of Adversity" *Modern Judaism* 19.2 (1999), 108.
[30] "I went through a hard struggle debating whether it was my duty to convince Grünberg that he must repeat what he had heard before the Council of Elders, of which I was an honorary member." Boehm, 293

another motive for his secrecy. Disclosure of information to the public could have had a significant negative impact on the Jewish inmates of Theresienstadt.

THE EFFECT OF COOPERATION AND STRATEGY

Isaiah Trunk has pointed out in his monumental and thorough study of the Judenrats in Eastern European ghettos that the Jewish leadership adopted many strategies when faced with deportation—from the suicide of Czerniakow, to the rescue-through-work policy of Jacob Gens and Chaim Rumkowski, to the participation in armed resistance in the Bialystok ghetto—the final result of which was relatively consistent: almost total annihilation. According to Trunk, "Jewish participation or non-participation in the deportations had no substantial influence—one way or the other—on the final outcome of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe." Every ghetto in Eastern Europe was dissolved and the population murdered in mass within the ghetto vicinity or within one of the death camps.

Theresienstadt was a different case. Unlike the ghettos of Eastern Europe, Theresienstadt was never liquidated completely. Trunk's argument that cooperation did not negatively affect the scale of destruction in Theresienstadt seems applicable, but cooperation coupled with the leadership's strategy may, in fact, have played a significant role in the survival of the ghetto until the end of the war. In other words, Trunk has said that participation had no effect "one way or the other," whereas in Theresienstadt, cooperation had no effect one way, but it did the other. The survival of the ghetto was largely due to its unique status as a display for the international community, but this alone

did not guarantee its security. The decisions of the Jewish leadership at Theresienstadt enabled the survival of the core population.

The strategy of the Jewish leadership to suppress information about Auschwitz and to accept the sacrifice of a part of the population was not unique to Theresienstadt. The head of the Vilna Ghetto, Jacob Gens, and Moshe Merin, the chairman of the Central Council of the Jewish Communities in Upper Eastern Silesia, also endorsed this approach. Both Gens and Merin tried actively to suppress rumors of the death camps and, at the same time, were willing to sacrifice part of the community for the good of the whole.[31] This strategy alone, however, was not sufficient to avoid destruction, but the consequences that may have resulted in the use of other tactics such as armed resistance would have ensured the more rapid destruction of any ghetto in its entirety. Zdenek Lederer similarly believed that in Theresienstadt "any attempt at open defiance would have entailed the liquidation of the Ghetto."[32] The status of Theresienstadt, coupled with the strategy of the leadership, made its survival a unique example among the Nazi-imposed ghettos.

LEO BAECK: ARMED RESISTANCE AND EVASION

Zdenek Lederer, survivor and historian of Theresienstadt, noted that "the merits of a policy of resistance as compared with a policy of compliance were judged by their costs in terms of human lives: it was calculated that in this respect the costs of revolt

[31] Trunk, 400-436.
[32] Lederer, 58.

would be higher."[33] Believing that widespread knowledge of the true nature of the deportations might generate armed resistance and evasive actions, Leo Baeck and the Jewish leadership considered the resulting negative consequences and factored them into their strategy of silence.

The Jewish leadership was well aware of the Nazis' policy of collective reprisal. They had witnessed it. In response to the attempt (May 1942) of the communist Herbert Baum group (many of whom were Jews) to destroy the propaganda exhibition "The Soviet Paradise" in the Berlin *Lustgarten*, the Nazis executed 500 Jews. They forced select members of the *Reichsvereinigung*, including Leo Baeck, to witness the murder of 250 of the victims. The experience moved Baeck to condemn the resistance group. "What they have undertaken was pure madness from the outset," he declared.[34] The Reichsvereinigung denounced resistance a few days later. "The behavior of every individual counts as he carries the responsibility not only for himself and his family, but for all Jews," they proclaimed. "Not for one moment must it be forgotten that every one of us is responsible for all of us, and that the acts of every single individual has implications for this entire community."[35] So too in Theresienstadt were Baeck's actions motivated by concern for the whole of the community.

In his view, an uprising would not save human lives, but in effect cause the destruction of the entire ghetto. Futile armed resistance—as would be the case in Theresienstadt—would serve to demonstrate the honor and dignity of the few. Baeck believed that martyrdom was a holy act, but only for the purpose of *Kiddush ha-Shem*,

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[33] Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt* (London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD, 1953), 165.
[34] Quoted in: Arnold Paucker and Korad Kwiet, "Jewish Leadership and Jewish Resistance" *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism*, David Bankier, ed. (Jerusalem: Berghahn Books, 2000), 388.
[35] This proclamation was drafted to be issued, but it is not clear whether it was ever published because a complete set of the journal does not exist. Quoted in: Ibid, 387.

the sanctification of God's holy name. "Martyrdom is the truest sanctification of the Holy Name . . . where there is the unconditional duty to testify of God through faith in Him."[36] The act of martyrdom in the name of self-pride would have been contrary to Baeck's philosophy of the preservation of Jewish existence. Like armed resistance, escape would also benefit the few while collectively endangering the population at large. Concerned about the continuity of the core of the Theresienstadt population, Baeck thought that the consequences from armed resistance and evasion would not serve the best interest of the community.

Historian Sarah Kavanaugh has suggested that "resistance [in Theresienstadt], or the lack of it, was directly related to knowledge [of the deportations]."[37] This idea, however, is farfetched. Even if the Jews of the ghetto had learned that the deportations went to the death camp Auschwitz, they still lacked arms, organization, and opportunity. The motivation for resistance, although in part influenced by knowledge, was only one factor in the possibility of its manifestation. There were small resistance cells in the ghetto, but they lacked weaponry. Siegfried Lederer had brought several pistols and grenades into the ghetto when he had returned to Theresienstadt during the months of April and May of 1944, but this supply of weaponry was dwarfed by the Nazi arsenal. These cells were also independent from one another and from the Jewish administration, which represented the Jewish population and held a policy against armed resistance. The ghetto police force tracked many of these cells and arrested them.

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[36] Friedlander, *Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 87-88.
[37] Sarah Kavanaugh, *The Jewish Leadership of the Theresienstadt Ghetto: Culture, Identity and Politics,* Unpublished Dissertation (University of South Hampton, 2003), 134.

The possibility for resistance was hindered further by the lack of opportunity. After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, the Nazis took steps in Theresienstadt and in other ghettos to prevent another such occurrence. They arrested Karl Löwenstein, the chief of the ghetto police, in May 1943 and disbanded his well-trained force of 450 men in order to eliminate what could have been the nucleus of a future revolt. The unit was replaced with 150 men, all over the age of forty-five, whom the Nazis believed would not present a threat. Further limiting opportunity was the German creation of "work transports" to reduce the number of young male inmates who posed a potential for armed-resistance. They deported 5000 men (mainly Czech) on a "work transport" on 6 September 1943 and also initiated the mass deportations of fall 1944 by sending out another "work transport" of 5000 young men. Clearly, knowledge alone was not sufficient to spark an uprising. Lacking arms, organization, people, and opportunity, it would have been practically impossible for the Theresienstadt inmates to revolt.

Despite the impracticality in retrospect, Baeck's evaluation of the situation may have considered armed resistance a real possibility, and thus a genuine threat to the survival of the ghetto's core community. Knowing first hand that the Germans instituted collective reprisals for acts of resistance, Baeck assumed that if there were to be an uprising in Theresienstadt, the Nazis would destroy the entire ghetto just as they had done to the Warsaw Ghetto.[38] According to Heinrich Liebrecht's memoirs, Liebrecht had approached Baeck and suggested that he help to organize a revolt. "We owe it to us and before history to sell our lives as dearly as possible by killing as many as possible SS men before they kill us," Liebrecht argued. Knowing the consequences of resistance,

[38] It is questionable whether Baeck and the inmates knew about the Warsaw Uprising. There were rumors of the uprising that circulated through the ghetto, but the details were unclear. According to Heinrich Liebrecht, Baeck had said that "We had heard only rumors of the uprising in Warsaw." Liebrecht, 188.

however, Baeck "begged me at that time to think this plan through further and to discuss it with [him], but at the moment, nobody except us should know about it—nobody."[39]

Baeck did not advocate "going like lambs to the slaughter." He organized a passive resistance movement in case the Nazis attempted to destroy the ghetto population. Baeck told Eric Boehm that:

> about the middle of January, 1945, I heard of feverish activity in the town fortifications. Deep tunnels were being dug into them, allegedly as storerooms. That did not appear likely; their real purpose could only have been gas chambers. We spread the word that if the SS ordered any groups to go to these tunnels, they should lie down—simply lie down—wherever they were. There were perhaps three hundred SS men attached to Theresienstadt, and it would have taken two of them to carry one of us to a gas chamber.[40]

Baeck's goal was continuity of the community, whereas the goal of armed resistance was to die with honor. Baeck's lie-down protest was a response to the Germans' attempt to destroy the entire community, whereas armed resistance would have been the initiation of their own destruction.

Like anyone who defied Nazi authority, the Theresienstadt inmates bore collective responsibility for escapees. In retaliation for an escape, the Germans deported the family of the fugitive and issued collective punishment against the rest of the camp. In most cases, the collective punishment would be an early curfew.[41] This made most prisoners reluctant to attempt an escape. Fugitives who were captured were tortured in the

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[39] Quoted in: Liebrecht, 187.
[40] Boehm, 294; For more information on the construction of the gas chambers in Theresienstadt and also the creation of the "Duck Pond," another place designed for the murdering of Jews, see: František Fuchs, "Building Gas Chambers in Terezín," *Terezin* (Prague: Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, 1965), 300-303; Arnošt Weiss, "The Duck Pond," *Terezin* (Prague: Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, 1965), 304-305.
[41] Baker, 61.

Small Fortress and subsequently murdered. Even if there were to have been increases in escape attempts as a result of widespread knowledge, it was difficult to hide in the surrounding area. Their emaciated appearance and lack of identification papers made fugitives from Theresienstadt easy targets. The flat and open Czech countryside around Theresienstadt also discouraged escape. There were no heavily wooded areas or mountains in which to hide.[42] Most of those prisoners who attempted an escape from the ghetto were captured; only thirty-three succeeded in escaping from Theresienstadt without being apprehended.[43] If an inmate on a transport list evaded deportation, another prisoner was substituted. An increase in evasion— would have either by escape from the camp or escape from a transport—had a negative affect on the Theresienstadt community at large.

In addition to a low number of escapes, there was also a low suicide rate. Of the approximately 140,000 prisoners who passed through the camp, there were only 273 successful suicides along with an additional 211 attempts; about half of the total number was carried out in 1942.[44] Several factors helped minimize suicide in Theresienstadt. The first was the establishment of the Strosstrupe (assault squad), a group of inmates led by the physician Victor Frankl that sought to help inmates overcome the shock of Theresienstadt. Focusing on the most vulnerable prisoners— epileptics, neurotics, the physically sick and the elderly— the Stosstruppe sought to engage constructively those who might be prone to commit suicide. The Stosstruppe's success convinced Frankl to establish an intelligence service that would discover those inmates who had expressed a

[42] IBID.
[43] Lederer, 61-62; George Berkley claimed there were 37 successful escape attempts. The number of unsuccessful attempts is unknown. Berkley, 61.
[44] Adler, 312.

suicidal inclination, and dissuade them from this course.[45] Perhaps the key factor in the low suicide rates, however, was the widespread ignorance about the east, and the strong hope for survival that ensued. Hopelessness, or a lack of hope is a significant risk factor for depression and suicidal behavior.[46] Sociologists have empirically linked hopelessness with suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and completed suicides.[47] Fred Hanna, a sociologist who has studied suicidal behavior, has further argued, "studies that show suicide to be related to hopelessness also suggest that the presence of hope is a vital aspect of living."[48] Sociological studies have affirmed Baeck's assumption that decreased morale would have lead to increased suicide.[49] If Baeck had shared his knowledge about the fate of the deportations, the morale of the inmates would have been shattered. The hopelessness that would have followed may well have prompted significantly large numbers of Theresienstadt inmates to commit suicide.

It seems that Leo Baeck was convinced that widespread knowledge about the east might have resulted in an increase in evasion, suicide, and or an uprising. He evaluated the consequences of these possibilities and decided to conceal his knowledge. Concerned with the wellbeing of the core of the community, Baeck decided that ignorance was for the good of all.

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[45] George E. Berkley, *Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt* (Boston: Branden Books, 1993), 123-124.
[46] Fred Hanna, "Suicide and Hope: The common ground," *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 13 (1991), 459-472.
[47] Parveen K. Grewal and James E. Porter, "Hope Theory: A Framework for Understanding Suicidal Action," *Death Studies* 31 (2007), 134.
[48] Hanna, 459.
[49] As Leonard Baker has noted, " There have been persistent rumors through the years that Natalie Baeck, Leo Baeck's wife, committed suicide because of the pressure of living under the Nazi regime. Undoubtedly the stress of living in Berlin contributed to her death, but there is no indication that she died of [anything] other than natural causes." Baker 214n. Whether or note Natalie Baeck committed suicide, Baeck's concern over the issue is clear in his emphasis on morale.

CONCLUSIONS

Leo Baeck may not have provided us with the most detailed explanation for his silence, but what he left unsaid can be understood through other voices. His philosophy put an emphasis on hope and on morale. He preached that without a vision of the future, life has no continuity. If a Theresienstadt inmate knew what truly awaited those who were deported, he might not be able to endure. The precepts of rabbinic law—by which Baeck lived his life—argue in favor of the survival of the core. The continuity of the few would ensure the continuity of Jewish life. Baeck knew that there was nothing that he could do to save every inmate, but he tried to pastor those who remained. Baeck's leadership policy helped in part to ensure the survival of Theresienstadt. Still, despite what appears to be a reasonable rationale for his actions, Baeck's behavior has prompted critical questions. Baeck may have believed that it was better to leave some things unsaid, but many survivors and a number of historians have not found virtue in his silence.

-5-

How We Have Heard the Silence

No one envies the Council of Elders their [*sic*!] power over life and death[1]

—Norbert Troller

The Jewish leadership throughout Nazi-occupied Europe felt a responsibility over their communities, yet were powerless to change its overall fate. They had ample authority within their community, but nearly no power vis-à-vis the Germans. With their influence, they hoped that the decisions they made would help their communities. Some of these leaders have been seen as heroes and others as tyrants. In the case of Leo Baeck, survivors and historians have had mixed reactions to his behavior as a Jewish leader during the war. This chapter seeks to analyze Baeck from different perspectives and present a range of assessments for his actions and behavior. Perhaps most important, this chapter will discuss how Baeck viewed his own actions.

THE GRAY ZONE

Primo Levi, Italian Auschwitz survivor and philosopher of the Holocaust, used the term "the gray zone," to describe the role and function of camp inmates with the privilege of power. "The ascent of the privileged, not only in the Lager but in all human coexistence, is an anguishing but unfailing phenomenon . . . . This gray zone possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our

[1] [1] Norberg Troller, *Theresienstadt: Hitler's Gift to the Jews* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 48.

need to judge."[2] Within the gray zone, the concept of collaborator and victim converged; the victim became an agent of the Final Solution. A number of Auschwitz prisoners fell under the spell of the gray zone, but so too did other members of the Jewish leadership outside Auschwitz. Levi pointed to Chaim Rumkowski, the head of the Judenrat in Lodz Ghetto. Rumkowski was "a small tyrant, impotent with those above him and omnipotent with those below him."[3] Viewing himself as "the King of the Jews," he abused his power at the expense of the community. Under the influence of a rationale within the gray zone, Rumkowski emerged as a collaborator.

The Germans forced every Judenrat throughout Europe to cooperate with them; that was the purpose of their existence.[4] Collaboration took cooperation a step nearer the perpetrator. Collaboration falls into the gray zone, and reflects moral ambiguity or outright dissolution of moral behavior. Frequently the leader was willing to place his own interests before those of the community. Not all Jews in positions of power or authority fell into the gray zone. Leo Baeck, a man who clearly exhibited strong moral fiber, acted upon cogent judgment. He was a man "who would not and did not falter when a moral choice had to be made," noted Albert Friedlander, a student and biographer of Leo Baeck.[5] He was not motivated by personal gain, but by his responsibility to lead the community. Attempting to the best of his ability to be impartial and knowing that a life was sacrificed for every saved person, Baeck sought to live and operate at the highest ethical level. He made no attempt to secure privileges for his family or friends at the cost

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[2] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 42.
[3] Ibid, 64.
[4] Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 572.
[5] Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 48.

of others: his nephew, niece, and friends were deported from Theresienstadt while he remained silent.[6] The motivation for silence was not self-serving, but self-tormenting. Its purpose was for the good of the community and not for Baeck himself or his intimate circle. Keeping his knowledge about the east secret was not a judgment made in the gray zone. As we have seen, Baeck's silence was consistent with his philosophy on hope and morale, and upon cogent thinking.

While Baeck's decision to keep silent was founded on his own initiative, he and other members of the *Reichsvereinigung* also received orders from the Germans to treat the information that the Gestapo disclosed to them as confidential. This order was backed by a threat to their lives. It is unclear, however, what information was supposed to be kept confidential considering that there is no evidence that the Gestapo ever disclosed anything to the *Reichsvereinigung* regarding the atrocities in the east. The only available evidence has suggested that Baeck received information from victims and Germans with good contacts, and not from the Gestapo. As we have seen in the last chapter, Baeck had many reasons for keeping secret the information that he received, but it doesn't seem that submissiveness to the Germans was one of them. Just because the Nazis sought to create a wall of silence around their crimes in the east does not mean that Baeck, who believed that ignorance was in the best interest of the Jews, acted complicitly in this regard. It seems most likely that Baeck's policy of silence straddled a line between a convergence of goals with the Nazis and cooperation. In many other ways, Baeck cooperated with the Nazis, but in this regard, Baeck's rationale was certainly not in the gray zone, but within a realm of lucid color.

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[6] Jacob Jacobson "*Bruchstuecke 1939-1945*" Leo Baeck Institute Archives, ME 329.

Like Baeck, other members of the Council of Elders, most notably the Elder of the Jews Paul Eppstein, were knowledgeable about the fate of the transports and about Auschwitz. The other members of the Jewish leadership also endorsed a policy of silence. Their decision to keep this knowledge secret was also not a case of collaboration. Still, in other regards, Eppstein was a collaborator. The animosity between Baeck and Eppstein stemmed from these collaborative actions, in which Eppstein abused his power for his own gain. Eppstein, a married man, exploited his position of power in order to secure sex from young women in the camp.[7] Baeck viewed this behavior as unbefitting a Jewish leader. He told Max Plaut, a friend and fellow inmate, that "he would refuse, should he and Dr. Eppstein survive the camp, to ever work together again with Dr. Eppstein."[8] Shortly after Baeck made this statement, the Nazis arrested Paul Eppstein, and shot him. Eppstein operated in the gray zone; his taste for power coupled with uncertainty about his fate compelled him to choose a collaborationist course.

GIVING ADVICE

Baeck's coreligionists came to him for guidance during the difficult times of the Nazi era. Jews held him, the symbol of German-Jewry, in the highest regard; he was their spiritual leader. "If you were to ever imagine a sage, it was him," noted Golly Dowinsky, a German-Jewish inmate at Theresienstadt. "You would only have respect for such a

[7] See: Vera Schiff, *Theresienstadt: The Town the Nazis gave to the Jews* (Toronto: Lugus Publications, 1996), 72, 100.
[8] Jacob Jacobson "*Bruchstuecke 1939-1945*" Leo Baeck Institute Archives, ME 329.

person. Everybody had respect for him."[9] There are inmates, such as Ilse Blumenthal-Weiss, who have claimed that Baeck's counsel helped her to survive.[10] Yet, not all of the advice that Baeck imparted was seen in such a positive light. When people came to him for counsel concerning the deportations, his judgment was conflicted, and his advice was not always beneficial. How could he, on the one hand, maintain his policy of silence, and on the other, give someone advice about the deportations without compromising his secret? Many have found Baeck's judgment faltered on these matters.

Golly Dowinsky's husband had been deported from Theresienstadt on one of the first "work transports" in October 1944. Shortly afterwards, "an announcement was given out by the Gestapo that the relatives of those who were deported may volunteer to join their relatives at this working camp." She had previously volunteered to be included on a transport from Berlin to Theresienstadt when her then fiancé (later husband), Sally Herzberg, was selected for deportation in May 1943.[11] "I was back in the same predicament as before, but I was a little more smarter but a little more skeptical . . . . I didn't know what to do," Golly remembered.[12] "Having had close access to Dr. Baeck; having been married by Baeck; knowing Rabbi Baeck to be one of the greatest rabbis in Germany and the saintliest in Terezin, I asked to speak with him in the hope that consulting with him would surely help me make the right decision." Golly sat in Baeck's apartment and explained her predicament and her qualms. She recalled Baeck looking at her, and saying the following:

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[9] Golly Dowinsky, interview by Rivie Zeiler and Margaret Agne, *Fortunoff Video Archive*, MS 1322, 23 October 1992.
[10] Ruth Schwertfeger, *Women of Theresienstadt, Voices From A Concentration Camp* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 86.
[11] Because Golly Dowinsky was half-Jewish and was working in the Jewish hospital in Berlin, she had been somewhat protected from the previous waves of deportations.
[12] Quoted in: Golly Dowinsky, interview by Rivie Zeiler and Margaret Agne, *Fortunoff Video Archive*, MS 1322, 23 October 1992.

> Frau Dr. Herzberg. Now please just try to imagine the following: the train, carrying those family members who decided to follow their loved ones in order to be reunited, slowly pulls into the train station where your husband is standing on the platform anxiously awaiting your arrival. Can you imagine his feelings if you are not among those who came to be together with their loved one again?![13]

Leo Baeck did not say directly "you should go on the transport," but he did encourage Golly to choose this option. Golly was confused when she went to Baeck for guidance. Her emotions conflicted with her common sense. "What to do? One's heart said YES! You'll be together again. One's common sense said NO! Be careful! Think before you act." It is unclear what may have motivated Leo Baeck to advise Golly Dowinsky in such a manner. In retrospect, it is clear that his advice was not in Golly's best interest. Baeck, who always attempted to serve the interest of his community and to remain impartial on matters of community survival, could have, and perhaps should have, abstained from giving advice on such an issue. By the time Golly came to him in October 1944, Baeck knew full well what awaited deportees in the east. Golly Dowinsky believed that an easier and more humane response would have been for Baeck to tell her, "I am terribly sorry, but this is one decision that only you yourself can make . . . . The known, Frau Herzberg, is still better than the unknown."[14] Influenced by Baeck and her own longing to be with her husband, Golly Dowinsky volunteered for the transport, and was deported to Auschwitz. By the time she arrived, her husband had already been murdered in the gas chambers. Golly was more fortunate. She survived the selection, and endured

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[13] Quoted in: Golly Dowinsky, e-mail message to Miriam Mertzbacher; forwarded to the author at Golly Dowinsky's request, 11 April 2007.See also: Golly Dowinsky, interview by Rivie Zeiler and Margaret Agne, *Fortunoff Video Archive*, MS 1322, 23 October 1992.

[14] Quoted in: Golly Dowinsky, e-mail message to the author, 18 April 2007.

the horror of Auschwitz. Golly has not been able to understand why Rabbi Leo Baeck would give her such advice, nor has she ever been able to forgive him.

Golly Dowinsky was not the only person Leo Baeck so advised. Anneliese Daniel was deported from Berlin to Theresienstadt in 1943. Like Golly Dowinksy, Anneliese had worked at the Jewish Hospital in Berlin. Her father had gone underground in 1937 and fled to Holland and her mother and sister had left on a transport from Berlin to the east in December 1941. She had no family in the ghetto. But in the summer 1944, she miraculously ran into her father; she had not seen him in seven years. He had been interned in Westerbork before the Germans deported him to Theresienstadt. Shortly after their reunion, the October deportations began and her father had orders to leave with a transport. Anneliese did not want to separate from her father again. She hadn't seen him for seven years and was determined to remain with him. So she went to Baeck for advice. She had not previously met him, but was aware of his reputation. According to Daniel, Baeck told her: "it is your duty to follow your father."[15] Like Golly Dowinsky, Anneliese was eager to remain with her only family. She volunteered for a transport that left three days after her father's deportation.[16] "We had absolutely no idea what was in store for us," Anneliese recalled. Her father was murdered upon arrival at Auschwitz; Anneliese passed the selection and survived. She too, has never fathomed why Baeck advised her in such a manner.

Leo Baeck did not consistently advise people to enlist on transports to the east. He advised Herbert Strauss to do just the opposite. Herbert Strauss had been Leo Baeck's student at the *Hochshule* in Berlin. He was an aspiring rabbi amidst the hardships of

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[15] Anneliese Dainel, phone interview with Joshua Franklin, 21 April 2007.
[16] Anneliese Dainel, e-mail message to Joshua Franklin, 21 April 2007.

everyday Jewish life in Nazi Germany. Although Strauss was his student and close friend, Baeck kept silent about his knowledge. Shortly after the large-scale transports began to roll out from Berlin, Strauss went to Baeck for advice on whether or not to enlist for deportation. "I had lost my own father and some wonderful friends to be 'resettled in the east.' At most, I believed we would face a harsh Darwinian struggle to maintain ourselves," noted Strauss. When he approached Baeck for guidance, he "discouraged me when I told him that I would be ready to go east with the Gemeinde and help, if help was needed."[17] Strauss did not volunteer, but his girlfriend (later wife) Lotte was selected for deportation in October 1942. Strauss and Lotte evaded the transport and went into hiding. Strauss again met with Baeck while he was underground in 1943; this was shortly before Baeck was deported to Theresienstadt. Baeck continued to conceal his knowledge from his student.

After the war, when Strauss learned that Leo Baeck had known about the atrocities in the east, he was upset that Baeck did not tell him when he had gone to him for counsel. "Why did he keep me in the dark when I visited him in his home near Schöneberg Park (AM Park 15) in January 1943, after I had been in hiding from the Gestapo for over two months? . . . Could the few students and teachers who held out at the *Hochschule* to the end have saved themselves if they had known the truth?" Eventually Strauss came to peace with how Baeck dealt with him.

> My own judgment vacillated considerably during the early postwar years, until I saw his behavior in terms of the irreconcilable dilemmas of decision-making in a situation beyond his control, balancing the consequences of one action against

[17] Herbert A. Strauss, *In the Eye of the Storm: Growing up Jewish in Germany 1918-1943* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 192.

> another, against estimated effects on human life and on institutions, and the anticipated behavior of the forces involved.

Herbert Strauss, unlike Golly Dowinsky and Anneliese Daniel, did not have to endure the horrors of Auschwitz as a consequence of following Baeck's advice. Baeck handled Strauss completely differently. In all three instances, Baeck did not break his policy of silence, but in Strauss's case, he discouraged him from enlisting on a transport. The context of Baeck's counsel— Berlin versus Theresienstadt—differed. Still, it is baffling as to why Baeck gave contrary advice. Perhaps he did not want to discourage Dowinsky and Daniel from following a choice that they had been leaning toward prior to their meeting. Dowinsky wanted to follow her husband and Daniel did not want to be separated from her father again, whereas Strauss came to Baeck asking if volunteering for the transport could best serve the community. Baeck may have felt that he could not dissuade Golly and Anneliese from following their impulse without exposing his secret, while with Strauss, he simply could imply that his help would not be needed in the east. Still, Baeck easily could have abstained from encouraging Golly and Anneliese from volunteering by insisting that the choice was theirs. Perhaps Baeck felt that it was the responsibility of women to be with their families. Baeck may have counseled many as he did Golly Dowinsky and Anneliese Daniel or perhaps others with the advice he gave to Herbert Strauss. Their stories, however, are yet to be discovered, or have been lost among the 1.1 million Jews whom the Nazis murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Baeck had to make difficult decisions, and in many cases, horrible consequences ensured. Baeck may have believed that his decisions were for the best but, as we will see, he was also remorseful about the ramifications.

THE EXISTENTIAL RIGHT TO KNOW

Should Leo Baeck have told his coreligionists about what awaited them in the east? Existentialist philosophers have observed that a person has an intrinsic right to know what another person knows about him. The Christian existentialist philosopher Paul Tillich held that "the full existential truth should always be made available." Tillich disagreed with Baeck's policy of withholding information; he commented, "there is one point where I might have disagreed with Baeck if I had been in his place, in the concentration camp . . . . I might have shared the last iota of information, the fact that the way of those railroad tracks to Auschwitz led to certain death." Tillich noted that "in the same way, I believe that the incurable patient should *always* be told the full truth."[18]

Emil Fackenheim, a philosopher and survivor of the Holocaust, also used the analogy of Baeck's silence with the existential right of a terminal patient to know his fate. "In this decision, was he right?," asked Fackenheim. He answered his own question by stating "basic for philosophy—especially the 'existentialist,' such as Martin Heidegger's––is that doctors knowing their patients will die must tell them the truth."[19] Baeck's response to demands for individual existentialist rights was simply, "living in the expectation of death . . . would only be the harder."[20] This existential quandary was further complicated by Baeck's skeptical hope—which was correct—that there would be survivors from deportations. "Death was not certain for all: there was selection for slave

[18] Albert H. Friedlander, "A Final Conversation with Paul Tillich," XXXI *Reconstructionist* (12 November 1965), 24.
[19] Emil L. Fackenheim, "In Memory of Leo Baeck, and Other Jewish Thinkers "in Dark Times": Once more, "After Auschwitz, Jerusalem"" *A Quarterly of Jewish Life and Thought* 51:3 (2002), 283.
[20] Eric H. Boehm, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003), 293.

labor," he noted.[21] Those who were deported on transports to the east were not "terminal," but in a life threatening environment. For the individual, Baeck believed that ignorance was beneficial.

More important, Baeck also believed that the emphasis should not be on the individual; he felt that existentialism placed too great a stress upon an individual's rights. "The philosophy of existentialism emphasizes the responsibility of the individual resulting from his existence," he declared.[22] The responsibility of the individual, however, was to his community as a whole. The individual "has something which is altogether his own, his belonging only to him—*his* thoughts, *his* wishes, *his* fortune and *his* burden, that of which no one else knows."[23] But continuity of the community trumped individual right. Baeck believed that "everything in which the community seeks the coherence and finds continuity, where parts join a whole, here finds its statement and its affirmation."[24] As we have seen, Baeck believed that the repercussions of revealing information would have jeopardized the existence of the community. Baeck was an essentialist, not an existentialist. That is, he believed that the individual, the "I," is part of a larger context of existence that seeks to serve the community, which seeks to serve a greater purpose—unity and oneness. "All individualities, all systems, all laws are terminated and find their unity and totality in a final . . .totality and unity . . . system, . . . law . . . individuality . . . continuity . . . in which all existence has its essential existence, all forms of life has its basic form and thus finds its total form."[25]

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 256.
[23] Leo Baeck, "The Shema," Leo Baeck Institute Archives, AR 4151, Folder D.
[24] Leo Baeck, *This People Israel: The meaning of Jewish existence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 198.
[25] Friedlander, 250. cf. Leo Baeck "Individuum ineffabile," XV *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, (1948), 389-390.

HERO OR VILLAIN?

How have people come to see Leo Baeck in light of his leadership during the Holocaust? On the one hand, he has been revered as "a saint for our times," but on the other, he has been demonized as the "Jewish Führer."[26] Logical arguments have been adduced for both positions. But Baeck was not a radical character, and should not be understood in such extreme terms.

Baeck preached the message of maintaining high moral and ethical standards, and many viewed his behavior during the Holocaust as representations of this philosophy. Joshua Liebman, a rabbi and admirer of Baeck, believed that Baeck was a contemporary Jewish hero. He was "on a par with the Hindu martyr and the Christian hero . . . a living saint," wrote Liebman. "Leo Baeck can be for all of us . . . the proof that man truly is created in the image and likeness of God."[27] Other admirers of Baeck, have distinguished him as a modern day prophet. Eva Reichmann, one of the members of the *Reichsvertretung*, noted, "Leo Baeck, his name and the reverence . . . [bore] the likeness of a prophet."[28] To those who praised him, Leo Baeck held the status of one of Judaism's greatest and influential men. He carried forward the line of Rabbi Akiba, Rashi, Maimonidies, and Joseph Karo. The name Leo Baeck would be "the one name that lives on when—in an ensuing time— we remember only the group and forget the individuals," declared Adolpf Leschnitzer, a personal friend of Baeck's. Yet Albert Friedlander, a

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[26] Quoted in: Joshua Loth Leibman, "A Living Saint: Rabbi Baeck," *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1948), 40; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (NY: Viking Press, 1963), 105; This label was deleted from future editions of Arendt's book. Later, in an interview, she commended Baeck for his "unquestionable courage and disregard for personal danger." Friedlander, 12n1

[27] Liebman, 42.

[28] Eva Reichmann, "Symbol of German Jewry," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* II (1957), 21.

biographer and student of Baeck, has insisted that if we are to see Baeck as a paradigm of Jewish greatness, we should not turn him into a saint, for this would destroy his example and make it impossible for future generations to emulate his legacy.[29] The representation a great leader and pious rabbi has been the most popular representation of Baeck's character.

There are others who see a disconnect between Baeck's ethical and moral philosophy, and his actions during the war. Hannah Arendt, a renowned political philosopher and a refugee, labeled Leo Baeck as the "Jewish Führer," implying that he was a dictator of the Jews and a collaborator. Recha Freir, a German-Jewish woman who organized Youth Aliyah to Palestine during the Nazi era, also argued that Leo Baeck was a collaborator, and unjustly glorified. "It is ridiculous to glorify him as a saint and a hero," she asserted. "Rabbi Baeck was informed by the Nazis of what awaited the Jews in Theresienstadt but did not reveal it to anyone, though many a Jew might have saved himself had he but an inkling of the fate he was to expect."[30] For many of the same reasons that Baeck was glorified—his role in the *Reichsvereinigung*, his silence, and his leadership in Theresienstadt—he was also criticized. Still others have defamed him. Rabbi Jay Litvin not only alleged that Leo Baeck was guilty of "collaborating with the Nazis," but also of "opposing Jews who tried to save children from the Nazi hell. He is also accused of misbehaving in Theresienstadt, where he is alleged to have exploited his position to cause inconvenience to Orthodox Jews, particularly Rabbis."[31] Many who

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[29] Albert H. Friedlander, "Leo Baeck in Theresienstadt/Terezin," *What Kind of God: Essays in Honor of Richard L. Rubenstein*, eds. Betty Rogers Rubenstein and Michael Berenbaum (Lanham, University Press of America, 1995),
[30] Recha Freier, "Letter to the Editor: The Guilty Men" *The Jewish Quarterly* 12:2 (Summer 1964), 12.
[31] Jay Litvin, "The Guilty Men: Call for an International Tribunal," *The Jewish Quarterly* 12:2 (Summer 1964), 11.

knew Baeck personally have countered these claims, but the picture that emerges is of a man who was not universally revered.

Most of the evidence and testimony about Leo Baeck reveals a person of greatness and high integrity, but a person who was not without flaws. He was human—subject to fears, doubts, and anguish—and it is human nature to make mistakes. Whether his silence was justified or an error is a matter of historical judgment and it is not unreasonable to conclude in some respect he faltered. Baeck's actions should be viewed in the historical context of Jewish responses to Nazi persecution, and not on the bi-polar axis of hero or villain.

SILENCE AND GUILT

Like many Holocaust survivors, Leo Baeck was reluctant to talk or write about his experiences during the war. Speaking about the traumas of the Holocaust was in a sense re-living the event.[32] He kept the details of his experience mostly to himself. When Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri asked him to document his activities during the war, Baeck politely responded, "I will gladly write for you—as soon as things have calmed down around me."[33] As his friends have noted, Baeck had a particular inability to say "no;" he never fulfilled Ball-Kaduri's request for a brief or comprehensive account of his activities, and probably never had any intention of doing so.[34] Having made "choiceless choices" that affected whether people lived or died, Leo Baeck lived with guilt. Whether or not he

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[32] Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 87.
[33] Letter from Leo Baeck to Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri, 30 September 1945. Kurt Jacob Ball-Kaduri, "Leo Baeck and Contemporary History" *Yad Vashem Studies* VI (1967), 123.
[34] Ernst Simon, "Comments on the Article on the late Rabbi Baeck" *Yad Vashem Studies* VI (1967), 131-134.

believed that his silence about the atrocities in the east was justified, he was remorseful about it.

This attitude was never expressed directly in any of his postwar writings and conversations. But in his sole surviving lecture from Theresienstadt, there is an apologetic proclamation that must not have been clear to the inmates who listened to him preach. The words become comprehensible in retrospect with the information that we have now so that we can see that Baeck was reflecting upon his own path of silence. In the closing lines of the lecture he delivered about a month after he had met with Siegfried Lederer, Baeck proclaimed:

> Historians . . . have often remained silent when they should have spoken. There is a history of silences in the history of mankind. How many things have men kept silent about when they should have spoken! About torture and slavery, about witch trials and the courts of the Inquisition, about every form of violence, about every historical crime for which justification has been sought in expediency and success. How often have the history writers, too, been silent and how often have they been ready with complacent words![35]

Lecturing on the history of the ancient world—Rome, Greece, and Israel—Baeck underscored his omission of the contemporary "form of violence" and "historical crime." His audience understood that. But he was not simply silencing the known from his listeners—disease, starvation, and imprisonment in the ghetto. He also elided what was unknown to his audience—Auschwitz. Baeck was admitting to and apologizing for his silence without his listeners even knowing. As was typical of Baeck's lectures, this was a

[35] Leo Baeck, "The Writing of History," *The Synagogue Review* (November 1962), 8-9.

"private conversation with God."[36] And he concluded by declaring that the "decisive advance in the development of mankind" will be when "men are not silent when they should speak nor speak when they ought to keep silent."[37] In his own case, Baeck was faced with a problem with no solution. He believed silence was his best option, but knew that it would not remedy the situation. In this way, the ramifications of his silence anguished him.

[36] Quoted from a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Community of Berlin. Fritz Bamberger, "Leo Baeck: The Man and the Idea" *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture* 1 (1958), 2.
[37] Leo Baeck, "The Writing of History," 9.

CONCLUSION

Leo Baeck emerged as the leader of German Jewry in the final years before its destruction. In that role, he aimed to serve the best interest of his people. Yet during the dark era of the Holocaust, the best interest was not always clear. When the Nazis began their genocidal campaign, there was little that Baeck or any other Jewish leader could do to counter its force. He became a powerless leader. Forced to make "choiceless choices," Baeck acted in accordance with what he thought would be most beneficial for his people.

Leo Baeck received information from various credible sources about massacres and death camps in the east and consequently developed an understanding about the Nazis' plan to annihilate European Jewry. He decided that it was better to conceal this knowledge rather than to disclose it to the public. This was not an easy choice for Baeck, but he believed it was the right choice. He reasoned that disclosure of information to the public would not change their fate for the better. Knowledge of the east would deplete hope and without hope, one could not survive.

After arriving in Theresienstadt in January 1943, Baeck avoided participation in the Jewish administration for as long as possible so that he could function as a rabbi and not a bureaucrat. As the former president of the *Reichsvertretung* and the *Reichsvereinigung*, Baeck recognized that the Jewish administration had no real power. He believed, however, that he could serve the community well as a rabbi. A rabbi had the power to inspire hope, to connect the people with their faith, and to be a true leader of the community. In this way, Baeck became a teacher of the children, a lecturer to masses, a visitor of the sick, and a pastor to the population. He lived up to becoming "a descendant from rabbis," the inscription which he later requested on his tombstone. Keeping his

knowledge about the east a secret from the inmates who were in jeopardy of being deported was essential to maintain the hope that he worked so arduously to arouse.

Baeck did not deceive the community, but withheld information from them concerning the fate of those the Germans sent on transports. In his view, what the inmates did not know would help them to maintain hope and to survive. Baeck understood that not everyone would survive, but he believed that it was his duty to save what he could. The consequences of disclosure might, in Baeck's view, not only have resulted in low morale, but also in the complete liquidation of the ghetto. Keeping his knowledge secret was part of the leadership's strategy to attempt to ensure the survival of the core. And indeed, this tactic may have proved successful in Theresienstadt.

How can we judge Baeck's choiceless choice? It is easy in retrospect to find both fault and brilliance in his judgment. On the one hand, he kept silent while deportees unknowingly went to their death; he may have even encouraged inmates to volunteer. On the other hand, he sought to help preserve the core of Theresienstadt's population. And he contributed to raising and sustaining the morale among the population. While survivors and historians have debated whether Baeck's silence was right or wrong, the voices of those who went to the gas chambers cannot be heard at all.

Baeck was tormented by his decision and he was critical of himself. Despite his impeccable moral and ethical character, he could not find a solution to an impossible dilemma. He hoped the choice he made served to preserve his people, but he never enjoyed certainty that it did.

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