



A SHORT HISTORY OF

HERZL LODGE

B'NAI B'RITH

608

A TEXT FROM A TALK BY MEL LUSTGARTEN GIVEN AT
A DINNER IN HONOR ON HIS RETIREMENT AS SECRETARY
OF HERZL LODGE FOR 15 YEARS

May 23, 1976

SHAMROCK HILTON HOTEL
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Thank you very much for the honors that you have bestowed upon me, and now let me tell you something about my favorite subject, B'nai B'rith, its history and a short review of my favorite lodge, Herzl #148.

B'nai B'rith means "Sons of the Covenant"; B'nai is an abbreviation form of Banim, meaning sons or children, B'rith means Covenant, or pact or agreement. In combination, the two words can be translated into two equally correct translations, Sons of the Covenant, or Children of the Covenant. The founders wished to embrace the noble objective of the covenant, made by God with Abraham. B'nai B'rith was founded on the lower East Side of New York City in 1843. Today it is the oldest and largest Jewish Service organization in the world. B'nai B'rith has been performing community services longer than the Salvation Army, 38 years longer than the Red Cross, 37 years older than the Knights of Columbus, and over 70 years the oldest of such ancient organizations as, Kiwanis International, Lions Club, the American Legion, and is only one year older than the YMCA.

Today B'nai B'rith embraces a vast network of departments, with activities in defense of civil rights, community and social services, youth welfare, veterans programs, aid to Israel and education and activity with the United Nations. B'nai B'rith subscribes to the platform of human rights, brotherhood and interfaith unity. I could go into more detail of B'nai B'rith services and how they function, but that is a subject all to itself, since I want to highlight some of our own lodges history.

In 1891 the only synagogue in Houston, decided to depart from Orthodox and embrace Reform, a schism occurred in its membership. Fifteen years later in 1906 these differences evidenced themselves in the formation of another B'nai B'rith lodge. There were already two here, the Star and Houston lodges. The new lodge was given the name Herzl after the stalwart in Jewish life who led us to Israel in 1948. From the start the lodge was predominately orthodox. It took about 20 years before a shift occurred and today our lodge membership consists of orthodox, conservative and reformed brothers.

Most of the early founders of the lodge were men of stature. The lodges first president was Charles Mendelson. Meetings were held on the 3rd floor of the Masonic building at East and Main Street, later destroyed by fire. The meetings were moved to the 2nd floor on Jackson Street until 1940. The programs were full and rich literary fare, both vocal and instrumental, with such live issues as shall the Bicher Shalom Society determine whether we shall have a Chanukah Ball and how the proceeds shall be divided. There was always leaders Tiras, who was a president of Herzl Lodge, who always got publicity in the Houston Post newspaper. The Houston Chronicle was then on upstart. Ben Harowitz and S.J. Washelmer who provided both conveyance and animals for the lodges annual hayrides. Turner Hall was the scene of the first Chanukah Ball, which of course was instituted by Herzl Lodge. Came World War II and Herzl Lodge adopted its quota of half a dozen Polish, Lithuanian or Russian youngsters who were orphaned. Our boys went into uniform. One of the first Marine casualties was Nathan Pizer whose father Sam Pizer graced our meetings for many years.

The summer slack was forestalled by watermelon parties. The first at the Westheimer home on Merkel Street. The tradition was kept up for many years. First it was Joe Weingarten who furnished melons, then Paul Lang, later Saul Horowitz and then Topek Produce Co. During both wars the wives of Herzl members took on the task of selling war bonds in the downtown booths.

In 1947 Herzl lodge founded the Max Westheimer Memorial Library at the University of Houston in memory of one of our great secretaries. We have given upward of one thousand volumes dealing with Jewish culture and history. It has been often said that the lodge needs a permanent fund to make this library a work shop for students who wish to enter the rabbinate or ministry.

A decision was made to recruit the younger men and establish them in office. It paid rich dividends, Jake and Ben Leff, J.O. Barlowitz, William M. Nathan, Harry Maltz and Harry Dow, all became officers of the lodge.

In 1953 Herzl Lodge sponsored the Ice Capades, under the presidency of David Berg. In 1954, the lodge sponsored an Initiation Dance at the Rice Ballroom, with the Buddy Brock orchestra furnishing the music. Herzl members helped raise money for the swimming pool at the old Jewish Community Center on Herman Drive. Then there was the Chanukah Ball at the Rice with Shep Fields and his orchestra. At about that time the lodge had a membership of 650 and their goal was 1,000. I found a few copies of the Herzl Life our lodge bulletin of 1953. One article read, "Congratulations to Mrs. Halse Topek, charming wife of the districts first vicepresident for being such a fine hostess of our last board meeting," another copy read, "One of the lodges new members Mel Lustgarten Display Manager for the Finger Furniture Co. won the first prize in a national Westinghouse display contest. The prize was a shining brand new Coupe De Ville Cadillac. Then a copy of the 1954 bulletin had an article that said, "Mr. & Mrs. Max Rosen were congratulated on their sons Alan Davids Bar Mitzva . "

In 54 I remember attending a modern Jewish Thought Discussion by 4 Rabbis at the Jewish Community Center which drew a standing room only crowd. On January 22, 1956 Herzl Lodge celebrated Fifty years of service in B'nai B'rith, with a big dinner and play titled, "The First Fifty Years." Mrs. Leona Liedecker was the director and Dr. Marcus Levinson was the author. Will Nathan was the consultant. Among those on the program were Max Rosen, Will Nathan, David Berg and Aaron Topek. I served the lodge in many offices and as its president in 1960 and became the Financial secretary the next year, and served the lodge in that office until 1973. The presidents that I served under were, Jack Forman, Sol Kobb, Sidney Katzoff, Ben Friedman, Irving Wilson, Bob Schwartz, Joseph Dyche, Leon Samet, Irwin Caplan, Dr. Irwin Meisler, Abe Merfish, Al Goldman, Morris B. Bell, Stephen Perel and Jack Loftspring. These years were trying for the officers because many new competitive organizations had sprung up, many new B'nai B'rith lodges were formed in Houston. Synagogues started to become active with their own varied programs. The creation of the State of Israel activated such organizations as ZOA, Bond for Israel, The Red Mogan David and the Jewish Community Center plus many more. Of course TV helped to keep members away from our meetings. However Herzl Lodge did not allow grass to grow under its feet. Plugging on with a membership around 350 members, who carried on the tradition of the lodge with programming and services to B'nai B'rith and the community. Herzl Lodge had one of the most outstanding Banquets with Father Harry Sureliff, a blind priest as its main speaker at the Westwood Country Club. Talking about banquets, it was Ben Friedman and Irving Wilson who were responsible in the formation of the Torch of Liberty Award and its Banquets from the year 1964 to 1973.

The awards were presented to Catholic Bishop John Morkovsky, Attorney Leon Jaworski, our own past District & Lodge president William Nathan, Former Mayor Louis Welch, TV personality Fred Nahas, Dr. Westmoreland pastor of the South Main Baptist Church, Rt. Rev. Milton Richardson, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, Rev. Lewis McAdow, pastor of Bethany Christain Church, Dr. George Garver former supt. of the Houston Public School and Rev. Ralph Langley, Pastor of Willow Meadows Baptist Church. Today you honor me with this award as I retire from my office as your financial secretary.

Our passport to Europe project under the chairmanship of Jack Forman raised \$10,000.00 in its first year. For years we had Brotherhood joint meetings with the Knights of Columbus lodges. One of the largest Civil Defense classes in Texas were sponsored by Herzl Lodge, with 4 classes that had an average attendance of 235 people. Herzl sponsored the Jeff Davis Hospital Special Fund which provided supplies and paid for a part time therapist for the hospital's psychiatric ward. The monies came from private donations raised by our members. Under the leadership of Ben Friedman his committee started a program with visits to the State prison where Jewish prisoners were confined. There were only 6 Jewish prisoners at that time in Texas, but 10 to 15 prisoners showed up when the lodge committee came to visit them, including one black man who said he was Jewish. I think they liked the goodies the committee brought. They had short services on the Saturday visits, On Passover Ben Friedman made a Sedar, that he so aptly called, "Our Sedar within the Walls." Ben even helped to get them jobs when they got out of prison.

Then there was the Herzl Lodge Information Speakers Bureau, to encourage dialog between Christians and Jews, to make facts available regarding the similarities and differences of Judaism and Christianity. They spoke at churches, Sunday schools, parochial schools and civic organizations. The speakers were Ben Friedman, Dr. Irwin Meisler, Irwin Caplan and Aaron Tapek. In 1968 Herzl Lodge honored one of its outstanding members, Life Honorary President Saul Horowitz, at a dinner at the Westwood Country Club for his work in B'nai B'rith. He was a founder of Cyrus Adler AZA and worked for over 30 years on behalf of the B'nai B'rith youth and Hillel at the University of Houston and Rice. In 1967 we had a well attended poolside party at the home of the Irving Wilson's. The lodge presented to the Texas Institute of Rehabilitation, remote TV sets for the disabled patients. The monies for this was provided by bequests of two former lodge presidents families, the Tiras and the Maltz families.

The last few years we had some fantastic programs at our meetings during the presidencies of Dr. Irwin Meisler, Abe Merfish, Al Goldman, Morris Bell, Steven Perel and Jack Loftspring. We heard talks by such famous political figures as Senator Towers, CIA director George Bush, Senator Benson and others. There were movies, lectures by radio, TV and sports personalities. Some of the topics were Hypnosis, Psychological Impact on Retirement, ADL, Soviet and Syrian Jews, Space discoveries, you name it, we have presented it. Our lodge has been cooperating with the Mayors Telephone Reassurance Service, by paying for the phone bill of an elderly person who lives alone and has no relatives, who is called to see how they are doing daily. We sponsor Mrs. Henrietta Simmons.

Herzl Lodge has given 3 presidents to District #7, S.J. Westheimer, William Nathan and Aaron Toppek. We supplied our quota of civic, professional and religious leaders. No facet of communal life has been neglected. Our members who have become Synagogue presidents are William Nathan, Harry Freedman, Sol Waldman, Carl Waldman, Abe Schuman, Irving Salaman, David Barg and Abram Geller, Joe Mandel, John S. Goldberg, Pincus Juran, William Spitz and myself. This covers the entire spectrum of reformed, conservative and orthodox. Our past president Morris Catchman was president of the Hebrew Free Loan of Houston. In the Zionist Organization, our members are leaders also, to mention a few, Dr. Marcus Levinson, Ben Friedman, Joseph Hiller, Joseph Dyche, Nathan Segal, Sol Waldman, Carl Waldman and Leon Samet. In Israel Bonds, dedicated workers from our lodge are, David Barg, Harold Turboff and John S. Goldberg among many. I believe David Barg sold over a million dollars worth himself. The late L.B. Goldberg started the Houston Housing project for retired persons and his successor is past president Morris B. Bell. Their dream is now a reality, known as the B'nai B'rith Goldberg Tower. Almost most of those I have mentioned were presidents of Herzl Lodge. Past presidents of the Jewish Community Center who are members of our lodge are Seymore Cohen and Milton Levit. On the B'nai B'rith National level we have Billy B. Goldberg who is on the International board of directors and Aaron Toppek who is the International Commissioner of Adult Jewish Education. Max Rosen and I served as commissioners for B'nai B'rith Community Volunteer Services. In the past men from our lodge who were chosen as Houston B'nai B'rith Councils Men of Year, were Jack Forman, Carl Selzer and Dr. Irwin Meisler. Of course Houston's top Alfreds Charity Dinner ticket salesman is our own honorary life vicepresident Carl Selzer. Wherever our members have gone, we have been honored for that which we stand for. To extend charity and help to our fellow man.

What prompts a person such as myself to work for an organization like B'nai B'rith? My answer is simple. I like it. But seriously it is because I believe in its principles of brotherhood, human rights, interfaith and charity. Jean and I had visited Czechoslovakia, a communist country, just a few weeks ago and the things we saw are still vivid in our memories. No one smiles, the government intimidates and harrasses its people. Two or three times Jean and I thought we would land in one of their jails for some slight infraction of their laws. There is no private ownership. No one can belong to any organization except the communist party or a labor organization directed by the government. A B'nai B'rith organization could never exist there. When we left their border and entered a free country we sighed with relief and were thankful that we lived in the good old USA.

Even if you are not an active member B'nai B'rith needs you. When our International president goes to visit the president of the United States or the Pope in Rome, Kings and presidents of other countries, he can say I represent over a million Jews, around the world who are members of my organization B'nai B'rith. When he talks to these leaders about Israel, the plight of the Russian Jews etc. and they listen, at that time you are important for belonging to B'nai B'rith.

Our Lodge is 70 years old this year. Happy birthday Herzl Lodge. I hope that all of you will continue your obligation of transmitting to the next generation even loftier dreams and challenges in our lodge. This is my wish, Amen.



SUPPLEMENT TO THE HISTORY OF HERZL LODGE...

In 1976 the late Max Rosen was elected president of the lodge and re-elected in 1977 and in 1978 Paul Amdur took over the reins of the presidency and died during his term in 1979.

Although the lodge had interesting meetings every month where they met at the Mercantile Bank, the attendance was very poor. The support from the members was lacking and the lodge was faltering. This apathy was causing the lodge to weaken from its past standing as a leader among lodges. One evening the late president of Herzl Lodge, Paul Amdur, called a meeting of the members who he felt still had the lodge at heart. It was at the Jewish Community Center and he had invited the District President, Al Levin to talk to those present. Mr. Levin a youthful dynamic personality, a past district attorney of the city of Houston, reinforced the needs of a lodge, such as Herzl in the community. I personally attribute his talk that evening, and the help of Jerry Ribnick, a past district president, to the revitalization of Herzl Lodge to its place as a leader in B'nai B'rith.

At the death of president Paul Amdur, Max Lass took over the presidency and was later elected president in 1980. The lodge has now increased its membership substantially and has a monthly meeting at Alfreds Resturant with an overflowing attendance. The breakfasts are free to the members, the cost being underwritten by Manual Rudy a Herzl member. Interesting programs are presented at each meeting. The lodge bulletin "The Herzlite" is being reactivated and many other projects are in the works.

Having been chosen as one of the outstanding lodges in the district, it can only grow from strength to strength in its 75th Diamond Jubilee year in 1981.

HERZL LODGE
1906-1981
MAX LASS PRESIDENT
1981-82

by Mel Lustgarten
Past Lodge, Council,
and State President

PAST PRESIDENTS OF HERZL LODGE #608

1906 Charles Mendelson *
 1907 D. Frosh *
 1908 S. J. Westheimer *
 1909 Ben S. Flurwitz *
 1910 H. N. Frachtman *
 1911 Mendel Wagner *
 1912 Isidore Tiras *
 1913 Rabbi Wolf Willner *
 1914 S. J. Westheimer *
 1915 Edgar Goldberg *
 1916 Max J. Westheimer *
 1916 M. M. Gordon *
 1917 Charles Mendelsohn *
 1918 H. Grossman *
 1919 M. Shafer *
 1919 M. Waldman *
 1920 Randolph Gordon *
 1921 Jacob Greenfield *
 1921 Morris Tiras *
 1922 Leo M. Furman *
 1922 J. O. Beslowitz *
 1923 Sam J. Moss *
 1924 Ben F. Loff
 1925 William M. Nathan *
 1926 Jacob F. Loff *
 1926 Abe Grossman
 1927 David Harris *
 1928 Harry Dow
 1929 Judge Abe Levy *
 1930 Samuel L. Tiras *
 1931 Harry Maltz *
 1932 Dr. I. S. Sondock *
 1933 Joe Mandel *
 1934 George Perl *
 1935 Abram L. Geller
 1936 Morris Catchman *
 1937 Julian L. Shapiro
 1938 Pincus Juran
 1938 William M. Nathan *
 1939 Saul Horowitz *
 1940 Abe M. Stracks

1941 J. L. Farb *
 1942 J. L. Farb *
 1943 Rabbi Nathan Collish *
 1944 George Perl *
 1945 Abram L. Geller
 1946 D. Aaron Topek
 1947 D. Aaron Topek
 1948 Dr. Marcus Levinson *
 1949 Joseph J. Hiller
 1950 Pincus Brounes
 1951 Nathan Segal
 1952 Mike Goldstein *
 1953 Billy B. Goldberg
 1954 David W. Berg
 1955 David M. Loff
 1956 Pincus Juran
 1967 Raymond D. Maislin
 1958 Milton Popkin *
 1959 Bill Spitz
 1960 Mel S. Lustgarten
 1961 Jack J. Ferman
 1962 Carl A. Kobb
 1963 Sidney Katzoff
 1964 Ben Friedman
 1965 Irving N. Wilson
 1966 Bob Schwartz
 1967 Edward Marks
 1967 Joseph Dyche
 1968 Leon Samet
 1969 Irwin Caplan
 1970 Dr. Irwin Meisler
 1971 Abe Merfisch
 1972 Alan B. Goldman
 1973 Morris B. Bell
 1974 Stephen Perel
 1975 Jack Loftspring
 1976 Max Rosen *
 1977 Max Rosen *
 1978 Paul Amdur *
 1979 Paul Amdur *
 1980 Max Lass

* Deceased

LIFE HONORARY PRESIDENT — PINCUS JURAN
 LIFE HONORARY VICE-PRESIDENT — CARL SELZER