

As soon as I heard Rabbi Lyon's voice on the phone, I knew I did not call him and immediately thought, "I have an undistinguished career at Beth Israel, how do I get out of this". His comments were persuasive and I decided if I could enjoy it, why not be a part of the symposium. Besides, a Rabbi's request is something that seldom, if ever, can be refused. Here are the essential points to know about Melvin Maltz and his Judaism.

First, In almost 89 years, I have seen 5 cent double dip ice cream, 5 cent James Coney Islands, 3 Cent Stamps, penny post cards, Milk delivered by horse drawn carts, and paper weights for open window offices. And, believe it or not, a man on the moon.

Secondly, here today and worried about what I will say is my Best Friend and Wife, Corky. Holding her hand are 2 of our Clan that totals 35 including 3 great (in all sense of the word) grandchildren.

2

Generally one loving wife is all that is anticipated. I have been twice blessed. In our situation, two of our sons and 2 of our daughters were born to Phyllis and me before she passed away during our nearly 25 years together. 3 of our daughters were brought by Corky to our family when we married over 37 years ago. As Hillel once said, "the rest is commentary."

About 1925 several Houston families wanted to start a Conservative Congregation and Congregation Adath Yeshurun was determined to remain Orthodox. My mother's parents and my parents joined a group that formed Temple Beth El as a conservative congregation. My Dad – if not the first as I believe – was among the first Presidents of Beth El. In the early years of Beth El, Dad and my Grandfather helped select the Beth El—now the Beth Yeshurun—Post Oak cemetery. I was Bar Mitzvah February 17, 1940 at Beth El and I hope God has forgiven me as at that time it was required to include in our speech, a pledge to continue our Jewish education. I and some others in my class believed that it would not count if we gave the speech with our fingers crossed.

3

I did not go further with formal Jewish education and thus the reason I hope I was forgiven.

Imagine how thrilled I was when granddaughter Molly was Bat Mitzvah at Beth Yeshurun and assigned the same Haf Torah that I chanted within a week 70 years earlier. I silently chanted as she vocalized:

ATAH VEN ADOM HAGAID ET BATE YISRAEL ET HABAYISH.....

I suppose I have been forgiven because some years later while unable to sleep, I said the Shema and promptly fell asleep. I hope the reason I sleep well now is because I have kept repeating the Shema prayer most nights ever since.

Houston was much smaller in 1940, and I have since learned, that Anti-Semitism was evident in those days. We had an experience with it when 3 or 4 guys jumped 3 or 4 of us playing in the Temple Beth EL yard. Fortunately Cantor Krasnoff heard the noise and broke it up before any real problem began.

4

I claim only that I was born in Tom Brokaw's "greatest generation." I enlisted for Pilot Cadet Training in August 1944 but later was told our class was denied training as there was a pilot surplus and we could select a Discharge or other training. I chose to train as a B-24 Mechanic. The War in Europe and Pacific ended before we completed the mechanic training. WOW, what a beer party was held in the Squadron area.

I was sent to Europe December 31, 1945 as a Clerk-Typist. I returned home November 1946 and reentered A&M February 1947. My experience with Anti-Semitism in the then Air Corp occurred when a more veteran GI was returning home shortly after I landed in France. He said something about Jews and I said something about being Jewish.

He said are you the fighting or talking kind. At that point I knew I was in trouble, but said Fighting Kind and he said Let's Go out to the Courtyard.

Again fortune was on my side, someone of higher rank heard this as we were walking to the court yard and stopped it.

5

I am sure anti-semitism was there, but in the years since I cannot recall other overt expression of hate and all members of my civic activities knew or soon learned that I am Jewish.

While I was in Service, a merger took place and Beth Yesuhrun was formed merging Adath Yeshurun and Beth El into Congregation Beth Yeshurun. My Dad was the MC at the formal merger dinner and Eddie Cantor the featured speaker. About 10 years later Dad died and Mother wanted to be with my brother, Herschel's family and my Uncles and Aunts. My new family moved to Congregation Beth Israel.

My Jewish Activity is undistinguished having served on only Jewish Community Center and Beth Israel's Board of Trustees. Asking Rabbi Karff for any special design for his office and having it ready for his move to Houston was my accomplishment at Beth Israel. He and Joan are wonderful friends and he is a fantastic Rabbi.

6

Rabbi Karff became my friend and excellent tennis partner as we played many times against Emmanuel's Rabbi Walters and Dubie Dubinsky.

My daughters were confirmed and married at Beth Israel; and 2 sons Bar Mitzvah here. Corky and I were married here.

My civic activities have been on Boards of non-sectarian organizations – Texas A&M, American Cancer Society, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Visiting Nurse Association, Lighthouse for the Blind and United Way.

I think I have served well on all of them as members of committees, officer of the Board and as Board Chair of several.

My parents taught Herschel and me to give and they were examples of “givers”. I feel that I have been effective and comfortable working in a general civic area.

It is far from a secret that I play golf; and that I attended Texas A&M.

7

A&M has been part of my life since enrolling as a 16 year old in May 1943. I have served as President of the Houston A&M Club, Board Member and Chairman of the A&M Association of Former Students, Chairman of the Board of Visitors to A&M Galveston; and member of the Board of Visitors to the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M; and the December 1973 Commencement Speaker. I knew before my first A&M Association meeting after being selected as Chairman, so it was no surprise when several of the Past Chairs of the Association mentioned that to their knowledge, I was only the second Jew to serve as Chairman of the Association of Former Students. There may be, but I know of no others.

Charlie Blumenthal, Norman's father and Ann's grandfather, told my Dad in late 1948 that he was one of a very few Jews active in the Houston A&M Club and wanted me to actively join the Houston A&M Club. Thus another “Command Decision” was extended by Dad to me and my work in the Association began.

8

Herschel and I recruited students to attend A&M. One, a Hispanic-American from Houston, became a Regent on the Board of Regents at A&M and later a business owner and President of the Houston Federal Reserve Bank. In 2013 Bob Epstein and I – two members of Beth Israel – were recognized at the same event as A&M Distinguished Alumnus. Imagine, 2 Jewish boys recognized the same day during the same Ceremony. We are Proud of each other.

Later in 2013, Two of our grandchildren, Molly and Jake, said they were sorry they disappointed me by selecting U T over A&M; but one son- JIM- and one grandson – Graham - did become Aggies as well as did my nephew Jerry. Second son I.B. and grandson Phil selected United States Military Academies over A&M.

I have felt very effective working directly with beneficiaries of the non-profit groups; especially within the Prison Entrepreneurship Program. This PEP program teaches prisoner participants a non-gangsterization program, how to be a brother, husband, father, son, Profit and Loss Statements, and how to be interviewed, to interview a prospective employee, and how to be a business owner. In almost 13 years, this program has over 1100 graduates and fewer than 70 have returned to prison. In 6 years with this program I have returned to prison over 30 times. I AM a repeat Attender.

This is not a Jewish program, has had no Jewish prisoners, is not funded by a government group. It is funded by donations and grants from foundations. Several other members of this Congregation also work with PEP. I feel it has opened my eyes to the potential of men with a history of drug dealing, excess use of drugs or alcohol, assault and battery convictions, and murder.

Lastly, let me describe our family in more detail. When Corky and I married almost 38 years ago, Corky brought 3 daughters to our home and I – 2 sons and 2 daughters. Our Tree has grown to a total of 35 branches that we both dearly love. We are in every sense a FAMILY and are very Proud of being a family.

Corky and I light Friday night candles, frequently attend – or watch on iPad – Beth Israel's Friday night services.

10

We did skip on Friday nights when grandson Jake played football at St John's. Our family celebrates together lunch after Rosh Hashanah, Passover Seder, Chanukah, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, birthdays, weddings; and other events that have no official title. Not everyone attends every event, but we have crowds of family at each event. Corky is the catalyst that merged and maintains us as a FAMILY.

Let me describe a very unique event that I participated in.

As mentioned Phil graduated West Point and when he returned from his second tour in Iraq, said he wanted to marry a Protestant young lady also in the military on New Year's Eve; however, the Jewish Chaplain was deployed, the Protestant chaplain had other duties, so a Minister in Campbell, KY would do the ceremony but they wanted me to participate in the wedding as a Jewish "Chaplain".

11

Thanks to Cantor Gerber I did several passages in Hebrew to show a Jewish presence. At the conclusion of the wedding, I did the Priestly blessing in Hebrew, the Minister repeated in English and declared the wedding legal. I shall never forget my "Rabbinic" experience.

Now you have my Commentary. I am doubtful that it says we are Jewish, and neither does it say we are not Jewish. This is the way we live and I firmly believe it is the way our Jewish Parents taught us. So by mathematical equation we are Jewish. I take pride in our family, my life, my Jewish life and telling you a little of my story today. There is more to tell but on another day.

To our wonderful, enthusiastic, knowledgeable Clergy, I say thank you for our beautiful Weekly and Holyday services; and La Shanah Tovah to all.