



Herzl Day vs. International Herzl Day

By Jerry Klinger

Four years ago, June 29, 2004, with belated awareness that Ben Gurion was wrong, that Zionism is not infused in the heart and soul by simply living in Israel, the Knesset passed the Herzl Law. It is an extraordinary admission by the government of Israel that the *why* of the existence of the State is in danger of being lost.

The law created the Herzl Council empowered to recommend, institute and encourage learning about Herzl's vision. On the 10th of Iyar throughout Israel, in the schools, the army and communities, the *what* of Herzl's vision, the *why* of Israel, is to be taught and commemorated.

Less than 50% of Israelis and even less than that of Israeli school children have more than a passing recognition of Herzl. Growing numbers of military inductees do not even know who Herzl was.

How can a society exist if it does not know why it exists?

The intent of the Herzl law is to change the tide.

Stephen Theodore Norman was the last descendent of Theodor Herzl. He was his grandson. Stephen was the only Herzl, other than Theodor, to visit Palestine, love the land, the people and to be an ardent Zionist. Stephen was a Captain in the British army during WWII. After a brief

tantalizing visit to Palestine, to see what his grandfather had started, he wrote in his diary on his way back to Britain for discharge.

"I had been told, you will be amazed at Jewish youth in Palestine: They are fair and sturdy and handsome. Therefore, I might have known what to expect, yet when I saw them, it was somehow new. These children bore the mark of freedom"....

"My visit to Palestine is over... It is said that to go away is to die a little. And I know that when I went away from Erez Israel, I died a little. But sure, then, to return is somehow to be reborn. And I will return."

Ironically, Stephen was barred from returning to Israel because he was a Herzl.

July 2, 1946, Stephen wrote to Mrs. Stybovitz-Kahn in Haifa. Her father, Jacob Kahn, had been a good friend of Herzl and a well know Dutch Banker before the war. Stephen wrote *"I intend to go to Palestine on a long visit in the future, in fact as soon as passport & permit regulations permit. But the dreadful news of the last two days have done nothing to make this easier."*

Black Sabbath, June 29, 1946, operation Agatha, as the British called the collective sweep throughout Palestine arresting anyone who might be a leader had been implemented.

In January 1946, during Stephen's short visit to Palestine, he was treated as near royalty. He saw himself, as did the Yishuv, as the symbol of Herzl returning. Stephen could not return. The British understood that. He was discharged in Britain and sent to Washington, D.C. to keep him far from Israel. He died tragically four months after arriving there, age 28. The Jewish Agency buried him in Washington's Adas Israel community cemetery. A congregant gave up his own gravesite so that the last Herzl would have a place to rest. The Jewish Agency never bothered to mark his grave. The Adas Israel community raised the funds and placed a respectful stone on the site for his memory.

It took five year's of bitter struggle against government indifference marked by apathy, disinterest, post-Zionism and Zionist sclerosis. Stephen finally was brought home.

In a belated affirmation of faith by the Jewish people and the State of Israel, the Zionist returned home. Stephen was reburied in the plot for Zionist leaders with his family, December 5, 2007.

On September of 2007, I appeared before the Herzl Council in the Prime Minister's office to promote the return of Stephen. The council was open and supportive of the effort. I spoke about the Herzl Law and explained a fundamental mistake had been made. "If Herzl is important to Israel alone then Israel will be alone". Herzl, his vision, his dream, Zionism, is not for Israel alone but for all of Jewry.

Diaspora's knowledge of Herzl, the why of Israel, is even lower than in Israel. The growing disconnection between the Diaspora and Israel is very real. Herzl's vision is not part of the Diaspora's consciousness. Israel must not focus on itself alone. Herzl day must become international Herzl day. The Council supported the ideal.

In reality, nothing has happened. In the United States, I returned and promoted the concept of International Herzl to major Zionist organizations, Federations, to be supported on the anniversary of his birthday. I promoted it to Zionists in Canada and Britain. A lot of agreement as to the importance, discussion about doing it and then nothing was implemented.

Anecdotally, I approached a principal of a middle school in Israel and asked about how Herzl day will be implemented. He said maybe they would devote an hour of school for a lesson on his birthday. Then he asked for funds to take the children on a trip to Jerusalem to see Mt. Herzl. I asked if he had ever been to the Herzl Museum on Mt. Herzl, an excellent interactive educational tool about the *why* of Israel. He said no. I referred him to the Herzl Council that has some funding but are arguing over how to spend it.

The challenges to Israel are many. There are Israelis who view the Zionists as the internal enemy to the attainment of the secure 50" flat screen HTDV TV materialist lifestyle. If it were not for their willingness to sacrifice and settle the land then there would be peace, they say. The *Yordim* (those Israelis who have left Israel for the Diaspora) say they are tired of strife and stress. They will go to America.

Memories are short. History is long. America is only 200 years old, about 10% of Diaspora's history. America is a land today where a probable Democratic Presidential candidate, Barack Obama, is leading. Obama's spiritual guide, his Pastor and Obama's 10,000 member church, honored a vicious anti-Semite, a vicious anti-Israelite, a vicious racist, Louis Farakhan as the man of the year. The Jews remain quiet in America with their 65" flat screen HTDV TV materialist lifestyles. Herzl is a distant memory. The reason for Zionism: a vague old story.

If Herzl is important to Israel alone then Israel will be alone.

Past is but prologue. International Herzl day is needed by all of us.

Jerry Klinger is the president of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation. He was the moving force behind the return of Stephen Theodore Norman to Israel.