

MASONIC MINISTERS IN AUSTRALIA

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There was a time when more than 9% of the Australian male population were Freemasons. We can probably take it, though statistical evidence is not available, that the figure was at least the same amongst Australian Jewish men. The Jewish Masons included almost every anglicised minister of the colonial period and up to about the middle of the twentieth century, from the time of Rev Moses Rintel, the first minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. Some rose to high office in the movement. Freemasonry was a highly significant segment of Australian – and Australian Jewish – society. Membership figures are now considerably lower, and I will address the possible reasons later. The state of Australian Freemasonry as a whole is not really the immediate concern of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, but the state of Australian Jewish – particularly Australian rabbinic – Freemasonry certainly is.

My credentials in this area are twofold – I am a minister, and I am a Freemason. I began my pulpit career in London, first at the historic Bayswater Synagogue, and then at the prestigious Hampstead Synagogue. In the Australian Jewish ministry I spent 32 years as senior rabbi of the Great Synagogue, Sydney – the mother congregation of Australian Jewry. In Freemasonry I entered the Lodge of Israel in London in the 1960s on the nomination of members of my congregation; I am a Past Master of Lodge Mark Owen in Sydney, and I now hold the rank of Past Deputy Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. I am also a member of the English-speaking Lodge of the Holy City in Jerusalem.

Despite the romantic claims of ancient origins, Freemasonry seems to have emerged in the late Middle Ages¹ (probably in Scotland) in a Bible-based society where most people were brought up on Biblical stories, upper-class English idiom echoed the King James translation of the Bible, and the potential of man's mind and reason was increasingly appreciated. The Masonic fraternity (often known

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At a Masonic Service at the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Raymond Apple (right), with a Senior Freemason, Leo Grouse.

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as 'the craft') calls itself 'a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'. It requires from its members a belief in God, and the Bible (which it calls 'the Volume of the Sacred Law') is on display at its meetings, but the movement is neither a religion nor a substitute for one. It has no theological doctrines and no denominational modes of worship.

Its ethical principles are based on the imagery of building – constructing both a quality society and an ethical personality. These principles are enshrined in elaborate Masonic rituals that are a form of didactic play-acting. The founders of the movement mostly based their ritual on the Old Testament, with the result that a member – in our case a Jewish member – could progress through a lifetime Masonic career without encountering Christian tenets, apart from a few upper levels which most Masons, who limit themselves to the three basic degrees of the movement, never enter.

The dechristianisation of standard Freemasonry was not introduced for the sake of Jewish Masons, since there was no deliberate policy of enrolling Jews, and there was debate in some places about admitting Jews at all (paradoxically, Freemasonry in some Continental countries was rather antisemitic, whilst in other countries the antisemites accused the movement of being too Jewish!). The explanation of Masonic dechristianisation may have to do with a desire – expressed in the early constitutions of the movement² – 'to oblige (members) to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves', that is a non-denominational form of Christianity that would appeal to men of all shades of Christology. The fact that this broad approach made it relatively easier for Jews was a mere a by-product. However, the outcome was that Freemasonry – at least in English-speaking countries – enabled Jews to feel at home in its midst and this brought ample dividends, because Jewish members generally gave distinguished service to their Lodges and Grand Lodges including energetic contributions by Jewish Grand Masters, not least in Australia.

The attraction of the movement to Jews, including leading rabbis, in Australia and elsewhere, is due to a sheaf of factors. Jews felt comfortable to encounter their own Biblical figures such as Noah, Nimrod, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Hiram and others, at a Masonic meeting. Those with a scholarly inclination were often motivated to research the Masonic application, extension and frequent distortion of Jewish legends, and some of the rabbinical Masons have written widely on the subject. Jews also found Hebrew words in the movement's ritual, even though these words were often mangled and mispronounced. The ethical vocabulary of Freemasonry resonated with Jews because it echoed the ethos of Bible-based

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Judaism. Light, truth, justice, brotherhood, charity, education, loyalty, and so many other Masonic keywords sounded like Judaism. These are, by no means, the only reasons why the movement attracted Jews. Historical and social factors played a very large role.

In a lecture I gave to the Victorian Lodge of Research in March 1995 I described Freemasonry as 'a touchstone of religious liberty and social tolerance, an agent of emancipation and social integration'. In that lecture I attempted an analysis of these factors and the text was subsequently published in the *Lodge Transactions*. I included a summary in my book of Masonic studies published by the Museum of Freemasonry in New South Wales in 2010.³ There is considerable evidence that long before British Jews gained their political emancipation in 1858, they were able to enter and enjoy Freemasonry. Acculturation and social emancipation long preceded the right to sit in parliament as well as the official acknowledgement of Judaism as a recognised faith that could be recorded on military enlistment, an achievement that had to wait until the end of the nineteenth century. In Australia, Jews were equal in every respect from the beginning of white settlement and were able to sit in the colonial legislatures, though there was debate for decades about whether they had a right to receive state aid for religion. Joining Freemasonry symbolised their acceptance into colonial society.

In New South Wales, the first Freemasons were members of travelling Lodges associated with the early regiments. Since there are no known Jewish names amongst the members of these regiments, it must have taken some decades for signs of Freemasonry to emerge amongst Jews. In addition, the first Jews were convicts of insufficient respectability to be approved by the Masonic craft. From the time of the formation in 1820 of the first Australian Lodge, Jews were gradually found in Masonic membership lists. Jewish Masons in the 1830s included Barnet Levy (who may or may not have been the Barnett Levey who is known as the father of Australian theatre) and Barnard Aaron Phillips.

The founders of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation in 1841 were members of Masonic Lodges. The lay spiritual leader of the congregation, Asher Hymen Hart, was initiated into the Lodge of Australia Felix in 1841 and by 1849 was Worshipful Master of the Lodge. At the laying of the foundation stone of the synagogue he used Masonic terminology in the prayers he composed. The first official minister, Rev Moses Rintel, was initiated in 1849 and in 1858 became Worshipful Master of the Lodge of Judah. For many years he was chaplain of the Lodges that came under the so-called Irish Constitution. Sometimes, as in Launceston, Tasmania, Masonic processions took part in synagogue ceremonies, even though Masons

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generally tended not to make their membership of the craft public.⁴ Where there was no synagogue, as in early Broken Hill, Jewish services were held in Masonic buildings.

Freemasonry and religion were intertwined. Christians often focused their social and public life upon both Lodge and church; Jews had their own twin priorities in synagogue and Lodge. Whether either group had theological problems with Freemasonry needs more investigation; it could well be that there was a comfortable general feeling that the Masonic craft was in basic accord with Biblical ethics, and that was enough for people who were mostly neither very intellectual nor spiritual and were merely looking for a social life under respectable auspices. The fact that in standard Freemasonry there were no Christological references made it easier for Christian Masons to see their Lodge as in concord and not competition with their church, though the non-mention of Christ is precisely what some latter-day Christian clergy find objectionable about the Masonic movement, leading to occasional public controversies.

Jewish society had no misgivings about Freemasonry, and Jews fitted into their Lodges quite comfortably. It is not that there was no antisemitism in Australia, but the Christians were usually more concerned with their sectarian conflicts with other Christian groups than with attacking the Jews. In the Masonic Lodges there certainly was very little evident antisemitism, due to some extent to a Masonic policy about keeping sectional religious and political matters away from the Lodge. In the churches, around about Easter time the Christian clergy pontificated about supposed Jewish guilt for the death of Jesus and made negative statements about Jews, but these attitudes did not seem (at least openly) to percolate into the Masonic fraternity. Perhaps one could even say that on the whole the Lodges showed themselves to be better bastions of brotherhood than the churches.

For Jews, Freemasonry went hand-in-hand with good citizenship, and it is no accident that often the same Jews who became involved in municipal government were also leading Masons. When, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Australian Jewish press emerged, its reports of municipal and Masonic events often highlighted the same Jewish names. In country districts such as Ballarat, which had Jewish communities, the Jewish minister was automatically one of the leading local personalities and held a position of dignity in the local Lodge. Thus Rev Israel M. Goldreich was chaplain of his Lodge and gave Masonic lectures which, in the fashion of the day, were printed and circulated widely.⁵ The more that their minister was seen and heard in the public life of the district, the more his co-religionists esteemed him, and the prouder they were to belong to his synagogue. The same can be said of Rabbi Isack Morris of Newcastle. It is also possible that by

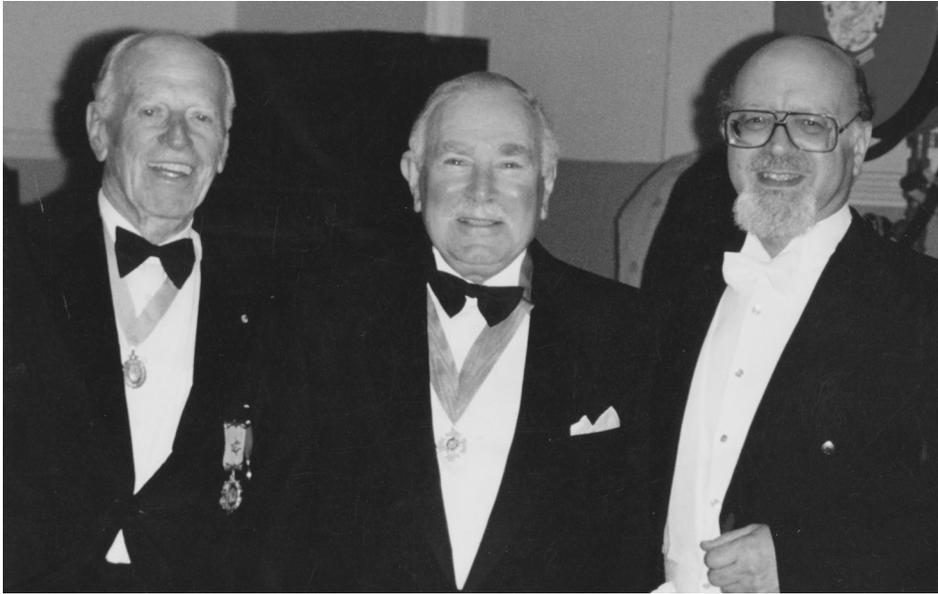
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progressing through the various offices in a Lodge, a minister could find a form of promotion to higher rank which was next to impossible within the Jewish ministry, since many ministers spent their whole career on one and the same professional level, and did the same things year after year for decades on end; if they moved, it tended to be sideways and not upwards.

An important factor in clerical involvement in Freemasonry was the opportunity to stretch one's mind in Masonic culture. Often starved of intellectual challenge and scholarly exchange, Australian Jewish ministers were drawn to the possibility of researching and writing on Masonic subjects. There were a few Talmudists such as the elderly Rev Samuel Herman, and some budding intellectuals such as Joseph Jacobs and Samuel Alexander, but Herman had hardly anyone with whom to study and debate rabbinic learning and Jacobs and Alexander had to go overseas to find fame and an intellectual milieu. The Jewish communities were generally not drawn to literary pursuits, and the ministers could talk books and the Bible more with the Christian clergy than within their own congregations. This may have led to some becoming acknowledged Masonic scholars.

When preparing this paper I attempted to draw up a list of ministers who were Masons. For the twentieth and twenty-first centuries this presented no problem because we are dealing with living memory. That Francis Lyon Cohen, Jacob Danglow and Israel Brodie were leading Masons was easy to prove, and I was given vivid memories of incidents that involved them. From a son of Rabbi Leib Aisack Falk, minister of the Great Synagogue, I heard that Rabbi Cohen arrived late for Rabbi Falk's Masonic initiation because of an earlier engagement and quietly waited in the vestibule for a gap in the proceedings (Cohen gave and published a number of Masonic lectures, not only within standard Freemasonry but also the Royal Arch). From a daughter of Rabbi Danglow I heard that her father rehearsed his Masonic ritual whilst he was shaving. From a number of sources I heard about Rabbi Brodie's mellifluous Masonic lectures, still vividly remembered sixty years later. Amongst other ministers of that generation, Rabbi David Isaac Freedman of Perth must also be mentioned. Many of their ministerial colleagues were also Masons, though not all were nearly as masonically active as Cohen, Danglow and Brodie.

In the recent past most of the Masonic ministers were or are known to me personally. Shalom Coleman, Chaim Gutnick and myself have held eminent rank and people have vivid memories of our involvement in Masonic events. Chaim Gutnick, for example, performed the role of Grand Chaplain at a lodge anniversary in Melbourne and (perhaps with tongue in cheek) said he had consulted a Catholic priest about a certain aspect of the ceremonial.

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*Freemasons in New South Wales:
L. to R.: John I. Einfeld, Tony Greenberg and
Rabbi Raymond Apple*

Currently Samuel Tov-Lev is Grand Chaplain of the United Grand Lodge of NSW and ACT. Other names from amongst the recent generation of Australian Jewish ministers that must be mentioned are Michael Alony, Edward Belfer, Rudolph Brasch, Erich Cahn, Yehuda Leon Cohen, Harry Gluck, Isidor Gluck, Lazarus Morris Goldman, Phillip Heilbrunn, Mattis Honig, Joseph Kleerekoper, Jeremy Lawrence, Steven Link, Ronald Lubofsky, Michael Mandel, Solomon Mestel, Isack Morris, Herman Sanger, Lionel Singer, Benjamin Skolnick and Aryeh Solomon. Rabbis such as Alfred Fabian and Izaak Rapaport who were not themselves members of the craft became known to Masonic circles by means of their orations. This does not exhaust the list by any means. Many ministers brought their own special talents to their Masonic career. Edward Belfer, for example, was known for his musical accomplishments and sang at various Masonic events; Lionel Singer researched and lectured about the Hebraic origins of a number of Masonic terms and procedures. My own contribution as a Masonic historian, writer and lecturer has already been mentioned.

I looked for evidence to verify my feeling that more or less all the anglicised ministers of the colonial period were Masons. As an instance, I consulted a descendant of Abraham Tobias Boas of Adelaide who was not certain whether the rabbi was a Mason but thought not.⁶ I am not inclined to accept this view, as Boas was not

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only a great name in the religious and general history of South Australia but a renowned Shakespearean scholar, and everything points to the fact that he perfectly fits the mould of the ministerial Mason or Masonic minister. There may be material in South Australian Masonic archives that would justify my conclusion, but the necessary confirmation has yet to be received. The same applies to a number of other ministers of that generation, and I am in process of pursuing the necessary enquiries. As Masonic membership was not always publicised, as I have already pointed out, and a number of ministerial Masons remained what might be called back-benchers, it is hard to be certain whether various clerics were in the craft, but I am continuing to seek evidence. At a later point I might have to ask another question – if certain leading figures turn out not to have been Masons, what was it that stopped them? Was it simply lack of time or interest, or did they have a religious or intellectual disinclination to join the movement?

From a number of the more recent Masonic ministers (or from members of their families) I received a series of observations, which I now quote, which indicate that these ministers saw no contradiction between their Jewish and their Masonic commitments. A son of Joseph Kleerekoper wrote:

Father regarded Freemasonry as an honorable institution which for the most part was entirely compatible with Judaism. Those areas not accessible to the Jew, being based on the scriptures of the non-Jew, do not impinge in any way on the basic tenets of Freemasonry, which share with Judaism authentic Jewish teaching and are based on our holy Torah.

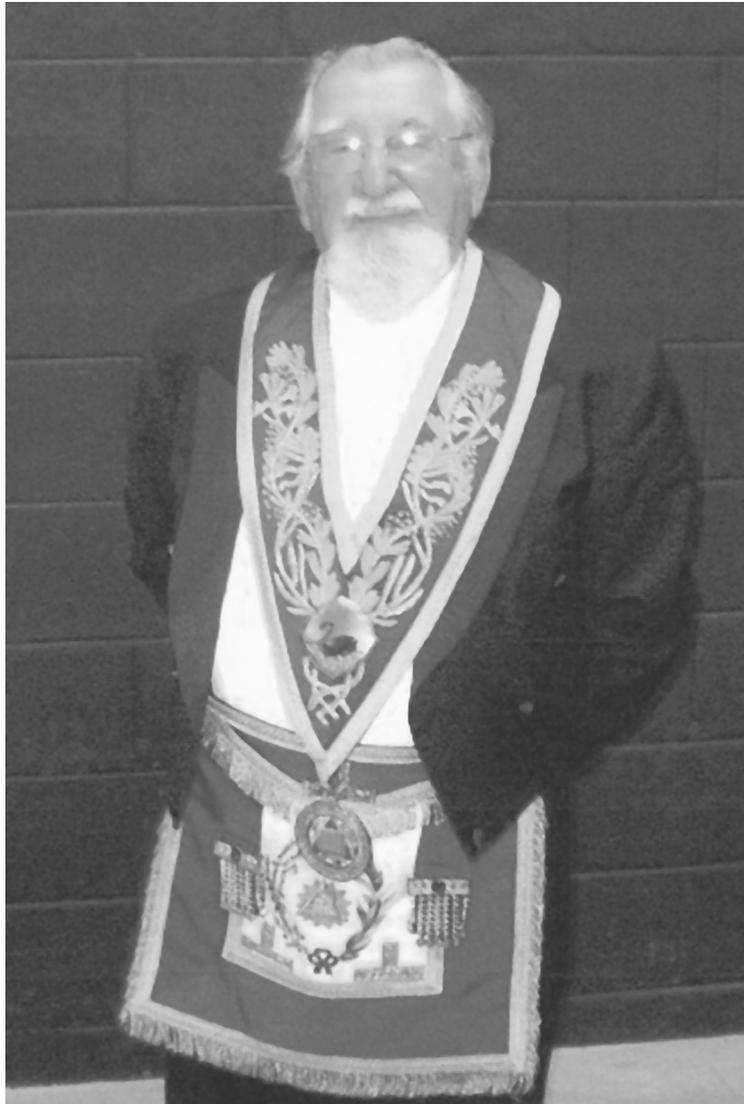
The same writer makes a point that deserves to be added:

For Father, the Lodge was a bastion of calm, an opportunity to recreate... the quiet purposeful serenity of the Temple of old: without discord, with proper respect for order, for ritual, for teaching and for learning... To enter the doors of the Lodge provided tranquility amongst fellowship.

Edward Belfer wrote:

The moral and ethical lessons of Freemasonry are acceptable to and can be and are applied by all.... I enjoy the ritual and the deep allegory it contains.

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Rabbi Shalom Coleman as Grand Chaplain in Western Australia

Shalom Coleman wrote:

In some instances I have found Freemasonry to help understand events in Scripture more clearly. In its rituals there is an element of genius as Freemasonry has translated the builder's tools into a discipline and code of human conduct with all its origins, albeit via the touch of classical Greece, emanating from Torah.

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Benjamin Skolnick wrote:

The author of the ritual certainly had a sound knowledge of *Tanakh*, and perhaps a lesser knowledge of Talmud. For example, the first degree (the first stage in the Masonic system) emphasizes the giving of *tzedakah* (charity), which is a *mitzvah* of paramount importance. Many other *middot* (ethical values) are extolled in the ritual – piety, virtue, free will, honesty in all one's undertakings, etc. All these desirable *middot* are part and parcel of Judaism.

These statements all indicate that Freemasonry and Judaism are compatible. They suggest that through following the Masonic path, a Jew contributes towards the Jewish ideal of being 'a light unto the nations' (Isa. 42:6).

This point is especially well expressed in a statement from a son of Chaim Gutnick, who wrote about his father:

He discussed with the (Lubavitcher) Rebbe his membership of the Masons and activities there. The Rebbe viewed everything as a means of ultimately spreading *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). I remember him telling me that he was amazed at the Rebbe's detailed knowledge of all the levels and all the secret 'rituals'. The way I remember, and I don't recall the precise wording, the Rebbe told him that there was no problem from a *halakhic* (Jewish legal) *Yiddishkeit* view from any of the levels except for one level (I unfortunately forget which number) in which J.C. (Jesus) is mentioned directly, and the Rebbe proceeded to quote in which context – but as he was unlikely to reach that level there was no real concern. My father told me that generally the content of higher levels is secret until you reach them, so technically unless you have reached that level you wouldn't know of its existence – so someone who had reached that level must have told the Rebbe.

This endorsement of Freemasonry from one of the greatest spiritual leaders of modern Judaism is of very high significance, reinforcing the positive attitude of the British and Australian rabbinate.

To the Australian rabbinic names listed above must be added British chief rabbis who were Masons, notably Joseph Herman Hertz and Israel Brodie, as well as Harris M. Lazarus, a member of the London Beth Din (ecclesiastical court) who was acting chief rabbi between the death of Hertz and the appointment of Brodie. Hertz and

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Lazarus, together with several other ministers, took part in 1923 in the first Masonic service ever to be held in a British synagogue. Brodie was an active high-ranking Mason in both Australia and Britain. He was Grand Chaplain in Victoria from 1935-37. As Past Grand Chaplain in England he wore a special blue *kippah* (skull cap) made of the same material as his Masonic apron. Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog of Israel was a Mason; Chaim Gutnick named Herzog as his own inspiration to join the craft.

In Britain and Australia, almost all the Masonic ministers were orthodox. They generally belonged to centrist orthodoxy, though occasionally a right-wing orthodox rabbi was also to be found in the craft. In the United States, by way of contrast, most Masonic rabbis were non-orthodox. The reason might be that Reform came to America almost a hundred years before Australia and Masonic membership helped the process of social integration. By the time Reform was founded in Australia in the 1930s, however, Freemasonry was no longer such an important agent of Jewish social acceptability. Nonetheless, Rabbi Dr Herman Sanger, one of the seminal names in the Australian Liberal movement, was an ardent Freemason. Other Reform ministers showed no real interest, with the exception of Rabbi Rudolph Brasch.

The 1940s saw the Australian arrival of an alternative - the B'nai B'rith Order - in which a number of rabbis who might otherwise have joined Freemasonry became involved (though some belonged to both).⁷ B'nai B'rith had a special appeal to many Central European Jews who knew it on the Continent. Whilst less rigorous in its procedures than Freemasonry, B'nai B'rith emulated some aspects of the craft and some people called it the Jewish form of Freemasonry. In Germany a century earlier it probably began as a reaction to German Freemasonry's less than welcoming attitude to Jews.⁸

Whilst some rabbis retained a lifetime commitment to the craft, others who resigned or drifted away have told me they had so many congregational and communal commitments in the evenings that they could not get to Lodge regularly, and if they did have a night off they felt they had to be at home with the family. Almost all, including those who remained members (myself too), had problems with *kashrut* at Lodge suppers, which are generally full meals and not just a drink and a snack, and even if they succeeded in obtaining *kosher* food they were embarrassed to see what other Jews (including some who had *kosher* homes) were eating and drinking. There were also problems with Shabbat and Festival observance, especially when Lodges met on Friday evenings and/or had social functions on Saturdays.

Masonic ministers admire the devotion that so many fellow

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Masons bring to the craft. They are all, however, puzzled that Jewish Masons often seem to value Masonic ritual much more than Jewish observance. The orthodox father of a high-ranking Jewish Freemason told me, 'I don't understand my son. He bothers so much about his Masonic regalia but couldn't care less about his *tallit* and *tephillin* (prayer shawl and phylacteries)'.⁹

In both Freemasonry and B'nai B'rith there has been a falling off of numbers in recent years. Changes in the nature of general – and Jewish – society have reduced the appeal of organisations that entail regular attendance and engage in considerable formality; the time pressures of modern life and the growing range of relatively easy leisure-time options militate against them. Both organisations are aware of the problem and are working to re-market themselves, but success is slow in coming.

If one asks modern rabbis, regardless of their position on the communal religious spectrum, why they do not join B'nai B'rith, they tend to reply that while recognising that the organisation seems to do good work they simply do not have time for a membership commitment. Few, however, are likely to state any ideological objection.

On the other hand, they might utilise ideology in order to object to Freemasonry. B'nai B'rith, they might tell you, is at least Jewish: but Freemasonry is *goyish* (non-Jewish), and many orthodox rabbis today have a rather isolationist approach and do not engage in socializing with the *goyish* community. Some have seen television programs about Freemasonry, and think its rituals bizarre; a few have witnessed a Masonic funeral service and found its language and symbolism archaic; hardly any have any real knowledge of or interest in what Freemasonry is and does. There even seems to be a vague notion that the craft is idolatrous and even dangerous to Judaism; they have no idea that orthodox rabbis have found it compatible with Jewish teachings and observances. They do know that there are leading rabbis who have a useful liaison network with the general community, often including a Masonic affiliation, but they themselves have no inclination to do likewise.

Part of the problem is the decline in the *Torah Im Derekh Eretz* philosophy associated with the name of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in nineteenth century Germany.⁹ Promoting a symbiosis of Jewish and western culture, it was British and Australian Jewry's prevailing ideology until recently fostered by the British chief rabbinate and brought to Australia by most of the ministerial incumbents. Partly because (in the words of Chief Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits) 'Germany's betrayal of civilization, culminating in the Holocaust, produced a horrible disillusionment

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with all western culture and science',¹⁰ *Torah Im Derekh Eretz* has been replaced in some circles today by a more separatist Jewish philosophy. In its heyday it enabled rabbis to move easily in the general community and, as a result, to embrace Freemasonry. The decline of Masonic engagement on the part of the rabbis must be connected with the shift in ideology.

In early 2012 I carried out a personal survey amongst Australian rabbis, orthodox and non-orthodox, on the subject of Freemasonry. I recognised from the outset that my survey would lack real scientific status, but I believed that the data I would elicit would indicate rabbinic attitudes to the movement. However, most of those to whom I sent my questionnaire did not bother to reply at all, which I take as a mark of indifference to the subject...or of personal inefficiency. I therefore followed up with an admittedly idiosyncratic series of personal contacts, in addition to inserting a notice in the *Australian Jewish News*, which resulted in much of the anecdotal evidence reported above.

Some ministers may at some stage have contemplated joining the craft but were put off for a variety of non-ideological reasons, one of which is indicated by this comment from one of the younger rabbis: 'My father... didn't enjoy it all that much so I thought I probably wouldn't either'. It appears that when some people joined it was largely because of family influence, whilst when others refrained from joining it was due to precisely the same factors working in the opposite direction.

By way of conclusion let me quote again, from my 1995 lecture to the Victorian Lodge of Research¹¹:

No longer...can it be said that...rabbis belong to the craft as a matter of course. Nor, for that matter, is there such a high proportion of Jewish laymen to be found in Masonic lodges... the nature of society has changed, and the general diminution in numbers of Freemasons is reflected in the Jewish community. In addition, Jews, like other groups, have built up a rich range of internal community organisations that keep many of them involved and busy. Freemasonry simply does not impinge on the consciousness of most of them.

ENDNOTES

1. Raymond Apple, *Freemasonry: Studies, Speeches and Sensibilities* (Sydney: Museum of Freemasonry, 2010), pp.105-113.
2. James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (London: William Hunter, 1723).

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3. Apple, *op cit.*, pp.105-113.
4. See extract from Minute Book of the St. John's Freemasons' Lodge, Launceston, 26 Sept., 1844, *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal (AJHSJ)*, vol 2, part 8 (1947), p.414. See also Robert Merrilees, 'Israel in Egypt Down Under: the First Synagogues in Australia', *AJHSJ*, vol 14, part 2, (1998), pp. 260-283.
5. See for example Israel M. Goldreich, *What is Freemasonry? – Lecture delivered at the Orion Lodge, No. 1153, Sebastopol, Victoria, (Sydney: 1877)*.
6. Other members of the Boas family also state that the rabbi was not a Mason, but I still have my doubts.
7. Gerry Levy, 'The Early Days of B'nai B'rith in Australia', *Yismach Yisra'el: Historical Essays to Honour Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush, OBE*, (Sydney: AJHS, 1988), p. 44.
8. Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723-1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
9. Yosef Burg, 'Torah-im-Derech-Eretz Today', in *Yismach Yisra'el*, pp. 68-73.
10. Immanuel Jakobovits, *The Timely and the Timeless* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1977), p. 257.
11. Apple, *op. cit.*, p. 113.