



Dr. Philip W. Lown

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When the old friends gathered for the weekly game, it was not unusual to talk about Philip W. Lown, for he had been an enormous success in the shoe business in Lewiston and yet made time for civic activity in the town and state. There was the time the YMCA wanted him to be president, the board changed the charter to make it possible for a Jew to serve as an officer.

Few people knew his background until his brothers felt a fitting gift on his seventieth birthday would be a book published about his life. Sam Isaacson could identify with him now because

Lown was born in 1890 in a hamlet in Russia. Lown's father was a Lubavitcher Hasid (a follower of a certain rabbi). His mother was equally pious. She could read, which was unusual for her time and circumstances. Each morning she read her Korbon-Minha siddur (the woman's bible) in one corner, and his father prayed in another corner. "Material existence was precarious under the heavy hand of czarism and the greed of a Polish landlord, but that was deemed the lot of a Jew in Galut." His parents saw this world as but an antechamber to the "Great Hall" of life everlasting.

Learning was prized—no sacrifice was too great. Before he was even six years old, he was sent to a teacher in a nearby village on Sundays and brought home on Fridays for the Sabbath. After two years he went to a more advanced teacher. When he was eleven, his mother enrolled him in a yeshiva in Vilna. Later she wept bitterly over the memory of soliciting "days" (board and lodging) for her son from "rich" relatives who had not been overly responsive. She was comforted by the assurance of the examining rabbi that Philip "had a good head" and could become a distinguished rabbi. He excelled in the yeshiva, which entitled him to study the Talmud independently.

To avoid eating days, which would have been accepting charity, he became an assistant sexton. He slept on a hard bench near the door. Since the synagogue was a center of study, as well as worship, people often came before dawn, and the twelve-year-old got very little sleep. But the atmosphere of learning mixed with gossip and social life stimulated him to write and even help the elders elucidate difficult passages in the Bible. He also wrote poetry.

During 1902 people dropped in the streets from hunger in Saratov, Russia, where the Lown family lived. Philip's mother bought squash on the black market to make soup. The weekly ration of seven-eighths of a pound of bread was divided into seven pieces: one piece was devoured, and the rest was hidden to resist temptation. Once when Philip was dividing his portion, a woman looked in at the window and begged for bread. When he refused her, his mother made him run after her to give her a piece of bread, but he could not find her. His mother recalled this even in her dying days.

When Jacob, who was three years younger than Philip, came to Vilna at nine years of age with an earache after traveling twelve hours, it was twelve-year-old Philip who took him to a doctor.

Another time his father sent Philip sixty miles from home to investigate the value of a mill for sale. On the favorable report of the eleven-year-old boy, the father bought the mill and moved the family to a better house.

Philip participated in the 1905 youth movement—the Socialist Revolutionary Bund. When the czarist police pursued too closely, he fled Vilna and landed in New York in May 1907 at age seventeen. Since the relatives who had sent him the steamship ticket were poor, he had to find work immediately.

Odd jobs in New York like paper hanging, painting, and delivering milk convinced him he had to leave New York. Somehow he landed a job in a shoe factory in Lynn, Massachusetts, but he craved school. A tutor taught him enough English to gain admittance to Lynn Classical High School, which he attended from 1911 to 1914, supporting himself by working the late shift in the shoe factory.

When he graduated from high school, he had enough money for the first semester at the University of Maine. He paid the nonresident fee of fifteen dollars per semester tuition, one dollar per week rent, and ate twenty meals for \$3.50 per week. After that first year he received a loan through the recommendation of the dean and graded examination papers. In addition, he chopped wood for the biology professor for ten cents an hour. During the summers he sold books for a friend, Maurice Jacobs of the Frontier Press. He not only supported himself but paid off the loan and sent money to his parents in Europe.

“There were few Jewish students at the university in those years, and only a handful of Jews in any college were concerned with Jewish affairs.” Maurice Jacobs was the exception. Philip and Maurice organized a chapter of Phi Epsilon, a Jewish fraternity (because Jews were excluded from other Greek fraternities), as well as the Menorah Society, with Maurice as superior of the fraternity and Philip as second president. The two friends cooperated in many cultural activities the rest of their lives.

Philip served as a chemical engineer in research in the U.S. Army when he graduated from the university. He spent seven years in the textile dye industry. He believed Germany undersold domestic manufacturers and the mergers of textile factories ruined small businesses.

He sold his factory and accepted the offer of Max Kagan, a national leader in the shoe industry, to join him in the Pilgrim

Shoe Company in Bangor as a partner. The crash of 1929 did not ruin this business. During World War II the wage and price freeze plus the scarcity of raw materials did affect the shoe business, however. He had to substitute cements for tacks and synthetic soles for leather. Labor became scarce, wages increased, and taxes were high, but he made many friends in Bangor who shared his enthusiasm for Jewish causes: Joseph Emple operated one of the largest knitting mills in the East; Samuel Goodman, who brought many refugees from Europe and helped develop the Jewish Home for the Aged in Portland; Michael Pilot, assistant U.S. district attorney in 1935; Edward I. Gross, judge of Bangor Municipal Court and later mayor; Abraham Moses Rudman, justice of the Maine Supreme Court; Dr. Lawrence M. Cutler, member of the Bangor School Board and chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine; and Brigadier General Bernard S. Waterman joined him in his community activities.

In 1935 Lown bought a shoe factory in Lewiston and took his family there. He practically worshiped his wife, Ann Rubin, an invalid for many years. He had an elevator installed in his home so that she could come downstairs for meals. Louise and Dorothy, their children, grew up in comparative luxury. Louise married a young shoe manufacturer from Lawrence, Massachusetts, but divorced him when her cousin, Bernard Lown, pursued her. This was a great tragedy in the Lown family—no family member had been divorced before. Philip was so upset that a psychiatrist was used to reconcile members of the family. Today Bernard Lown is an internationally famous cardiologist. According to his secretary, Lillian Berns, Philip dominated every group he was in. He was generous to people he liked, but he could be cruel to Bernard, whom he called a “communist.” Dorothy married Lee Fischman, who had a large shoe business in Florida.

As treasurer and later as chairman of the board of Beth Jacob Synagogue in Lewiston, he reorganized the finances and expanded the cultural and social influence of the institution. The Hebrew School, too small and led by an untrained teacher, was not very effective. He convinced the more prosperous Jews in Lewiston to combine with lower-status Auburn Jews to form a community school with competent teachers. With his guidance a Jewish community center was built to merge the two communities.

To rescue Jews from the Nazis, he and Israel Bernstein, a lawyer in Portland, organized a statewide organization called

Maine Jewish Council. A small group of men and women visited towns, villages, and hamlets where they helped to establish United Jewish Appeal committees to collect funds. When his family expressed concern for his health after these trips, he would smile happily and speak with enthusiasm of the warm-hearted, generous, backcountry Jewish potato farmers. Philip used the council to not only raise funds for UJA, but he also sparked Jewish education in every community he visited.

He wrote, "We realized that Jewish education means learning to live intelligently as Jewish Americans. We felt that Jewish knowledge is a source of personal dignity and security and that Jewish education can counteract the demoralizing effects of anti-Semitism." The council published a monthly gazette, that featured literature, Bible and Talmud study, Jewish life (past and present), book reviews, and current events.

At a convention of the council held in Lown's summer house in Naples, Maine, Ben Rosen, then professional head of the American Association for Jewish Education, proposed that a survey of educational needs of the state should be made. Philip Lown was elected president of the committee and Alexander S. Kohanski was named educational director for Sunday Schools in Maine. In 1945 they found about nine thousand Jews scattered in Portland, Bangor, Lewiston-Auburn, and almost twenty-five small towns and hamlets among 900,000 people spread over 33,215 square miles from Aroostook County to Portland. Kohanski characterized them as largely homogeneous Orthodox, "with a sense of kinship and mutual belonging."

Home study courses were provided for children in isolated settlements. In addition, public lectures, adult study groups, and a portable library stimulated alienated groups.

Lown proposed a summer camp and bought the land in Oakland for this purpose. It was to stimulate a sense of pride in the Jewish heritage as well as to create an emotional bond with Jews everywhere, "so that they might become self-respecting American Jews." The camp was expected to provide the children with a happy emotional experience in Jewish living while in a recreational atmosphere. The camp was established as Camp Lown in Oakland, Maine, in 1945.

In Lewiston Philip was active in Lewiston-Auburn Community Chest, the American Red Cross, the General Hospital, the USO, and the YMCA. The YMCA invited him to serve as

director and later as president, though they had to eliminate their bylaw requirement of "belief in Christ" to secure his services. He established five student loan funds at the University of Maine, Bates College, Brandeis University, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Tufts University.

Lillian Merson Berns, his secretary for many years in Lewiston, spoke of him as a "great man" several years after his death. He was her son's godfather. He paid for his education at Camp Lown since he was six years old and maintained an interest in his career as a social worker.

The Maine Jewish Council disbanded in 1949. By that time other statewide organizations were established, including the United Jewish Appeal and Israel Bonds where he served as chairman.

Philip's wife died in 1948, and his children lived elsewhere. He gave up the shoe factory, and though he had many friends in Lewiston, he needed other interests.

In 1952 he moved to Boston, and thereafter his contributions to Maine organizations decreased. He felt that children worldwide should be accepted in Camp Lown, not only those who were Maine residents. In this he differed with his board of directors, who wished to keep the camp small and for local children. He still sent financial contributions to Jewish agencies in Maine, but he insisted they must reflect distinctive features of Jewish life.

Lown was not active in anti-defamation work. He believed the respect of non-Jews would be won by Jews positively identified with the Jewish heritage and their psychological security stemming from this identity. He strove to affect intercommunity cooperation. He regarded education and Israel as the prime responsibilities of Jewish leaders.

In Boston he served as campaign chairman of the UJA in 1956 while the Suez crisis was raging in Israel and the Sinai Desert. In 1961 and 1962 he was treasurer of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies campaign.

During his term as board member, vice-president, and president of the American Association for Jewish Education, a national teachers' pension plan for Jewish schools and the National Curriculum Research Institute were established. He served as president of the Hebrew Teachers College of Brookline,