

On Experiencing the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem

On our last day in Jerusalem, my brother and I girded our loins and visited Yad Vashem, the museum dedicated to the Holocaust, to the memories and testimonies of the survivors as well as to the millions who perished during Hitler's reign of terror.

The grounds on Yad Vashem are extensive. The main museum houses lifelike views where torture and mass exterminations took place. Upon stepping into the interior of the main museum, one sees countless sections, almost impossible to fathom. To see this from the outset, one begins to comprehend the endlessness and vastness of the hatred, the brutality, the inhumanity and the finality of the genocide. We went through the sections for what was an eternity, but in reality, just three hours.

Having listened to horrific stories as shown and told by the survivors, we emerged from this intensively painful journey to view a floor to ceiling window which overlooks the Jerusalem Woods. Beyond the nightmare stands the forest: verdant, reaching to the heavens, soaring green spikes with rays of light shining through.

As my brother and I paused at the overlook, we were emotionally drained but greatly relieved to have come through, to have survived – not to any imaginable degree that the Holocaust victims who survived, but nevertheless, to have found the moral strength to bear witness. In turning our sights to the forest, we felt more hopeful for a better future, for the survivors, their children, and their children's children, of which my brother and I are a part.

After a fashion we had collected ourselves, left the main museum and forged on. We wandered through the grounds in a somewhat dazed manner. We found a path with a sign pointing to the Children's Memorial. My brother and I searched each other's faces and silently asked, "Would we be able to experience this memorial?" Yes, we decided, we must do this.

With determination and trepidation, we entered a tall, cylindrical building and were immediately enfolded in almost utter darkness. As we inched forward, we heard voices intoning names, places and ages. "Judith Solomon, Warsaw, Poland, Age 3." "Ezra Rosenberg, Vienna, Austria, Age 6." On and on the names rolled. As we continued to descend, we looked left and right. Out of the darkness was a small flame, then another, then another, then another. The number of flames seemed infinite. We moved slowly down and farther down into the darkness, broken by a multitude of single flames, flanking us on either side, with the voices overhead, continually naming names, places, ages.

Eventually we arrived at what we perceived was the nadir, the lowest point in the darkness. There we beheld a single flame and behind the flame, thousands of mirrors. It was then that we recognized there was only one flame with mirrors reflecting throughout the entire memorial, one flame to depict the unity in the deaths of over one million innocent children who had perished during the Holocaust.

We slowly ascended on the other side of the memorial, always seeing the single flames, always hearing the names. As we emerged into daylight, I remembered what my cousin, Amit had told us. His father had survived and had made his way to what was once Palestine, now Israel. The unofficial policy in Israel is to marry, to have at least three children and those three children were to do the same. In 1946, Amit's father and uncle arrived as teenagers in Palestine. In just three generations, they can now count 27 of the Teller family living in Israel. The Tellers and many others are carrying on for all those children who were murdered, to help ensure the future of their families and the future of their nation.

My brother and I continued our journey through Yad Vashem and arrived at the Hall of the Righteous, where those for whom a tree was planted to honor their acts of bravery, sacrifice and breath-taking good will. There were and will always be people of good will. It was with this belief in which my brother and I left Yad Vashem and drove immediately to the Jerusalem rose garden.

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