

A time for Remembrance

JRoots – HGS Journey to Poland Past, Present and Future

Directed by Tzvi Sperber and R Naftali Schiff



Sunday morning, alarm clock goes off at 3.30am, grab clothes, dress, dash out the door in the pouring rain, meet Simon from down the road, get the bus, off to the airport, picking up a few more tired and disorientated souls and fly off to Poland.

At least we all had the option to do this of our own free will. Over the next three days we followed the story of those who were far less fortunate, and didn't get to make the return journey.

Brilliantly led by Zvi Sperber and Rabbi Naftali Schiff of Aish, our small group of twenty from HGSS, Highgate and Manchester visited Auschwitz, Krakow, Tarnow, Lublin, Maydenek, Treblinka, the Warsaw Ghetto and the grave of Rebbe Elimelech.

On the first day we were honoured to be accompanied by Mrs Neumann, a survivor of Auschwitz, now living with her extended family in Manchester. Her ability and willingness to talk of what she had experienced, while being gently and perceptively interviewed by Zvi, brought home to us all the magnitude of what happened. It contrasted the vast depersonalising scale of the place with the story of an individual human being. Her refusal to harbour any hate was the message to us all – hate consumes and hands a victory to those we hate, instead we should concentrate on living and prove that they failed.

The next day, we visited the forest near Zbylitowska Gora. There we walked in silence down a leafy lane that led to a clearing in which a few fenced off areas marked the edges of where the pits had been.

The trip was not all gloom. We davened shacharit at the Rema Synagogue in Krakow, we ate in the now restored Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin where Rabbi Meir Shepira started the Daf Yomi cycles and we danced and drank vodka by the kever of Rebbe Elimelech.

At certain times we became very emotional; recitations of kaddish at some harrowing sites will never be forgotten. The success of our trip was largely due to the sensitive and relevant readings chosen and delivered by Zvi Sperber at each location. These brought meaning and gave focus to our turbulent feelings.

I was not sure what to expect from the trip and admit to having dreaded it as departure approached. It has left a lasting impression with a positive final message. When Zvi and Naftali lead their next trip, I would thoroughly recommend it to everyone.

Lizchor ve'lo Lishko'ach – To remember and not to forget.

Bernard Fromson

My parents, both of whom were survivors of the Holocaust, never wanted to go back to Poland. They said that the country's earth was soaked in Jewish blood. From an early age they would tell me their stories from "the home" and their personal experiences during the Holocaust. I took a number of courses related to the Holocaust when studying for my undergraduate degree. However, neither the personal recollections of my parents nor my academic studies could prepare me for actually seeing the death factories of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, or where the Treblinka concentration camp once stood. At Zbylatovska Gura, near Tarnow, we went to the forest where over 10,000 Jews were murdered in cold blood. The Germans and their Eastern European collaborators had turned Poland into a mass Jewish cemetery. They succeeded in taking a country where Jews were over 10% of the population, where every major city and town had a significant Jewish population, and making it into a country virtually "Judenrein" (free of Jews).

Well before the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, my maternal grandmother begged her husband that they and their family needed to leave their very comfortable lives in Lodz and leave Poland. My maternal grandfather refused to leave the country where he was able to live a full Jewish life and have success in commerce -- he believed the Nazis were a passing storm. They and virtually all of mother's family died due that false belief. So when I was asked to say Kaddish at Auschwitz-Birkenau on behalf of our group, I thought of my family, and I thought of the six million people who were murdered simply because they were Jews. **Larry Weiss**

The recent trip to Poland was one that will be imprinted in my memory for many years to come. As well as visiting concentration camps where so many innocent Jews and non-Jews were killed, I was uplifted by some of the historic and cultural places we passed, illustrating the vibrant Jewish past in Poland. The organisers AISH, and in particular Zvi Sperber, supplemented the tour with a guide full of knowledge, enthusiasm and humour - ensuring that we returned home with enhanced knowledge of events and also the thirst to learn more about our history and the impact of the holocaust. **Ivan Ezekiel**

HGSS participation in the Poland trip was organised by Community Director Rabbi Knopf.