

This trip sandwiched Lizensk, between Krakow and Munich. I did not plan it that way. I planned to visit Krakow like I always do, despite there being a nearer airport to Lizensk (Rzeszow), in deference to my father, his brand of orthodoxy and the REMAH. He called himself "A Remah Yid" and was upset my turn toward chassidut, so for the last decade I stop there on the way an from the shul built in 1558 call my dad to reassure him. Besides, Kazimierz has a hold on me. Its cobblestones and narrow streets bring me back to a lost Judaism, and I feel the history and memory there and in the 2 cemeteries. This time however I spent time on the way back in Munich. The trip became a metaphor for the journey between two worlds stuck in the medieval structures of the buildings and hearts of the lost souls.

I walk the streets of Kazimierz, old Jewish Quarter of Krakow, Poland, on my way to the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizensk, some 3 hours drive into the mountains tomorrow. Walking by Oscar Schindler's factory in the Jewish Ghetto now a museum, a film crew from Universal Studios is preparing the launching of the 20th anniversary of the film by Spielberg.

Death lingers here and all over Europe, it lingers on the streets, the cobblestones, and the haunting chairs in the Umschatzplatz, where Jews were finally rounded up and the elderly were shot on what is known here as Bloody Thursday.

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/zgody.html>

So it seems quite surreal , this descent into the real life *sitz im leben* of an old city to launch the new format for the film, clearly a publicity event to promote the new version....while in the background throngs of Hassidim from the US and Israel are gathered in the old Jewish cemetery to pay respects to the Remah and other Rabbinic personalities buried here for the last 3 or 4 hundred years.

Dressed in 18th century garb, refusing modernity, they fill the old city in groups of 5 or 10, in piety and innocence, mostly in their teens or early twenties, oblivious to the film crews roving the Jewish Quarter and setting up for the event opposite Schindler's factory, now museum, in the Ghetto.

Surreal because bar after bar has klezmer music playing with pictures of Hassidim dancing hanging on the walls but no Jews to be seen at the non kosher tables!

Local Poles come here, to the Jewish Quarter to experience some kind of Jewish authenticity, a world that has been lost, having been robbed of their own cultural identity by a century of communism, they grab at anything, and fill the bars and restaurants here on weekend evenings, for the kitsch music, the non kosher jewish style food and the pictures on the walls of Hassidic merriment and joy.

And similarly Spielberg¹ is here, or his publicity agents, promoting and selling the sentimentality of the Schindler film 20 years later, itself now a US cultural icon for hungry American Jews seeking identification with Holocaust and Israel as their only cultural identity markers left. It has a feel good ending, the survivors crossing the landscape in Israel, the Promised Land, true to Hollywood. But here the Zionist happy ending is not felt, for we are frozen in time, the last moment of deportation to Belzec, and then silence, a screaming 70 year old silence that haunts the cobblestones. This square, with its silent chairs dotted around is a reminder of the belongings laid strewn after the deportation.

In this square they gunned down the elderly and children. It has an eerie quality. People don't cross it. All around life goes on. The square's cobblestones bear the weight of history and witness to the unspeakable. They cry out for the victims, they demand justice, they point fingers at us, not only for the past but the present too. Our inaction, the current genocides torture and terror, point back to these places as the place where all this became acceptable, a marker of our century, the turn of humanity into a new darker age. Rather than withdraw in horror as a result of the Nazi curse, the world has allowed this type of inhumanity to continue.

The Schindler phenomenon gives a false sense in the goodness of humanity, an isolated incidence that, by promotion and publicity gives the viewer a false hope. Those who "watch" are like those who visit concentration camps, (I think of Oprah and Wiesel) promoting a horrific voyeurism (mounds of hair, spectacles etc) in the service of "justice". Rather than cause a prevention of further torture, it remains unclear what effect all this really has, when appropriated by people for ulterior motives.

¹ see my comments in : <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/steven-spielberg-reflects-20th-anniversary-424919#comments>



At Plac Bohaterów Getta - Heroes of the Ghetto there is a mute memorial to what has passed here designed by Krakow architects Piotr Lewicki and Kazimierz Latak. This memorial features 33 large illuminated chairs in the square and 37 smaller chairs standing on the edge of the square and at the tram stops. The chairs represent the furniture and other remnants that were discarded on that very spot by the ghetto's Jews as they were herded into the trains that would often take them to their deaths in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. At the other end of the square is the Apteka Pod Orlem (the Chemist under the Eagle) which was the only pharmacy allowed in the ghetto and funded by Roman Polanski it is being renovated and turned into a museum.²

With all this Schindler's list *sphrach* I am reminded of the recent LACMA exhibit on Stanley Kubrick's filmography and muse what would have been, had his final film *Aryan Papers* come to fruition. A serious look at what it meant to survive by any means to protect one's child, a metaphor and a deep contemplation on the Holocaust worthy of any theologian. But Schindler's List came out and he abandoned the project. Was it too immense....did it kill him...?

I walk the cobblestoned alleys here to access my own sense of authenticity, for on these streets the giants of our tradition once held their students enthralled with their novellae and codification of the Jewish Law, that forms the basis for our current Ashekenazi practices, a real center for Jewish learning and piety, for hundreds of years and then I imagine the Nazi brutes rounding up Jews a few decades ago, and can palpate the horror and fear welling up inside me...remember this is 60km from Auschwitz.

Death is present here. It has a way of lingering. The absent Jews, the kitsch hassidic music spilling out from the bars onto the street, the young Hassidim oblivious, and the film crew....where am I...a bad dream.

Krakow/Kazimierz is a city of absent souls, lost to the Nazi murderer. A city where death lingers and the cobblestones carry the weight of history. I feel this each time I come and it grounds me before leaving to meet the Zaddik in Lizensk. In an ironic way I find a deep connection between Reb Elimelech and the Holocaust. Firstly he and Reb Zischa stopped in Uschpitzin (Auschwitz) where they heard the cries of screaming babies. That is the day they stopped their "Galut" their migrations and Auschwitz became the most western point of the spread of Chassidut. The the story of the two NAZI officers who opened up Reb Elimelech's grave in 1941 thinking the Jews were hiding their gold there. I have felt that if he had any relevance for us today he must speak to this paramount theological issue for us children of survivors.

² Zgody Square "Krakow" The German Occupation of Europe <http://www.HolocaustResearchProject.org>
www.holocaustresearchproject.org, Holocaust Education & Archive Research Team

Confronting the evil out there and the evil within: Pilgrimage to Lizensk 2013

I wander into the old city, the Christian center of Krakow with its imposing square (on the last five medieval towns left in Europe with central large squares) and marvel at the architecture.

According to a popular 20th-century legend, during a Mongol invasion of Poland (the invasion usually cited is that of 1241), Mongol troops led by General Subutai approached Kraków. A sentry on a tower of St. Mary's Church sounded alarm by playing the hejnał, and the city gates were closed before the Tatars could take the city by surprise. The trumpeter, however, was shot in the throat and did not complete the anthem. According to the legend, that is why it now ends abruptly before completion.

I listen to the Bugler and am reminded of the first time I heard the legend from Mr Lewis my biology teacher (a defrocked Presbyterian minister who taught us “the meaning of truth” besides biology at the Hasmonian Grammar School for boys, despite the Rabbis!), in 1966, and my desire to actually hear the tune.³ The Melody has lingered over the years.⁴

This towering Church stands in the main square of the old city and Marta tells me the priest last Christmas eve ridiculed the Jews for not accepting Christ, despite Vatican II. She walked out.

³ <http://www.krakow-info.com/hejnal.htm>. listen to the abrupt cessation of the tune reminding the listener as to the moment the young bugler was shot with an arrow.

⁴ The Kraków Hejnał is well-known throughout Poland and has been used as a symbol of the Polish nation as a whole. For instance, during World War II, on May 18, 1944, a bugler from the 2nd Polish Corps played the tune to announce the Polish victory in the Battle of Monte Cassino. See Wikipedia.



St Mary's Church where the bugler plays each hour.

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Why am I so drawn to the Christian old city? Beyond having been raised in the Christian west, I feel the deep many times unacknowledged, connection between the Christian and Jewish communities of Europe, despite centuries of Christian theological anti-semitism, our self conscious identities are so determined by “the other”.... Their insistence on the preservation of their Jewish sister in shame the “Old Israel” and our dogged denial of anything “Christian” in our rituals and customs.

Yet here I feel the culmination of this tragic sisterhood most, in the NAZI barbarism that engulfed both communities.

For the first time in their relationship the Nazi program had nothing to do with theology, rather ethnicity.

Below is the sculpture of The Ecclesia and the Synagogue - Strasbourg Cathedral, ~1230 CE:



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The church looks on at her older sister blindfolded and shamed. The new Israel triumphant bearing the chalice of Christ, whereas the synagogue holds the book in her left hand.

Nothing has changed this perception. Not even Vatican II, not here in Europe.

The architecture reflects centuries of European Christian dominance, but now with a post Holocaust vision, the absent synagogue, the absent Jew, has created a vacuum , a chasm where Hitler's victory is felt acutely. So we must conjure up dead Jews and pictures of Hassidic piety gaiety and dancing and music of the macabre. All the while neo-hassidic groups from Israel and US pour in on their way via Krakow to worship by the Rebbe in Lizensk.

At the other end of the trip Post Lizensk, I stop over in Munich.

Munich is a bustling business town yet in the heart is the Konigsplatz, where Hitler Exhibited his power and consolidated his base. here he burnt books in 1933 and here he rallied his brown shirts. Here he buried his comrades in Greek like tombs.



Konigsplatz today.



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Konigsplatz 19th November 1938

I come to this large square to feel history, in the space between the buildings, the square, this large space where thousands pledged allegiance to this man. Nearby is a beer hall where I sit and try to feel the immensity of this platz. A Jew some 80 years later in a place that remembers its own glory, Germany prior to Hitler and post fascism. yet I was born only five years after his death. What began here ended in Krakow.

And between the two towns the visit the pilgrimage to Lizensk, albeit a day late for the Yahrzeit, and still Nazi reminders, that day when 2 officers showed up and were told the Jews were hiding gold by the Rebbe's tomb.



The Ohel of Reb Elimelech of Lizensk, 2013

For me, if the Rebbe has any power over my spiritual life he must address the central theological problem for me, a personal relationship with the divine following His apparent indifference to the suffering of European Jewry. In addition the darkness within me, the possibility that in similar circumstances, my indifference or even participation in the face of brute power, my lack of courage and presence to protest ongoing genocide

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in the world today, needs to be addressed. My character defects addictions betrayals and deceits as part of a holographic image of evil within mirrors well the carnage without.

Here before the Zaddik I cannot make any rational statements or rationalizations. He sees through me and all my faults, and despite all that accepts me as the zaddik. The peace of mind that descends on me is quick to follow. In that space of serenity I return to face the challenges of my life, my theological enterprise and my inner work of healing.



The Tomb of Reb Elimelech of Lizensk

Even here by the Rebbe, who promised that God would never let us down (*parshas Beshalach*) what was he thinking in 1942? did he give up then? After 200 years? Or did he rage at the dying of the night, laugh at the Nazi officer as he opened his tomb looking for gold?

I find magic here. Despite my broken life, coming here brings me hope. in this Zaddik I find serenity, that despite all my failings he does not give up on me, as a saint he rescues the broken souls, and pleads on my behalf before the divine judge. In return I come home pledging to work harder spiritually, To struggle more and have faith in the self, the higher self, that good will overcome. Mostly not to feel despair. in some mysterious way he gives me sense, meaning to this struggle, inspires me to suffer better, carry my burden better, bringing clarity in a non rational way. I leave with serenity. Loving life and others better.

In some mysterious way the Nazi past of this haunted land and the Rebbe are connected. it is precisely this question of human suffering and man's cruelty that has haunted my religious life. So what does this inclusio of Lizensk inform Krakow and Munich? What did the Rebbe teach me about human suffering?

His insistence on the god beyond suffering, his brother Reb Zicha's refusal to see suffering only God. This couple, these brothers Lipmann, teach me how to let go, to accept it all, the divine will, in serenity, to stop resisting, to stop controlling my father, rather yield, surrender, and see what happens. Now I have been here before, but maybe it takes years of coming to finally see....hear...feel their presence, their lives, their message.

In this lived life we have few choices, fates, destiny, genes, past abuse, personality traits, ethnicity, culture, background, reduce our choices, so that at times, we feel little freedom. Then comes these moments when all seems possible, even now this late, the Zaddik opens up new paths of possibility. This gives rise to serenity. In this peace god presents Himself, and His felt presence despite the absence of His saving graces a generation ago, despite the screams and utter despair of millions, life continues, couples sit at the cafe houses in Kazimierz, people hustle to work in Munich, and Lizensk reaps American dollars from Hassidic tourists.

In the space between Munich and Krakow, the beginning and end of Nazism, the typology of evil out there, I do my work with the Rebbe, to confront the evil within. Until I work on the inner demons I feel those out there will never be fully confronted.