

From Richard Edelman

In October of 2013 my wife Nina and I joined with our friends of nearly fifty years Jim and Nancy Youngerman in transversing Central Europe in a self-designed tour of Jewish sites of memory, pain, and renewal. We passed through Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, and finally Krakow. Like many before us, we sought understanding, remembrance, and a past we never had to suffer.

We found Jewish History walks, attended services in synagogues and basements, visited sites of terrible mass murders. Everywhere we sought signs of new Jewish life and found it in a thorny complexity of new forms of worship, of self-discovered young Jews themselves the children of children hidden away in the war years. There were memorials, museums, bricks, plaques, sculptures, leaflets, maps and sorrows enough to go around in a dozen languages spoken and written.

But it was particularly in Krakow where we found not only remembrance but also hope. Hope is a funny thing: you need it most when it makes the least sense.

Krakow is an historic and cultural crossroads. It has been the political capital of Poland as well as the site of its most important University for many centuries. Through an historic accident its Jewish Quarter Kazimierz was physically preserved because its inhabitants were moved to a new Ghetto before elimination and Poles were marched in. In shambles and abandoned after the fall of the Soviet Union, the keys were largely turned over to Jewish institutions. Today we see it physically close to how it was then. Here the events of Schindler's List took place and were recreated in film by Spielberg...while the dark factory has been repurposed into a world class museum shedding light on the Shoah. Here old Synagogues watch silently while tourists in carts zip through centuries filled with the ghosts of Jewish merchants, musicians, thinkers and students. Now a Jewish Music Festival is held attended by upwards of 40,000...the vast majority Poles. Krakow is the nearest major city to Auschwitz and often tours begin and end here.

In the midst of all this stands a great institution, the JCC Krakow. Here Jews find a place to gather, to heal, to learn, to find themselves emotionally and physically. Beyond its walls, a message goes out from the JCC of

renewal and regeneration to the larger Jewish World, as over 8000 visitors monthly from around the world find their way here. Israeli teenagers and IDF troops pass through its doors and find meaning.

While in Krakow I began to think how these themes of remembrance as well as of hope could be given voice in an expression by a Jewish artist. At any great cultural crossroads many voices mix, cry out, and argue for expression. There might be Jewish music here, but is it Jewish? There might be tours of Jewish sites, but is that Jewish? Questions of identity expand to fill a vacuum when so many of the living honestly care and are curious...yet so few are left to explain honestly *the way it was*. Focusing this debate is the JCC, a living institution of living persons, serving needs and teaching world Jewry lessons about survival...not in Eretz Israel but in what can be still be called the diaspora, if infinitely reduced in absolute numbers. Yet, it seems to say, if we can exist here, we can exist...anywhere.

My dream of a sculpture in Krakow expressed with a Jewish voice making a unique Jewish statement was placed in the hands of Hannah Rosenthal who carried it in portfolio to Krakow on a family visit. Call it my family photo album in stainless steel. It was Hannah who understood that a sculpture to speak most effectively must stand outside of the public squares of Kazimierz. Her insight was that we must enter the argument of identity debated by society at large, but from our own space...perhaps the protected courtyard at number 24 Miodowa Street...that is formed on the one side by the JCC and the other by the eastern Bima wall of the Tempel Synagogue. A low wall with an open gate separates this semi-private space from the street, yet a sculpture of significant proportion would rise above it and give expression to the larger community of travelers and visitors.

Hannah met with Jonathan Ornstein at the JCC, the brilliant leader at the center of all we have witnessed in Krakow. Like the IDF soldier which he was, Jonathan is active, thinks on his feet, and leads courageously through example. He is ... a natural. Hannah and Jonathan and his staff loved the idea of a sculptural expression. And in reviewing the portfolio...the SHOFAR concept won their approval...the very one which I had thought most appropriate. Within a month, Hannah, Jonathan, Nina and I worked out the details. Jonathan's insight was key to our conception: that the sculptural theme should represent the forward looking idea of RETURN over the idea of remembrance. Thus the subtitle to the work: SHOFAR

KRAKOW, *CALL TO RETURN*. In the end, Return contains remembrance because we cannot return if we do not remember from where we came. I created a metal model of SHOFAR KRAKOW and Nina and I returned to Krakow and presented a photographic study to Jonathan and his staff who approved.

The staff of the JCC KRAKOW, in particular Sebastian Rudol, have worked tirelessly to allow this sculpture to spring to life. A thousand details have been ordered, executed, and checked off long lists. Foundations will be poured. Containers unloaded. Cranes hoisted. Drawings rendered. Photographs taken, and taken again. Hotel Reservations made. Trucks ordered. Import duties paid. Bills of Lading signed. Soil conditions analyzed. The sculpture has been created in my studio in Milwaukee and largely executed in a factory space also in Wisconsin. The sculpture's path is by truck from Milwaukee to rail from Chicago to a vessel sailing from Montreal to arrive in Gdynia port, Poland and then by truck to Krakow.

All of this is in quiet service to the blowing of SHOFAR KRAKOW for the first time on Selichot 2015. It will be our privilege to join the delegations from Milwaukee and from Poland as witnesses to this act of *RETURN*. My deepest thanks to Jonathan Ornstein and Hannah Rosenthal.

Richard Edelman May 2015