

Why We Went to Poland



WARSAW -- CATHOLIC PRIMATE, REFORM RABBI EMBRACE. AT CEREMONIES MARKING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY HERE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING, JOSEPH CARDINAL GLEMP, CATHOLIC PRIMATE OF POLAND (LEFT), MET WITH ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER, PRESIDENT OF THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS, FOR WHAT THE REFORM JEWISH LEADER DESCRIBED AS A "FRIENDLY AND SATISFYING" HOUR-LONG DISCUSSION. "IT WAS A MEETING OF BROTHERS," SAID RABBI SCHINDLER, WHO SAID HE AND THE CARDINAL HAD DISCUSSED "BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, INCLUDING THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE." RABBI SCHINDLER HAS BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF EFFORTS BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE U.S. TO WIN AGREEMENT ON A NUCLEAR ARMS FREEZE.

BY ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER
PRESIDENT, UNION OF AMERICAN
HEBREW CONGREGATIONS.

'To honor, to mourn, to say Kaddish
in the Jewish cemetery that is Poland'

There has been criticism of those Jews who went to Poland to mark the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Because I was among that group -- indeed, I helped lead a mission of Reform Jewish leaders who went to Poland -- I believe it is necessary to speak out on why we went and why it was good that we did. Also with us were representatives of the World Jewish Congress, Yad Vashem and World Federation of Jewish Fighters, Partisans and Camp Inmates, most of them from Israel.

We went because we wished to honor the memory of the Jews who died on the blood-soaked soil where they perished. We went to mourn and say Kaddish in the Jewish cemetery that is Poland. We went with pride and dignity, and everywhere we went we let it be known that we were Jews, brothers and sisters of the Polish Jewish martyrs, and that we had come to honor the dead -- our dead.

We went because we wished to maintain con-

tact with the remnant of Polish Jewry that survives. They are entitled to that contact because they are Jews. We are entitled to continue that contact because we are Jews.

We went because the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has undertaken the task of recovering and preserving sacred treasures of Polish Jewish life that are in danger of vanishing. Our Polish Judaica project, under the supervision of Rabbi Philip Hiat, has already made accessible to the West priceless religious artifacts, sacred books and historical records thought to have been destroyed. More materials of this kind are now being found and saved. In addition, contributions from Reform synagogues in the U.S. and Canada have also paid for the restoration of old and crumbling Jewish cemeteries.

We went because we must not forget the thousand years of Polish Jewish history, and we must not let the Poles forget. When I first visited Auschwitz six years ago I could not tell from its exhibits that Jews had died there. Annual commemorations of the Nazi genocide referred to the victims only as Poles. This year, because we were coming, the Polish government acknowledged the Jewish dimension to the Nazi occupation.

What about the PLO? I had been personally assured that the terrorists would not be permitted to take part in the ceremonies. The moment I arrived in Poland I issued a public statement calling any PLO participation an obscenity. The fact that they were permitted to lay a wreath at the Warsaw memorial made a hideous mockery of what the commemoration was all about; it was especially repugnant because in maintaining that the PLO had nothing against Jews but only Zionists, the terrorist spokesman was again falsifying history. It was the Zionists who were in the vanguard of the Ghetto Uprising; it was Arafat's predecessor -- Haj Mohammed Amin el-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem -- who publicly supported Hitler, lived luxuriously in Berlin and plotted his return to a Nazi-occupied Palestine after the war.

Our of a sense of Jewish self-respect, we decided that we would ignore the PLO, who in any case were not present at the ceremony where we laid our wreaths. We mourn when -- and where -- we choose to mourn. To allow an enemy of the Jews to drive us away from places we consider holy is unthinkable.

What about Marek Edelman? Dr. Edelman, an opponent of the regime and hero of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising who still lives in Poland, called for a world boycott of the commemoration. I recognize and appreciate his feelings, but each of us had to decide as the heart prompted. We declared publicly that our presence should not be construed as an endorsement of the suppression of human rights in Poland or as support for the present government.

We also felt that a boycott by world Jewry would have compromised Poland's remaining Jews, and perhaps even jeopardized their security. Their numbers are small -- something between 6,000 and 10,000 -- but they are Jews.

They are part of us as we are part of them. We went to demonstrate that unity.

A highlight of the commemoration took place in Treblinka, in memory of the thousands of Jews who died there. There were many children; Polish Scouts had come to honor one of the founders of Polish Scouting -- the Jewish educator Janusz Korczak, after whom their Scout troops had been named. We walked through the gates of Treblinka and followed the path that led Korczak and the children of his Jewish orphanage to their death.

I approached some of the young Scouts and asked them why they were there. Their answer sums up our central reason for going to Poland. "This was the place where Jews were killed," they said. "It must never happen again."

Governor's Senior Ball June 24

The Governor's Senior Ball in June 24. The setting for the Senior Center fund raiser is to be the Grand Ballroom of the Sands Hotel.

Music will be provided by Paul Meeker's Big Band Era Orchestra. Meeker played at the Drake Hotel in Chicago for 14 years in addition to gigs throughout the country during the big band period. Members of his present orchestra played with other notable bands of the time including Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Glen Miller and Gene Krupa. Presently the orchestra is cutting an album with Capitol Records featuring the Big Band Era.

Meeker's band is sure to please young and old alike. Dancing will begin at 9 p.m. and continue until 1 a.m. Tickets are selling rapidly so don't wait too long to buy yours.

General chairman for the event is Ben Roscoe, Advisory Board vice-president. According to Roscoe, there will be seating for over 1,000 around the ballroom floor. Throughout the evening there will be many fine prizes awarded to holders of lucky drawing tickets which will be available for \$1 each the night of the dance.

One of the highlights of the ball will be the Grand March which will be led by Governor and Mrs. Richard Bryan. They will be assisted by Mayor and Mrs. Bill Briare, former Mayor and Mrs. Oran Gragson and Mr. and Mrs. Bob Light. The Grand March will be directed by Roger Brodeur.

Tickets for the Senior Ball are available at the Sands Hotel and the Las Vegas Senior Center. Prior to the evening of the dance they will sell for \$7.50, and at the door they will be \$10. The event is for dancers of all ages. Seniors may earn a free ticket for themselves by selling 10 tickets to friends, family and neighbors. Tickets which are contributed back to the Center by local businesses will be awarded through random drawings in the various classes and activities in the week prior to the dance.

According to Simon, all funds raised through this event will be dedicated to the purchase of furnishings for the Center expansion area or for changes in the existing structure to accommodate new functions. He urged all Center users to get behind this event because there are no funds presently available for these projects. Individuals wishing to assist by advance selling of tickets or working the night of the dance should contact any member of the Center staff.

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