

Remembering the Holocaust: A Two-Minute Mourning

I woke up earlier this week to the sound of a huge clap of thunder, and then I heard the steady sound of a driving rain on the street in front of my house, on the windows, and rushing down the gutters. I got out of bed, had coffee, served my kids breakfast, drove them to the bus so they wouldn't get drenched on the way to school, came home and showered, prayed, and started work.

Other than the rain, which is not typical this late in the spring, it's nothing atypical or particularly unusual on a Wednesday in the Feldstein home.

My work was interrupted by the sound of an air raid siren. Conveniently I didn't have to move as my office is in my basement bomb shelter. But this was not an "ordinary" air raid siren signaling rockets coming in from Gaza in an effort to terrorize or kill us as happened often last summer. This was the two-minute siren, sounded all across Israel, in solemn memory of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

For two solid minutes, people literally stop in their tracks wherever they are, no matter what they are doing. Cars stop in the middle of the highway and the drivers get out standing silently. City buses stop wherever they are and passengers pile out to remember the victims. It is the beginning of formal ceremonies throughout the country including in thousands of schools where children of all ages pause to remember.

I stood by my desk, silently, remembering the names and faces (where we have photos) of my relatives who were murdered, and grateful that my grandparents and a few other relatives left Europe in time, or survived the horrors and lived to build a

family.

I also realized that no matter how typical my day was, Holocaust victims never had it so easy. They woke to the sound of a Nazi guard or their Polish neighbors rounding up the Jews before deporting and murdering them.

They could only dream about a cup of coffee, much less with a dash of milk.

Breakfast for their kids? That meant stashing away a few extra bites of stale bread to keep kids spirits up and trying to stay alive. Eggs? Cereal? Oatmeal? Not a chance. Of course, that's assuming that their kids were not shot or gassed to death already.

Putting on a warm coat and boots before going out in the rain to stay warm and dry was not even a fantasy. There were no rain outs in the concentration and labor camps. Slave labor and mass murder did not pause because of the weather, no matter how rainy, snowy or cold it was. Inmates were not given rain coats, winter coats or boots.

What about taking a warm shower? Today we can bathe any time we want, daily. Maybe more. Then? Months and years went by without bathing. Other than it not being healthy, it was demeaning as the Nazis not only murdered us, but tried to dehumanizing us.

Did they pray? Some did, religiously. Their spirit and faith never broke and they would pray three times daily as per Jewish tradition, or as often as humanly possible given the Nazi guards and circumstances in which they "lived." Some lost faith entirely and wanted nothing to do with God. Many cried out to God to protect them and their loved ones, to save them. Some prayers were answered. Many more were not.

But none had a synagogue or even a prayer closet which they could "escape" the rest of the world for a few minutes and be

in intimate uninterrupted dialogue with the Creator of the world.

This week as we watched the live TV broadcast of Israel's national Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony as a family. As my 9-year-old son sat with his head leaning against me, asking questions that were challenging, and I tried to answer him in a way that was age appropriate, I wanted to take a selfie, to show the world, and our enemies today, that despite the horrors and suffering which we have endured, we won.

He is the only one in our immediate family born in Israel. Maybe this was a distant dream or prayer, but this is something I suspect that the six million victims could never have imagined. He is named for two victims of the Holocaust, our relatives. He's named for Yosef Feldstein, my father's first cousin, who was murdered as a small child. He's also named for my great grandfather, Shalom Yakov Birnbach who was rounded up along with the other Jews in his town and shot to death alongside a ditch the men were forced to dig, and then buried in.

Normally, my son would watch cartoons as he's getting ready for school but all TV broadcasts in Israel today are either with a Holocaust theme, or canceled outright. There's no place for frivolity today. No cartoons. No cooking shows. No mindless sit-coms. It was a day of reflection.

My son asked where Yosef and Shalom Yakov were buried. I explained that we don't know, and that one day I would read him the account of how his great-great grandfather was killed. We know, but he's not ready. Or I'm not ready to have more of his childhood taken from him as we confront our past and resolve to build and restore what was lost, and never again be threatened like that again.

Minus the rain, the day started quite normally, but it wasn't a normal day. It shouldn't have been. And if it's the only day

in which we remember the victims of the Holocaust, that's the least we can do.

And maybe all the rain was just God weeping.

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