

President's Message May 2009

My wife Linda and I just returned from a week's trip to Prague. Our children Sarah and Brandon had already visited the city on their various tours of Europe, and finally convinced us to visit the city. They described it as a smaller Paris, and much less expensive. They were correct. However, next time I go to Prague, I believe it will be my duty to invite the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

President Ahmadinejad is a well-educated person, who is also a Holocaust denier. It is impossible to visit a city like Prague, experience wonderful concerts at synagogues, and notice that there are very few Jews in the city. What do I mean, few Jews in the city?

In their twisted mentality, the Nazis chose to preserve the synagogues of Prague as reminders of the past. We visited the [Pinchas Synagogue](#) where approximately 80,000 names of murdered victims are inscribed on the wall. My wife uses her maiden name, Albin, and we discovered that name in several places.

Consequently, there is a visible infrastructure that was used historically by the Jews of Prague. Ironically, this infrastructure is visited today, mainly by tourists, but minimally used by the estimated 2,000 Jewish residents of Prague. More than 80,000 Czech Jews were murdered in World War II. Most of them spent time at a concentration camp in Terezin (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terezin>). We also visited Terezin. Our feelings at visiting this death camp were the same as those expressed by Rabbi Lewis in her [December, 2008, message](#). Terezin was utilized by the Nazis as a way station while the Nazis were preparing Auschwitz and other death camps for their "Final Solution."

Rabbi Lewis said it very eloquently in her December, 2008, message. There she described her conflicting feelings of visiting Auschwitz. She was impressed with Israeli visitors to Auschwitz who visibly wore the Israeli flag as a symbol.

Yes, there is an active Jewish community today in Prague, but it is a remnant of what the Nazis destroyed over 65 years ago. Mr. Ahmadinejad, I hope you now see such visible reminders of the Holocaust are not a fabrication.

In the Broadway play, *Irena's Vow*, Tovah Feldshuh plays a devout Catholic Polish house maid who successfully hides 12 Jews. After the war, Irena moves to California as Irena Gut Opdyke, married to a United Nations official. In her words, "she places a do not disturb sign over her heart." Remembering the awful Nazi occupation was too much for her until a student asks her whether the Holocaust existed. Determined, she becomes a non-Jewish exponent of the importance of remembering the Holocaust in the hope that it will never re-occur.

Please set aside June 7 for our annual Congregational meeting. More information to follow.

Shalom,

Jim Arvesen

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