

Inauguration ceremony of the restored Choral Synagogue of Drohobycz

17.6.2018

We are standing here today, in the names of our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents - our families who lived right here as far as 600 years ago. Does this really fill our hearts with joy?

This is indeed a great building. It has been completed by our great-grandparents about 150 years ago. It has been a synagogue and community center, which served their everyday life. Children, as young as 3-years old, learned how to read and write in the Talmud Torah next door. Bar Mitzvah boys became men as they stood on the *bima* and read from the Torah. Young and hopeful couples joyously took their wedding vows here, while those plagued with difficulties, troubles, sadness and grief sought counsel, solace and support within these walls. Our parents built this place as a center of life and hope.

Today it stands as a symbol of the spirit of that Jewish community. Not all of them were particularly religious. Most were ordinary people, living their life here at the best they could. They were people with traditions, with lives to live, doing their best to raise their children and be decent people.

Those people who prayed here or just got together for this or that event, were good people. Some were particularly talented and made fantastic contributions to the life of this town and far beyond: Bruno Schulz with his enchanted writings and illustrations was one; Young Maurycy Gottlieb with his outstanding paintings, including one of this synagogue, was another; So were his brothers and the painter, Efraim Lillien and pianist Ignacy Tiegerman and many-many more.

Others made their unique contributions to this town's and that of Boryslaw's economic history, as the founders of the Galician oil industry and later as its professionals, innovators and laborers. But mostly they were just decent people, living their life here at the best they could. They were our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents - working, loving and hoping.

Then came the Holocaust. In a matter of 3 short years, Nazi aggression annihilated 97% of this thriving Jewish community. We are the grieving sons and daughters of the remaining 600 survivors of Drohobycz's once 17,000 and Boryslaw's 14,000-strong Jewish communities.

Are we joyous when we stand here celebrating the rebirth of a great building which once served as a center of their tradition and life? We feel pain thinking of those 97% Human beings, our families, who were slaughtered because of fanaticism, racism and intolerance. We feel pain because we all know that they were human beings, selected by other human beings simply for being "OTHER" human beings.

As human beings, we all feel an overwhelming awe and responsibility for the future of our children and the next generations. Can we all contribute to their life and happiness? Perhaps.

Today we gaze at these beautiful walls around us. They were resurrected by people who looked at the tragic past with an eye to a better future. By people like our dear, late Alfred Schreyer, who never let us forget that painful past, and who worked incessantly to convince others to bring the ruins of this synagogue to life again; By those who undertook the challenge, preferring to remain anonymous, working behind the scenes, continuously and relentlessly supporting this project and bringing it to fruition; And by those present here today, Mr Joseph Karpin, his predecessors, his team and supporters, who were responsible for organizing and overseeing everyday work, persistently overcoming countless problems and setbacks, until achieving the final result before us today.

Can these magnificent walls contribute to the life and happiness of all our children and the next generations? Perhaps. It is up to us. All of us.

Let this magnificent synagogue serve as a concrete example of how a painful history can be turned into a source of hope. Let these walls be filled with education and cultural activities aimed at increasing open-mindedness, tolerance and peace. Let this hope and this splendid building never become ruins again.

It is up to us. All of us. Let's work on that together. Let there be hope.