

Temple Community

Temple Israel Religious School's 13 participants in the Asper Human Rights and Holocaust Studies program had their official graduation from the Program on the evening of June 1. The Program included a challenging academic curriculum and a requirement that each participant complete 16 hours of volunteer work in the community. It culminated in a trip to Washington DC, where our young people visited the Holocaust Museum and took part in a special program at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Many thanks to all the congregants who supported them and ensured that they were able to make it to the final part of the program in Washington DC.



Front Row - left to right: Isy Burke, Charlotte Hood, David Khazzam, Sonia Jason Byerley, Maya Ruckenstein
 Back Row - left to right: Angus Smith, Nathan Jason Byerley, Elijah Rodriguez-Garcia, Jacob McKean, Steven Angel, Sarah McKeague, Miranda Rhamey-Smith, Jordan Jason Byerley, Sue Potechin, Rabbi Norman Klein, Principal Sheli Braun.

Israel "Izzy" Asper was a giant of the Canadian communications and broadcasting industry and, incidentally, a Winnipeg boy who made good. He used to like to say that "we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

For Israel Asper, those weren't just empty words. He exemplified the imperative of Tikkun Olam – healing the world – as one of this country's great philanthropists, plowing his personal fortune into charities, into hospitals, into libraries, parks, theaters and community centers. The Asper Foundation, established in 1983, has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into Jewish causes, into arts and culture, community development, literacy and education, journalism and healthcare, not just here in Canada but all over the world.

But Asper's real passion lay in the realm of human rights. As most of you know, the Asper Foundation was the driving force behind the brand new Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. The goal of the Museum is to document the history of intolerance and to inspire global recognition of human rights as the basic underpinning of equality, dignity and freedom in all countries.

Long before the museum became reality, however, Asper was looking for a way of engaging young people – all of you – not only to sensitize you to racism and human rights abuses, but also to teach and inspire you to do something about it. That's where the Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program comes from – the Program that all of you have been involved in over the past six months.

It's a program, as you know, that requires you to undertake a challenging curriculum on human rights and the Holocaust. Almost 14,000 Canadian grade 9 and 10 students just like you have followed that curriculum since 1997. That's pretty incredible.

Even more importantly, it's a program that requires you actually to go out into your community and to give freely of your time, not for any material or personal gain, but purely to help others. Since the program

started, you and your fellow participants have performed more than 145,000 hours of volunteer community service. And that truly, truly makes a difference in people's lives.

And each year, you and – particularly – your parents and other donors in the community raise more than a million dollars to offset program costs. That in itself represents a significant investment of time, energy and goodwill.

And it's a program that gives you an opportunity to travel to Washington DC. That was good, because it was a bit of a holiday and a chance to hang out together in a new place. But while you were there, we also asked you to do some serious reflection on the Holocaust – one of the defining moments in the entire history of our people – as well as on human rights, racism and the role of people like you in responding to it. You probably noticed that of those 300 or so kids that we were with in Washington, less than about 15 per cent of them were Jewish. So their experience of all of this was a little bit different than yours. Not better, not worse, just different.

Remember that glass wall in the Holocaust museum with the names of all those thousands of Jewish communities that no longer exist, because everyone who lived in them was murdered? And do you remember how each one of us was able to point to one of those names – Minsk, Lvov, Cracow, Vilnius, Salonika – and say: my people came from there; I came from there.

Your experience of this program is unique. It's unique because – as we learned from our afternoon at the Religious Action Centre – the Jewish people have a special call to try and repair the world so that it reflects the divine values of Tzedek, Chesed and Shalom. That is Tikkun Olam; that's what Israel Asper believed in so strongly and why he made this program a reality.

Again, every single person in this world is invested with this responsibility, but we, as Jews, have the duty, the imperative, of carrying out deeds of G'milut hasadim – deeds of loving kindness. Our history means that we have a particular understanding of the worst that human beings can do to each other. But that also gives us unique understanding of the best that we can do for each other as well.

We walked in the shadow of truly remarkable people when we were together in Washington. Some are well known – Martin Luther King; Abraham Lincoln. But some were just ordinary people – think of Rosa Parks, or that statue of the Vietnam nurses that we visited on the first day we were there. Each one of you has the power to be those people. You don't have to be Abraham Lincoln; sometimes, you just have to be that extra person at the Out of the Cold program. But if you don't it, nobody else will.

Pirkei Avot tells us: "You are not required to complete the work, yet you are not allowed to desist from it." I think that all of your work this year; everything that your parents did to support you; was really about understanding that, and finding ways of acting upon it.

And I have a pretty strong feeling that that is exactly what Israel Asper z"l wanted too.

Angus Smith

Max Sternthal, speaker.

On December 10, 1942, YITZCHAK RUDASHEVSKI made this entry in his diary:

"Wednesday, December 10, 1942. It dawned on me that today is my birthday. Today I became 15 years old. You hardly realize how time flies. It, the time, runs ahead unnoticed and presently we realize, as I did today, for example, and discover that days and months go by, that the ghetto is not a painful, squirming moment of a dream which constantly disappears, but is a large swamp in which we lose our days and weeks.....I often have deep qualms. Surely I could live better...I became