

WHAT BEING JEWISH MEANS TO ME



Dr. Ruth Westheimer
Psychologist, Author, Broadcaster

All grandparents feel a special glow when they see their grandchildren. But when I look into the faces of my grandchildren Ari and Leora, there is an added reason for my heart to rejoice. You see, I am originally from Germany and lost my family in the Nazi terror, so I know that Hitler did everything in his power to insure that these children would never be born. And yet here they are. They represent for me small victories in the continuing struggle against evil, especially the evil of anti-Semitism.

Last week, when again watching *Schindler's List*, I was struck by one fact in Steven Spielberg's postscript: The 1200 Jews saved by Oscar Schindler now have more than 6000 children and grandchildren. What if *millions* had been saved?

Every child born into a Jewish family represents a blessed link in the long chain of Jewish life stretching back to Abraham and Sarah. The soul is seared by the thought of the generations that, because of the Nazi Holocaust, will not be born.

The world can learn something valuable from the Jewish experience. We have been the objects of the most perverse form of human hatred -- the attempt to destroy an entire people. But we never permitted that hatred to determine who we are or what we stand for. As Jews, we never forgot that we are called upon by our tradition to repair the world by transforming hatred into love and by teaching and working for justice and peace.

When I look at my Ari and Leora, I know that the Nazis weren't able to accomplish their supreme goal. Yes, they destroyed my family, including my beloved parents and grandparents, but they couldn't eradicate my will to live and pass on to my children and grandchildren my love for Judaism, Israel, and the Jewish people. For me, the phrase "Am Yisrael chai" -- "The Jewish people lives" -- holds special meaning.

And for a Jewish people whose numbers were so decimated, let future generations fulfill the Biblical commandment -- one Dr. Ruth especially endorses -- "be fruitful and multiply."



The American Jewish Committee

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The American Jewish Committee is proud to present this message, the twentieth in a series on the meaning of being Jewish today. For information on a variety of programs which can help you explore your connection to the Jewish people, contact us at: Dept. JCAD, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022; Tel: 1-800-551-3252. All the previous messages in this series, along with other information about the American Jewish Committee and its many activities to enhance Jewish identity, can be found on AJC's web site: www.ajc.org

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