

Impressions of Poland // Rabbi Yehuda Gilad

And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre. And he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.

(Genesis, 18, 1, KJV version)

This description of Abraham opens chapter 18 of the book of Genesis. According to the interpretation of Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Abraham's meeting with these men (who were pagans, according to the Jewish biblical exegesis) is the expression and manifestation of a divine revelation. As if to say, "and the Lord appeared unto him" – in the shape of these three men. Discovering simple human kindness is often an expression of mankind's divine aspect. I felt the verity of this interpretation in some of the special moments we've experienced during the interreligious encounter in Poland. This encounter with people of a different religion, who are earnestly trying to bridge gaps, to collaborate together to create a better world, free of hate and wrongdoing, while recognizing their past, was a significant experience for me.



Beyond the fascinating intellectual meeting of minds, this occasion brought with it the rare emotional experience of being exposed to the honesty and earnestness of our Polish colleagues' good will. The Prayer March to what used to be the synagogue of Kielce (in a temperature of 10 degrees below zero) with the Mayor of Kielce, Father Zygmunt Kostka, parish priest of St. Cross in Kielce and Rabbi Michael Scudrich, Chief Rabbi of Poland, was a rare gesture in its simplicity and sincerity. The Psalms devotedly recited in Polish by the locals gathered next to the former synagogue (now the City Archive) and next to the impressive monument of a large menorah sinking into the ground at the center of the city, received an entirely new and exciting meaning.

Perhaps most exciting of all was the opportunity to meet the local anti-hero Mr. Bogdan Białek. This man took it upon himself to transform the heart of an entire city, to make it realize and recognize its Jewish past, to remember and remind the past and to make it present in the city's current day-to-day life. This encounter in itself planted in my heart the hope for a better future for the human race.

Furthermore, the thirst for knowledge and enthusiasm with which our Torah lessons were accepted in Poland reminded me of the words of the prophet Amos: "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.*" (Amos 8, 11)



Rabbi Yehuda Gilad is the Founder & Head ("Rosh Yeshiva") of Ma'ale Gilboa Yeshiva, as well as the Rabbi of Kibbutz Lavi in the Lower Galilee. He has also held the positions of army Chaplain and a Member of the Israeli Knesset (where he served on the Education and Labour and Welfare Committees). Rabbi Gilad earned his Teacher's Certificate from the Yitzchak Herzog Teachers College and Rabbinical Ordination from the Chief Rabbinate. He has additionally studied in Israel's finest yeshivot, including HaYishuv HeChadash in Tel Aviv, Mercaz HaRav in Jerusalem and Yeshivat Har Etzion in Gush Etzion. Rav Gilad holds a bold Jewish world-view that embraces human rights and personal dignity, and has earned recognition for his outspoken views and grassroots activism in promoting a Jewish and a democratic state.