Good evening.

I had the privilege of joining a group of 10 rabbis for a one-week journey to Germany this past week. We took a whirlwind tour of Frankfort, Munich, and Berlin.

I had ambivalent feelings about going to Germany. I wasn't sure I wanted to visit the place from whence came so much suffering during the holocaust—the place that took the lives of so many of my family, so many of my human family. But I decided this was an opportunity I didn't want to pass up. After all, Germany is not only a place where Jews died. It is a place where Jews have **lived** for almost 2000 years. And, I would come to learn, it is a place where Jews are making lives once again.

I wanted to visit the cradle of Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox Judaism. I needed to visit the place where my family lived, not only died. I didn't know what it would be like, or what I would find, but it turned out to be an incredible journey.

My grandparents left Germany in the fall of 1938, in the weeks leading up to Kristallnacht. My grandfather Henry made his way to the states by way of Holland, where he and his cousin barely escaped the Nazis a second time. My grandmother Alice, who Ari is named after, came via kindertransport to London, where she served as a maid for 2 years before coming to New York. Alice had family in Chicago and so she headed there; Henry, who was in love with Alice, soon packed his bags in New York and adopted the White Sox as his first and only baseball love.

My grandparents barely spoke of their lives in Germany when I was growing up. They were forced to leave their homes when they were each in their late teens, and they always seemed to want to protect us from hearing difficult stories about what they experienced, about what they had seen. They spoke German when they didn't want my brother and I to understand what they were saying; there were pictures on their walls of generations people I came to learn were my family. I grew up thinking that I had a very small family on the Mosbacher side.

I gathered over the years that many members of my family, like so many families, had died during the Holocaust, but it was only much later that my grandfather began to speak of his life in Germany as a boy. I am so grateful to the Spielberg Foundation for recording my grandfather on video, speaking of his childhood. It was these stories, these images, these snippets of my family history that I carried with me on my journey.

I went to Germany thirsty to drink in something of the place where generations of my family lived. And, I admit, I embarked on the journey fearful of facing, fearful of trying to understand how such horrors could emerge from a country and a people where my family and so many others had built lives for so long.

But by the end of the very first day, I was so glad I had come. On the very first day of the tour, when the group went off to a city called Worms to see places that were significant in the life of Rashi, one of the most important commentators in Jewish history, I hired a guide to see if we could find the graves of my ancestors. I am somewhat of a family tree buff, and have a family tree dating back to 1680 on the Mosbacher side.

I knew where my great-grandfather—Henry's father—was buried—in a cemetery in Darmstadt--a suburb of Frankfort. The guide and I were able to

find the grave, and, already, I felt like I was reclaiming something that belonged to me.

Darmstadt I knew, but, I admit, I came woefully unprepared otherwise. I wasn't sure where else to go to find my family's history. The people on the family tree were said to come from a town called Eschau. So the guide and I each got on our smartphones. We Googled Eschau—no Jewish cemetery. We took out a map and drew a concentric circle around Eschau, and began to search the internet for Jewish cemeteries in the area. We happened upon a place called Reistenhausen about 15 kilometers away, which claimed to have a regional cemetery for Jews in various towns in the area, including Eshau. Not knowing whether the cemetery had survived the Holocaust, not knowing whether we'd be able to find anyone from my family there, not knowing whether we'd be able to even get in to the cemetery, we decided to make the 1 ½ hour drive.

We were able to get the key to the cemetery, and no sooner did we walk in than we began to see intact graves with familiar names. Yosef Leib. Gerson. Menachem Mendel. Feivel. They were all there, all the way back to my 7th great grandfather, Peretz. For the first time since before my grandfather was forced to leave Germany just before Kristallnacht 75 years ago, a Mosbacher was able to place memory stones on the graves of my family. I was incredibly moved, and already incredibly glad I had come.

Germany in general is working hard to remember, too. It's working hard to come to terms not only with what it has **done**, but what it has **lost**. This year, the 75th anniversary of Hitler's rise to power, the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the city of Berlin has created a powerful exhibit all around the city called "Diversity Destroyed." All over the city are these huge pillars with photos and stories of the Jewish artists, philosophers, actors, singers, directors, philanthropists, rabbis, cantors, businesspeople, politicians who were either forced to flee or whose lives were ended by the Holocaust.

Every city we visited has memorials and museums, not only to commemorate the 12 years of horror, but to teach Germans about Judaism. There seems to be a fascination amongst non-Jewish Germans with everything Jewish. When Berlin or Munich has Jewish arts or music festivals, as they each do each year, thousands of people turn out—mostly non-Jewish.

There are reminders of shoah everywhere, intentionally. Unique memorial signs were erected on street lights in a certain Berlin neighborhood in the 1990's. Each of the 80 signs have two sides-- one, outlining a law that was passed and the date it was passed during Nazi times to exclude Jews, and on the other side, a picture symbolizing that law. Irony/new sensitivity-- when the signs were being erected, ordinary Germans were afraid that something anti-Semitic was being done—neighbors called the police... Now the signs include a smaller sign underneath indicating that this is a memorial.

And then there are the stumble-stones-- markers built above grade into the streets in front of homes and businesses that used to belong to Jewish families. A constant reminder that literally trips up natives and visitors alike —22,000 in Berlin alone.

There's the Memorial to destroyed Jewish communities in Berlin. Kids and adults seem to naturally fall into playing hide/seek in the memorial. For some, that's disturbing. The designer of the memorial, when asked about this phenomenon, said: "there's life in the midst of dark memories." I agree. I can picture my grandfather, with a twinkle in his eye, playing hide and seek at age 13 in 1933. In the midst of the horror, kids played, people found ways to live their lives. What's also true about hide and seek I saw played

out in the memorial-- there were times when people stopped seeking. There were times when people literally couldn't find each other anymore.

Also: because of the nature of the memorial, all kinds of contradictions. At no point in the memorial unless you're in a helicopter or a plane or a building above it-- at no point can you see the whole picture. Also: wherever you stand, even in deepest darkness, you can always see glimpses of "the real world" at the edges, and yet they feel impossibly far away, inaccessible. You can see those glimpses, and yet they don't intervene. When I moved to the tri-state area, I told someone I was afraid to drive in Manhattan. Don't worry, someone told me; it's a grid. Can't get lost. Well, in this memorial, this grid, you can get lost. In a Germany so fixated on rules and structure, where you'd think you couldn't get lost, Jews got lost in the grid.

Also: The passages between the stones are so narrow; when you pass someone, you pass close by; you naturally look them in the eye. In the Shoah, in those narrow places, people couldn't help but see what was happening to their neighbors.

There were these strange tensions everywhere we went, and with everyone we met—tensions within Germany and within its Jewish community.

There are now 120,000 Jews living in Germany.

We met a rabbi in Frankfort who told us that all news outlets want to talk about when they call her is the holocaust, and how her community deals with being second generation survivors. “I’m not a second generation survivor,” Rabbi says defiantly. “I’m the first generation of something new!” A rabbi in Berlin urged us on Shabbat: “when you come to visit Germany, don’t just judge based on the 12 years of terror; judge based on the nearly

2000 uninterrupted and continuing years of Jewish life in Germany."
There's tension in building a Jewish future in a place haunted by the recent Jewish past.

Our instinctive question everywhere we went as American Jews was: how can Jews live in Germany again? The German Jews living there today ask a different question: how can we make a Judaism that Jews in Germany can fully live today? And yet, even as they try to emerge from the shadow of the holocaust, they clearly feel anti-Semitism; one woman we met at one of the synagogues told us that she would wear a chamsa but not a Magen David, but only inside her blouse, not outside. There are guards and bulletproof glass in front of the synagogues in Germany. Jews are reanimating Jewish life in Germany, but it's not without fears from without.

So, too, there is internal Jewish tension in Germany, too. A high percentage of the Jewish community consists of Jews who came to Germany from the former Soviet Union. In some ways, it's like the Lower East Side all over again; the Jews who were born in Germany resent the Jews who came from Russia, and the feeling is mutual. The new elected head of the German Jewish community from FSU-- native born German Jews don't like him, or the idea of him.

It's clear that Germans and German society live with tensions every day. These big cities were obliterated by the allies in the Second World War. What did Germany do? The remains of the old buildings were torn down to build new buildings made to look old.The whole country is a strange little Disneyland in that way.

For non-Jewish Germans, like a guide we met called Rupert, there's the tension of being born/raised/living in a city called Dachau. To us, when we think of Dachau, we think of a concentration camp. For Rupert, he was born and raised in this city after the war. We asked him: what was it like to be raised in Dachau? He described life with American tanks and GI's

passing through on a regular basis. He told us an ironic story: when he was a teenager, his town had an exchange program with kids from a town called Auschwitz in Poland; Rupert from Dachau never knew that Auschwitz was anything other than a death camp.

And there's tension between those who were born in West Germany and those who were born in the East before the Berlin Wall fell. East Germans taught about the holocaust earlier; being in a Communist country, they were naturally anti-fascist. They wouldn't teach about their **own** repressive regime, but they were comfortable talking about Nazism. Many teachers in West Germany on the other hand, had been teachers before and during the war; many of them were members of the Nazi party. They didn't teach so easily about the Shoah.

I've now stood at both ends of the railroad track that meant death for millions-- 20 years ago I stood at Auschwitz-- the end of the line. This past week, we stood at track 17 in Berlin, from which 57,000 Jews were put on the trains to their deaths. Trees native to the areas around Auschwitz have been brought to Track 17 in Berlin.

In a way, it felt like there were ghosts everywhere-- ghosts of those who died, of course, ghosts of perpetrators, ghosts of those who stood by and did nothing, AND ghosts of those who heroically resisted.

Some resisted-- there was the policeman who stopped the New Synagogue in Berlin from being burned down during Kristallnanacht; Otto Weidt, who did for 50 blind and disabled Jews in his broom workshop what Oscar Shindler did with his ammunition factory. German women whose Jewish husbands and children were rounded up for deportation in the so called factory action on 1943-- the women protested, and their loved ones were brought back to them. Owner of bakery around the corner from a collection

point who smuggled white bread to Jews who had been collected for deportation; nuns from a local convent who went to the collection points and saved children by saying to their captors, "we're afraid these children have typhoid." 1700 Jews survived in Berlin with the help of non Jews. Not enough, and yet enough for us to remember them, too, and the average of 7-10 non-Jews it is said were needed to help save each Jew.

There were sights that were so incongruous that it was hard to fathom; Sushi restaurant across from Dachau gate; too close, and yet, there was probably a different restaurant there during the war, too. If there was a memorial everyplace where a horror was committed, the whole country would be one big memorial. On the one hand, how can folks live in the apartments where the Munich hostages were taken (and 2 were killed!) Was there a debate or even discussion after the 1972 Olympics about whether those apartments would be rented out like the rest of the Olympic village? Or was there just a mop crew?

On the other hand, if no one was allowed to live in any places where horrors were committed in Germany, there wouldn't be any place to live. I wonder if non-Jewish Germans feel that tension, or just us?

Then there was the bizarre sight of seeing officers from all branches of the German armed forces touring Dachau, engaging in a discussion sitting in the barracks there.... It was bizarre and disconcerting for the most part, and yet it seemed somehow important that this next generation of German military leaders were being made to confront what a previous generation had wrought.

You look down, you see stumblestones, graves, train tracks, and

memorials. You look up, and you new buildings, new promise, new hope.

In the book of Leviticus, there is a particularly difficult Torah portion called Metzora. Metzora deals with the idea that there can be illness in the very walls of a home—sickness, plague. The text describes the rituals and incremental steps that the ancient Israelites would go through to try to get a home with plague in its walls back to health; to make it fit for human residents. If there was illlness in the walls of the house-- what would they do? Remove the plagued stones from the walls. If the illness didn't come back, kosher. If the illness came back, they would take the whole house apart, remove the stones outside the camp, and rebuild. It’s a strange portion with strange rituals, and yet, as I went through Germany, it somehow resonated with me.

These are beautiful cities—Frankfort, Munich, Berlin. Beautiful, cultured cities—just like before the war. Which is eerie in and of itself. The country has been rebuilt—in many ways, rebuilt to look just like it looked before the war. Which actually begs the key question of my brief exploration of the nation of my family’s history.

As we wandered through Germany, a theme kept coming back to my mind. What will grow here? Everything is reconstructed-- buildings damaged by the war, the Old Opera house that is now neither old nor an opera house, even barracks at Dachau have been reconstructed. There's a Surprisingly hilly area in the Munich Olympic village-- why hills? Because after WWII, this was The dump site for the crushed remains of the city of Munich. A little like Metzora.

There was clearly illness in the very walls of Germany—the plagues of anti-Semitism and xenophobia permeated society in the lead up to the Second World War. And while I am hesitant to equate the Allied Forces who

obliterated Germany’s cities with the priests of old, there’s some analogy to be made.

The question that Metzora might ask today is: what will grow in Germany? Has the illness of hatred, intolerance, and dehumanization been removed? If so, maybe it’s time to move on, to not blame this generation for the sins of their fathers and grandfathers. But how long until we know? How long do we wait to see if the walls of Germany regrow clean or unclean? There’s a fascinating documentary film called Hitler's children, which traces the families of Hitler’s inner circle. Some embrace their identity and are determined to live righteous lives, to live lives of repentance on behalf of their ancestors. Others embrace their identity by providing funding to defend Nazis at trial. Have the stones in the walls of Germany been purified by time/reparations/guilt/coming to terms/education/punishment? I’m not sure we can say just yet.

But as we gather tonight to mark the November Pogrom, I hope what you’ll take away is a mixture of thoughts and tensions—despair for what was lost, despair for what could have been had righteous nations used their power to stop this unfathomable destruction, yes.

And also, hope. Hope for the tens of thousands of Germans who are reestablishing Jewish life in a place we Jews have lived for thousands of years. Hope for a Germany that is, at the very least, confronting its past head on, teaching its children in schools, its citizens on every street corner, its military officers about the horrors of the holocaust. Hope for a Germany that is being honest with itself about what its society perpetrated, what its society permitted to happen. I hope you’ll consider going to Germany someday; two weeks ago, I wasn’t sure I wanted to go. Tonight, I’m ready to go back and learn more.