

The Valley of the Destroyed Communities

“The Valley of the Communities in Yad Vashem is a massive 2.5 acre monument literally dug out of natural bedrock. Over 5000 names of communities are engraved on the stone walls in the Valley of the Communities. Each name recalls a Jewish community which existed for hundreds of years; for the inhabitants, each community constituted an entire world. Today, in most cases, nothing remains but the name.”

“The Valley itself is a labyrinth of courtyards and walls, of openings and dead ends in which it is intended that visitors will sense some degree of insecurity, of being trapped in a frustrating maze which threatens to collapse upon them, of being caught in a place from which escape is difficult.”*

We were visiting in 1992. We had inadvertently attached ourselves to a tour comprised mostly of grandmothers and grandfathers. Naturally our 6 year old girl was getting all the attention she wanted. The tour guide was there for the first time and had not worked out his spiel. He stumbled into an introduction that confused our daughter completely.

He explained that the Valley was like a map of the places where everyone had died; finally using a word that our daughter understood. She raised her hand frantically. The guide, said: “Yes.” in the tone of a man delivered from an embarrassing situation.

Our 6 year old asked: “Where is Denver on the map?” The silence engulfed the crowd all of whom had relatives in the places marked in the monument we were standing in.

He slowly said: “Denver is not on this map.”

May his words always be true.

* from the website <http://www.yadvashem.org/>