

A Soldier's Story

Rabbi Will Berkovitz

Yesterday afternoon I met with a soldier who recently returned from Afghanistan -- a Junior at the University of Washington, a 20-year old. He was trying to adjust to his new freedom. And he was trying to find someone who would not only listen to his story, but understand it. Understand how his experience in a far away desert had transformed him – reached into his dreams, followed him while he was walking down the street.

He did not want to merely tell me of his experience in Afghanistan I sensed he was striving for something else...a deeper connection. Reaching into his backpack, he took out his computer filled with photographs to help the narration. Image by image he walked me through his experience. The day after **this** ambush, the dinner with **that** Afghani police chief. **These** smiling children. **Those** captured rocket propelled grenades. His photographs held more than images. They contained a larger narrative.

As I walked back to Hillel after our conversation, wondering if he would find his innocence again, I felt extraordinarily privileged and humbled. And upon reflection it occurred to me this is among the greatness of the Jewish community.

We create shelters in the storms. At our best we construct places where people can gather and feel safe telling their stories. And those stories are

given a place of honor and respect – be they told by the very young, or the very old. And in the retelling we link both the people and their words to the larger Jewish narrative – our people’s narrative. Our larger past, present and future are united in the retelling of our stories. None are insignificant.

There is no word for history in Hebrew only memory – Zahor. And although we may have individual experiences, as a people we live and are joined in community by our shared memory – For in truth, it is in retelling our story that we create our common destiny. As we gather tonight let us strive to feel a portion of that narrative. An aspect of that eternal destiny.