

ADL Leadership Conference Thoughts by JJ Slatkin



This past weekend, I attended the Anti-Defamation League's National Leadership Summit in Washington DC. In the past decade, I have been a part of numerous conferences in both my personal and professional spheres and expected that this conference would be good but hardly thought it would impact me to the extent that it has.

Starting out with a tour of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was a poignant, perfect way to set the stage. As I walked through the floors of the museum, soaking in the multitude of painful pictures and readings, vivid visions of a concentration camp tour through Poland almost 15 years ago bombarded my mind and soul. With great rapidity, my emotions shifted between profound sadness for what we have lost as a Jewish people to anger and incredulity that humanity can sink to depths this depraved, and then rise to incredible pride; pride in the Jewish State of Israel, pride that the Jewish people have not and will never lose our spirit and connection to our traditions and each other, pride to live in the great United States of America and pride in the existence of the ADL, an organization that safeguards the freedom and liberties of all people and, along with the State of Israel, gives physical form to the words "Never Again".

It was with this strange brew of emotions but most of all a determined focus on protecting the ability of every human being to live out their G-d given rights to liberty, peace and happiness that the conference began for me. Over the next three days, I was inundated with the power that is ADL. From seminars on empowering our children against bullying to discussion panels with legal experts on civil liberties to breakout sessions on anti-Semitism, the caliber of speakers and information was unparalleled. Every moment of every day was dedicated to the mission of protecting the human race from the worst that we can become but never losing sight of the beauty that is life and the heights that we can achieve when we come together with love in our hearts and goodwill towards all. The friends I made from across the country and the strengthening of the relationships with my Sturm Fellows attendees renewed my faith and confidence in both the goodness of man and the future of our world.

I came to this conference expecting to be educated and left with a rededication to always stand tall and firm in the face of hate and bigotry, whatever its form. ADL inspires me to examine what it means to be a mensch, to live a life of virtue, to be the bulwark of justice upon which the forces of small-minded tyranny and hatred crumble. ADL gives me hope for the future and faith in humanity. ADL stands for the right to live in freedom and peace, the right to live a good life, and I will always stand with the ADL.