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Reflective Insight: "Reflection and Renewal"

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Ross Patterson

Reflection and Renewal

One thing that struck me during our visit to Auschwitz II Birkenau was the actions of a flock of small birds amid the ruins of Crematorium III. Before we left, Emma read a Kaddish prayer by a memorial in between the ruins of two destroyed crematoria. Shortly after she began, something, probably the few visitors over near the area, startled a sizable flock of probably fifty to a hundred yellow-brown finches or sparrows that then rose in a 'butterfly fight' column akin to a tornado from the area of Crematorium III's gas chamber. Once they reached about ten feet off the ground, the formation broke and formed a more nebulous, atom-like cloud that buffeted in a breeze as it advanced and settled into the old furnace area. I thought that it was a beautiful natural moment to witness in such a place. It seemed like one of those instances where nature was healing an old wound, reclaiming the shattered husk of a ruined edifice once meant for destruction and transforming it into a haven for the small and defenseless. It is a fitting, unintentional memorial in itself, bringing life back to a place built solely to take it away.