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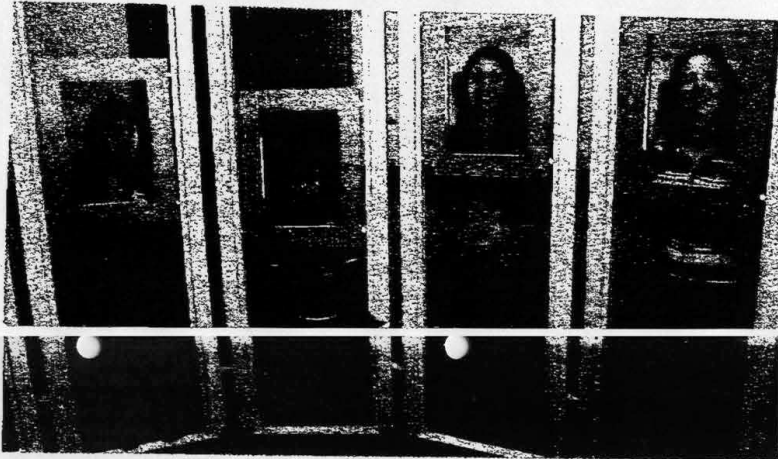
## The sound of silence

*In an effort to dispel stereotypes about the deaf in Israel, Holon's Children's Museum is giving visitors a noiseless experience in a whole new world*

• By VIVA SARAH PRESS

With tons of summer activities to choose from, I was rather surprised to see so many youngsters at "Invitation to Silence," an educational exhibit at the Holon Children's Museum, during a recent visit. Special effects, flying objects, or other technological surprises are not part of this exhibit. Rather, "Invitation to Silence" is a hand-waving, gesture-packed introduction to the hard-of-hearing world that hopes to break stereotypes that exist about the deaf community among the country's hearing public.

"I want people to understand that just because I cannot hear them does not mean that I'm stupid, or mental-



A BIT of quiet. The Holon Children's Museum explores a deaf reality.

tour-guide at the exhibit. "I am not handicapped. I am deaf."

Indeed, Nurit - who guided my group through the exhibit - didn't seem any different from the rest of us. In fact, a number of the members in my group didn't even realize that she was deaf and thought she was play acting that she couldn't hear.

To enter a world of silence, visitors are given a set of sturdy headphones to put on, and thus block out outside sound.

Making hand gestures to follow her, Nurit brought us to a room with a big white table. Here we played "dancing fingers" games that included making shadow shapes and numbers.

Having mastered beginner techniques of sign language, we moved on to a room designed for communication through facial expressions. The children in my group loved this segment of the tour. Nurit encouraged us to stick our tongues out, scrunch up our noses, blow out our cheeks, and distort our faces to a variety of different poses. Since a deaf person cannot hear what is being said, he or she relies on body lan-

guage and facial expression for cues. Throughout the exhibit, Nurit pointed at her eyes, trying to convey to us that eye contact is a crucial part of conversation with a deaf person. Whereas looking at an object while speaking to a friend is acceptable in day to day life, in deaf culture to look away when a person is speaking to you is considered to be extremely rude.

Another stop on our tour was at a coffee bar. Here, we were asked to say our names - in sign language - and were encouraged to order something in silence. Placards with hand symbols and their meanings were hung on the wall surrounding the bar.

"Invitation to Silence" was originat-

ed in France. The Holon Children's Museum decided to launch the project here after the success of its other socially-conscience exhibit, "Dialogue in the Dark" (which offers a sense of what a blind person feels like in the world of seeing people). The exhibit's set up is similar to its European originator. The Israeli addition to the project is a room at the end of the tour that is set up for visitors to ask their guide questions about the deaf world. A sign-language translator sits in with the group to facilitate answers.

Nurit was very patient when answering our group's questions. She told us that it is more difficult to battle the stereotypes people hold about her than it is to live as a deaf person in a hearing

world. Asked why she takes part in the project, she answered to "give people an understanding of my world."

At the end of the tour, visitors are encouraged to play trivia games. Based on the answers given, it would seem the deaf community here is still fighting for equal rights.

And though water parks, gymboreses, and the zoo are fun options for the summer, both children and adults should make "Invitation to Silence" a must-do during this holiday break. This exhibit is a fun experience with valuable lessons.

"Invitation to Silence" is suitable for people aged nine and up. Summer hours: Sunday, Tues.-Thursday 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; 4 p.m.-8 p.m. Must call ahead: 1-599-585-858.

Handwritten notes in Hebrew:

ליל  
עם  
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ביום  
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