

The speech of Mr. Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, The President of The Jewish Community of Turkey, in Kadir Has University, on the 27th of January 2014, at the Memorial Day of the Holocaust victims.

Today, as we commemorate 11 million people who were slaughtered in concentration camps, I would especially like to thank Kadir Has University which took the lead to organize on behalf of all this memorial service which has been held for the last 3 years in various synagogues of our community; our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Ahmed Davutoğlu and the Foreign Ministry who has always encouraged us by separating Holocaust issues aside from politics, also to our dear friend, Ambassador Ertan Tezgör with whom we had the privilege to work together. I would also like to gratefully remember Mr. Kadir Has, the founder of this estimable institution.

In a world where the reality of the memories and pain of the victims of the Holocaust of which 6 million were Jews, are witnessed by the ones who are still among us, can we say that we took the proper lessons from this tragedy for the future.

What is the meaning of the Holocaust when this reality is being deviated even in our country, when our belief in God, our Judaism is easily transformed to a "scapegoat" and when we sit and watch everything in silence even today?

Are all these facts only a nightmare that needs to be buried in the dark pages of history? Is this a day to be left behind in the thousands year-old human history, to be mentioned in 3 short lines in history books or to be remembered only once a year, just like a ritual? Or is this just a lie made up by the Jewish people who distorted historical facts and acted as if they were abused and victimized, just for the sake of exploiting human conscience and took advantage out of the Holocaust?

As a Turkish Jew, I would like to share what I have tried to learn from the Holocaust with the teachings of my faith.

Let's go back to January 27, 1945. On that very day the Soviet army entered Auschwitz and liberated more than 7,000 prisoners. There was great joy and celebration in the camp, people were singing and dancing. Soviet soldiers and remaining prisoners left the camp victoriously, singing joyful songs and anthems; those moments were to be one of the most important and emotional liberation scenes in history but unfortunately it did not happen that way, actually it could not.

Viktor Frankl summarizes this moment as follows:

In the evening, when we all met again in our hut one said secretly to the other: "Tell me were you pleased today?"

And the other replied, feeling ashamed as he did not know that we all felt similarly, "Truthfully no!" We had literally lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn slowly.

Psychologically, what was happening to the liberated prisoners could be called “depersonalization”. Everything appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream. And now the dream had come true but could we truly believe in it?

“Freedom”-we repeated to ourselves, and yet we could not grasp it. We had said this word so often during all the years we dreamed about it, that it had lost its meaning, its reality did not penetrate into our consciousness; we could not grasp the fact that freedom was ours.

What could be the meaning of “freedom” in Viktor Frankl’s speech, that the word “freedom” did not make sense even after they were free?

And that humans could depersonalize humanity so much?

What is the path to follow, for freedom to become “free” and not massacre humans in hatred camps through words created to discriminate them?

Now, let’s go back to a day in April in Egypt, 3.300 years before January 27, 1945.

210 years long slavery of the Jewish nation was about to come to an end. The final period of the exile was quite similar to the last days of concentration camps. Babies were thrown into the river, used as bricks for constructions and 80% of an enslaved nation disappeared through forced hard labor.

But now it was the time for freedom and Jewish people started to march out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses through the path that their God opened for them.

Moshe Rabbenu was preparing to deliver a speech to 3 million Jewish people to emphasize the significance of that day. What kind of message of freedom, victory or future should he give to his people in fear, excitement, joy and hope?

This is what Moses told them:

“When your children ask you about this very day, you shall tell them that, with a mighty power, God led us all out of the slavery in Egypt.”

With this brief speech, instead of talking to them about the present or the future or the victory they won or even their Promised Land, Moses chose to talk about the distant future, the basics of freedom and the importance of the children’s education which is only way to protect freedom.

He wanted us to teach our children to challenge us by actively establishing a dialogue with them in order to show that the idea of building a life together and that creating a force made of different and even opposing ideas is far more important than believing that power which is made of a single force.

He wanted to explain that freedom was much more precious than victories; the suffering and the pains on the way to freedom and our common responsibility in man’s falling to a state to fight for his freedom

and once “freedom” being sacrificed to another’s or purchased at the cost of someone else’s leads freedom to become selfish.

He explained that this selfishness could transform societies to a chaos where the power of truth becomes the truth of the powerful and this imprisons us to Auchwitzs, Treblinkas and Buchenwalds that are constructed by our own bricks. He explained as long as we can teach these truths to our children and learn through them to realize that this world is our only home where we can all live in peace and prevent to create Viktor Frankls, Anne Franks and Ceyka Stojkas of 21st century.

That is why, we should include humanity’s most severe lesson in history, called “Holocaust” in our official curriculum and integrate it in details into textbooks in order to teach it to future generations; we should teach it to our children to raise our awareness so that we realize once again our responsibility to carve out a better future for them.

We should remember that a free, pioneering and advanced nation cannot be built through military victories or political entities, but only by knowing how to cherish this desire in our hearts and by integrating it into our education system and conveying it to our schools in the utmost standards.

Finally, instead of recreating the past, we can establish a strong future based on the painful knowledge we can present our children with

humanity's lost paradise and we can protect the memory of those who sacrificed their lives on this journey or were brave enough to save them.

I bow in reverence before their blessed memories...