

What lessons about the Holocaust and its historical context are most important to us today?

From time immemorial, mankind has pondered many philosophical questions to which the human mind cannot give unambiguous answers. The most difficult questions are those concerning human existence itself. How did life originate? Who or what is behind the existence of life? Are we just a random cluster of cells or are we predefined as the work of an author? What is the meaning of human existence or what is the purpose of the one who breathed life into us? What is the value of our lives? We have been pondering these questions throughout our existence, and yet our minds have still not been allowed to answer them.

As a child, I used to ask similar questions to my parents. They were very educated people. Our family belonged to the Jewish community in Bardejov, and as education is known, it is a very important part of life for Jews. My mother was a teacher at one of the local schools, she also played the piano beautifully and she passed on this art to many students who came to us for private piano lessons, I still remember the penetrating melodies that came from the living room, where she waved for hours. My father worked as a doctor in the interwar period, but according to Jewish customs and tradition, in addition to education, men also have to master a craft, so my father was intensely involved in carving. It was also his great hobby. He loved to carve various wooden toys that made not only me and my little sister Sarah happy, but also other children from our neighborhood. However, he preferred to carve gifts for his mother, when I asked him as a little boy why he still carves so many gifts for his mother, he told me: "With my creations I express to my mother what I am not able to express in her words." Even after an hour of contemplation of these deep in my father's words, I was unable to understand their true meaning. I couldn't figure out what her father wanted to say, but she couldn't do it through words.

As a family, we lived in peace with all the neighbors and fellow citizens of our beautiful picturesque town. Both parents were very respected citizens in the city. The father was known for his dedicated and kind approach to patients. There was perhaps no person in the whole city who would not help, either as a doctor or just as an ordinary fellow citizen. He had excellent relations with Jews, Christians, merchants, but he also highly valued ordinary workers who worked outside in any weather. As a teacher, the mother was also very respected and popular, especially for her kind and persistent approach to children and their parents. Both parents, on the other hand, had great respect for all the inhabitants of our picturesque Bardejov, and whenever someone stopped or greeted us on the street walking through Bardejov, they strictly instilled in us the need to respectfully return the greeting. When I asked as a child why it is so important to greet the people on the street, my mother replied: "Dany, we greet people with

respect, we show them that they mean something to us." Again, deep words that are not easy to understand at all. .

However, the situation in the world began to deteriorate. Europe gradually began to find itself in ever-increasing flames, driven by a single man, a man whose name does not deserve to be spoken by my mouth. Gradually, news began to spread that a war was coming. That was the first time I saw worries on the faces of my beloved parents, which escalated as the situation worsened. The news that Slovakia is joining the German attack on Poland in September 1939 brought her mother to tears, as our aunt Rachel, her mother's sister, lives there. I asked Dad why his mother was crying so much, he didn't say anything, but what came out in 1000 words was his sad expression, which was a harbinger of what was to come soon.

The state of which we were legitimate citizens suddenly began to undertake harsh reprisals against us Jews. At first we were forced to wear a yellow Star of David sewn on our clothes, so we were to be visibly distinguished from the "Gentiles", suddenly as if people were no longer equal. As children, we never understood the need to wear this star, and many still do not. State reprisals continued and escalated. Suddenly, Jews were not allowed to take public transport, they were not allowed to drive a Slovak motor vehicle, they were not allowed to vote, they were not allowed to hold public office, they were not allowed to work as engineers, notaries, lawyers, they were forbidden to gather, Dad and his mother were forbidden to perform their professions, together with Sárka we were forbidden to go to classical school and later to meet non-Jewish friends. A little later, there was a process of Aryanization, the confiscation of property in favor of the state. We lost almost everything, I still remember my mother crying when they brought us a piano from the apartment, among other things, on which she played melodies that I loved daily, melodies that I had never heard again.

Dad took all the carving tools, without which he never cut anything for us or his mother again.

Sitting with my beloved family in a ghetto waiting for I don't even know what I was asking myself, does human life have any value at all? "500 Reichsmarks." It sounded from nowhere, not knowing where. Only today, after all this, do I know what this magic number means. It is the amount that the Slovak state paid to Germany for one exported Jew. In conversion, it is € 3,000 for one living being whose life is irreplaceable. Is that the value of human life? Has it really been set by humans at the value of one head of cattle, which is exacerbated by the fact that people were sent to a "slaughterhouse" in disgusting cattle wagons for this ridiculous amount? Upon arrival in the camps, the Jews were deprived of the last thing they had left, they were deprived of jewelry, clothing, hair, and finally their names. They were no longer human, they were walking corpses numbered and slaughtered daily as cattle. At this point, the value of human life did not fall, but it definitely disappeared.

Sarah and I were happier, my father hid us under a straw that was intended for sleeping in a ghetto. I didn't know where they were going then, and why I couldn't go with them, but after my mother's kiss, I realized I wouldn't see her again, both of them.

Many years have passed since then, many things have changed. States emerged like the Jewish one, Israel, or disappeared, like the Soviet Union, political systems changed, science and technology advanced, and the standard of living increased. And the people? Unfortunately, they have not changed much since then, they have forgotten, they have forgotten about this dark period of our history, the crimes that were committed daily not only in the camps, but also in the streets of our beautiful Bardejov. Memories of this period are slowly fading with the last survivors. There are only a few recorded stories left to serve as a warning to today's people, as a warning against how inhuman man can behave towards man, what abominations man is able to commit. And what about today's people, do they even realize it? Have we finally started to respect each other? And finally, did we begin to value life itself? With tears in my eyes, I must say no. Once again, a person opposes a person, points out his otherness, condemns him, and even more, strongly opposes him. Once again, it is hindered by the fact that some people have different skin colors, that there are other sexually oriented people among us, that someone does not share their political opinion, that someone is a Christian, a Muslim by religion, or that someone is "again the "Jew, a man who has a lot of wealth and is doing well at the expense of others. My father used to tell us many times, "People change with time, but hatred, envy, and greed last forever." And I have been asking my whole life, "Where do so many come from Today we abound, we are not able to realize the value of human life. In every single armed conflict that has happened since then, there has always been only some benefit, what benefits this conflict will bring, losses are seen only as numbers, again, people become only numbers in tables.

Even after all this, humanity tends to resort to various forms of extremism. Today, people are massively spreading hate speech against various minorities, openly approving the statements of extremist leaders and, unfortunately, in many cases, violence is being used on their part. Why? Wasn't that hatred in history finally enough?

Wasn't this historical period full of hatred and injustice enough for us? How much longer will we look at all those wasted human lives through our fingers as necessary victims? How to ordinary numbers in the loss table? Can we even learn from this historical experience? Can we really not realize that despite different biological traits, different political or sexual orientations, or different religious beliefs, are we all the same? Can't we really rise above all differences and not intend to treat each other humanly, to respect each other, to help each other and, above all, to let the other live? Where does so much hatred come from in us that we can hate a person just because he is different? Is there an evil entity that still makes you hate a person? Or is hatred itself so deeply ingrained in us since its very beginning?

Everyone must find the answer within themselves.

We are all flesh and bone people, we all need to eat and drink and we all need love and understanding for life. When will we finally realize the fact that every life is unique and irreplaceable? How long will we put personal interests above the lives of others? Too many questions and no answer, unfortunately, to this day, no one has dared to answer these questions. Nobody dares to estimate when the evil in the world will finally be enough.

Despite the fact that the legacy of the Holocaust is relatively clear today and is reminded of us through a number of monuments, museums and open-air museums, it remains perceived by people today and is perceived rather than a long past that has already happened and cannot be repeated. Unfortunately, this statement is reinforced by the fact that we are indifferent to our history. A nation that does not know its past is doomed to repeat it, so it is up to us to learn from it before we are doomed to feel it firsthand.

So what is the true value of human life? Infinite, incalculable and unbalanced by anything one can imagine. Every life is unique and irreplaceable, this is how it has always been and will always be, and it is up to us humans to finally realize this unchanging reality after all those historical experiences.

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