



Holocaust Memorial Day 2010: The Legacy of Hope

“Hope without memory is like memory without hope...” Elie Wiesel

Holocaust survivors have played an immense role in bringing our attention to the lessons of the Holocaust. They speak of pain and loss, of strength and survival, of despair and their wish for a **Legacy of Hope**. They encourage us to look within and without, to be sure of our moral compass, to be certain of our choices and to use our voice, whenever we can, to speak out. On Holocaust Memorial Day 2010, we are asking everyone to listen to their words afresh and to make a commitment to carry their lessons forward into the future, to make their long term legacy one of hope.

Holocaust survivors themselves have made a difference to the world in which we live. They have survived, built new lives, raised families, and contributed to the values of society in a positive way. They have translated difficult experiences to create a future that is free from the dangers of exclusion and persecution. They have passed a message of resilience and hope to the next generation. Holocaust survivor, Rabbi Hugo Gryn wrote, “You can only be safe and secure in a society that practises tolerance, cherishes harmony and can celebrate difference.”

It is estimated that there are upwards of 5,000 Jewish survivors of camps and ghettos, child refugees, those who survived by hiding from the Nazi authorities, and refugees of Nazi occupied Europe now living in the UK. Each person has their own unique story and experiences which deserve to be heard. Despite their unimaginable suffering - being forced to leave their homes, families and communities, being sent to camps and ghettos, or to other countries where different languages were spoken, or into hiding, away from their friends and families - these remarkable individuals have made their mark on our country.

Many have used their experiences in numerous ways to influence our lives and actions today. The numbers of survivors who have built their lives, communities and families in the UK are inevitably diminishing, and, as they become frail, their thoughts are turning to their future remembrance and the preservation of their memory. On HMD 2010, we all have an opportunity to become part of their **Legacy of Hope**.

On 27th January 1945, the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated by Soviet troops. This important day now offers a potent challenge to us all. We must listen to the voices of the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust and Nazi

persecution. We must also listen to those affected by more recent genocides and those who remain excluded today, and to commit, collectively and individually to tell others what we hear and to make these hopes, experiences and voices part of our future.

The Nazis had a plan for German society. Their goal was to make Germany an exclusively Aryan nation. Propaganda films were made to show the model of the 'perfect' young German men and women. Nazi ideology stated that not all humans were equal, some were even considered "*untermenschen*" (sub-human) if they did not fit the ideal. The Nazis hated anyone that they considered 'different', including those who fitted the Aryan concept of racial normality but had different views or thoughts which did not adhere to their ideology. It was not only Jews who did not fit the Nazi ideal - others included the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, Gay men and Lesbians, the mentally and physically Disabled, Trade Unionists, Black people, political opponents, communists and those termed 'asocial'. Survivors of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution know what it means to be stigmatised, marginalised, persecuted, and ultimately dehumanised. They understand what society is capable of.

The Holocaust is not a matter for Jews to discuss alone. The persecution of Roma and Sinti peoples is not a matter for Travellers and Gypsies to talk about alone. Remembering Gay and Lesbian victims of Nazi persecution is not a matter for LGBT groups alone. The experience of those facing exclusion from society is a matter for us all.

Our responsibility is to remember those who were persecuted and murdered, because their lives were wasted. Our challenge is to make the experience and words of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides a meaningful part of our future. We need to learn *about* the Holocaust. We need to learn *from* it too. The aspirations of those who have suffered from the effects of the Holocaust and of genocide around the world, should inform our lives today. Their words can make us think about our own attitudes, our behaviour, our choices, the way we vote, the way we interact with one another, the way we respect and celebrate the differences between us and the way in which we build a safer future together.

As history unfolds the voices of victims are often drowned out. They are often the last to be heard. And yet they are the first to know what is happening. We see this with the victims of National Socialism. The Nazi regime established ghettos, forcibly moving Jewish inhabitants of entire towns and communities. Conditions in the ghettos were abhorrent. Families were forced to live in cramped conditions, often sharing single rooms, food and money were scarce and death through starvation, cold or disease was a constant threat and often a reality.

Despite these hardships, the inhabitants of many of the ghettos understood what was happening to them and wanted their voice to be heard from within the maelstrom.

Materials were inevitably limited but drawings, photos, memoirs and diaries were all created and many survived when their creators did not. We sometimes take for granted the basic human right of having a voice. For the ghetto inhabitants this was difficult. In Warsaw for example, a group called 'Oneg Shabbat', collected testimony of the daily lives of inhabitants of the ghetto. They buried their words and collected thoughts underground in milk churns. Their words were miraculously preserved for us, to learn from and recount to others. By reading them we keep alive the memory of individuals and the communities they belonged to, many of which were completely destroyed. Their will to live, to overcome and to remain human in the midst of unbearable inhumanity, still stands today as a testament to human values and resilience.

Since the end of the Holocaust many survivors have felt compelled to use their experience as a clarion call to act today. It is their example that can inspire us to greater action. We need to ask ourselves what we should be doing today to build a safer, stronger society so that the risk of the building blocks of genocide ever being laid is removed.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn goes on:

“When I think about the summer of 1945, when through a chance I cannot fathom, I was free and still in life...why, I was sure that never again would there be anti-semitism or race-hatreds of any kind...The sad truth is that tyranny and race-hatred did not end when the Second World War ended, as we then hoped and believed but the vision for peace did not die.”

It is our duty to ensure that these hopes of Rabbi Gryn, and others like him, become a part of our lives and our interaction with one another.

As Holocaust survivor Freddie Knoller eloquently states:

“My attitude of hope and optimism helped me to overcome fear and perils and was one of the reasons why I am still alive today.” His hope and determination to overcome a hopeless situation contributed to his survival. Freddie’s resolve and courage show why we should commit to fighting the kind of racism and prejudice that placed him and millions of others in serious danger.

There is also a new generation of survivors of more recent genocides emerging where the challenge is as difficult to meet as in previous generations. Beatha Uwazaninka who survived the genocide in Rwanda states: “There is a new generation coming now and I hope there will be forgiveness among them. If we can teach them, there is hope.”

As humanitarian activist Hugo Slim says of the voices that speak out of tragedy to our shared sense of humanity: “We need to listen, for a change.”