

The papers are based on remarks delivered at the at United Nations Headquarters on 28 January 2019, at the Holocaust memorial ceremony marking the International Day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

## Lessons from Auschwitz<sup>1</sup>

by Mr. Marian Turski

In Auschwitz<sup>2</sup> I had no name. In Auschwitz I had nothing but a number - B-9408. It was tattooed on.

I was in Auschwitz almost until the last day, until the so-called "evacuation", which was in fact, the death march to Buchenwald. Then, the Nazis gave me the 'privilege' to join a second death march, from Buchenwald to Theresienstadt, where I was liberated the same day with Inge Auerbacher.

I meet people very often - it's my duty and responsibility - and they used to ask a question, "Tell us please, what was the worst in Auschwitz? What was the worst when you were there?"

They, probably like you as well, expect that my response will be, "hunger". You are right. In a way you are right: people who are normally fed today - if they are not survivors of the Holodomor in the Ukraine; if they don't live in Yemen or in Sudan, if they get their daily portion of nourishment - cannot imagine what is hunger. To say it very shortly: imagine that a spectre of a potato, a spectre of a spoonful of soup, a spectre of a bite of bread is before your eyes... always...always...

But nevertheless – I wouldn't say hunger was the worst.

So, what was the worst? The winter of 1944-1945 was extraordinarily cold. It was a horrible winter: minus 20 degrees centigrade. And we were in our inmates' dresses, inmates' uniforms. I covertly cut out underwear from a cement sac. And when the supervisor noticed it he started shouting: *Du hast deutsches Vermögen gestohlen* - "You stole German property!" And he gave me such a savage beating.

So, was cold the worst? No. What? Not cold, not hunger. Maybe the so-called "living conditions" were the worst aspect of being in Auschwitz? 800, 1000, 1100, 1200 people were placed in the barracks. Five, six, seven people were jammed on a bunk. And when you are in the barracks in Auschwitz, you start to think where to sleep? In the top bunk or the bottom bunk? Of course, it is better in the top bunk because the bladders of the prisoners do not hold out and they leak – so it is better to be in the top bunk. But on the other hand, if there were a sudden roll-call, which happened very often, and you were very weak and had to climb down from the top bunk - it was dangerous, because you had to be very quick to get to the roll-call or you would be beaten almost to death.

But even this was not the worst.

So, what, you would ask?

Were lice the worst aspect? Lice were something - a curse really. Lice. The hundreds of thousands of lice were so horrible during the death march. As a matter a fact, a louse infected me during my last death march and I ended the war with typhus.

But still I wouldn't say this was the worst.

So, if not hunger, if not cold, what was the worst?

The worst was humiliation. Humiliation.

If you were Jewish, and precisely because we were Jewish, we were treated like we were not human beings. We were treated like we were a louse, a bed bug, a cockroach. And what do people do with cockroaches, lice and bedbugs? They step on, they crush, they suffocate, they kill, they annihilate.

Very often I'm asked: you, who survived the hell, you who experienced all those evils, what did you learn from your experience? What would you like to tell us, young people, alive today?

If I would have to choose among all the lessons and all the words, one or two, I would choose the following: Empathy. Compassion.

These are the most important in life.

When we commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz it is natural to use more often the phrases: "Never more", "never again", "never again Auschwitz". But if we want this call to not only be a mere slogan – an empty phrase, we must learn to understand other people, people who are different from us, who are motivated in their way of life in a different way than we are.

This is what I would like to advise you as a survivor.

In January 2019, I was honoured to be invited to Rabbi Schneier's Park East Synagogue together with many United Nations' diplomats. In his very touching speech, Rabbi Schneier used the biblical phrase, "וְאַתָּה לְרֵעִי כְמוֹתָּךְ", ("v'ahavta l'reacha kamocho") - "and you should love your neighbour, your fellowman, like yourself". I wouldn't go as far as Rabbi Schneier. I think that before we start with love, let us start with something else. Let us start with reducing hatred, animosity, hostility.

We must do it!

If not – who will protect our children, our grandchildren, from a world disaster, from a world catastrophe?

-----

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on remarks delivered at the United Nations Holocaust memorial ceremony in January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945). The World Heritage Committee agreed to change the name of the camp on UNESCO's World Heritage List in June 2007.

## I Am Their Voice<sup>3</sup>

by Ms. Inge Auerbacher

I was born on 31 December 1934, to a religious Jewish middle-class family in Kippenheim; a village in south western Germany. I remained an only child. My father, who had served in the German Army in the First World War, was decorated with the Iron Cross. Our world crashed when my parents and I were included in the 22 August 1942 transport from Stuttgart to Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. I was seven years old, wearing a yellow star, and was given the number XIII -1-408. I was the youngest in the group of close to 1,200 people. I arrived with few belongings and my beloved doll Marlene in my arms.

Theresienstadt was an old fortress town that had been called Terezín. The Nazi German army renamed the town and converted it into a transit camp/ghetto. It was sealed off from the outside world with high brick walls, wooden fences, barbed wire. Theresienstadt was a holding centre before sending the prisoners to be killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and other killing centers. Among the prisoners were elderly and prominent Jews. They came from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, Holland, and Denmark. The Nazis called Theresienstadt a "model" ghetto. This name was part of a larger Nazi propaganda campaign to hide the true purpose and nature of the Theresienstadt. The camp was beautified for the International Red Cross Inspection in the summer of 1944. They accepted the deception.

The truth that the Nazis wanted to hide was very different. Life was especially harsh for children. We slept on the floor, or if lucky on straw-filled mattresses packed like sardines on double and triple-deck bunk beds. We grew up fast. The most important words in our vocabulary were "bread", "potatoes", and "soup". We got used to the carts piled with dead bodies. Three times a day, we stood in long lines holding our metal dishes to get our meagre food rations. Hunger, over-crowding, bad hygiene, mice, rats, fleas, bed bugs, lice, and fear of being sent to the East plagued us daily.

We were finally liberated on 8 May 1945 by the Soviet Army. I was ten years old. I had spent three years in this hell. Very few of the 15,000 children sent to Theresienstadt survived the Holocaust. Most were sent to Auschwitz to their death; including my best friend and bunkmate Ruth.

We had lost 20 family members; including my beloved Grandma. Of our transport to Theresienstadt, only a handful had survived; including my parents and me. We returned to Germany for less than a year and emigrated to America in May 1946. Our destination was New York. Unfortunately, my new-found freedom was short-lived, and I became very ill from the consequences of my life in Theresienstadt. I was diagnosed with a severe case of tuberculosis of both lungs. Years of hospitalization and complete bed rest, plus painful procedures followed. Finally, drugs were discovered to give me a cure. During my long illness, I found solace in writing, which gave me a purpose in life and took away the loneliness I was feeling.

Eventually, I returned to school at age 15, after the loss of eight years of education. I attained a college degree in chemistry and worked for 38 years in the medical field. Six published books followed; including "I am a Star -- child of the Holocaust". I am immensely grateful to my co-writer - composer Madeline Stone, and choral director Gregg Breinberg of PS 22 in Staten Island. Special thanks go to the wonderful children of the choir who personify the blending of many ethnic backgrounds. Thank you all for bringing our song: "Who am I?" to life.

My hope, my wish and my prayer, is for every child to grow up in peace without hunger and prejudice. I plead with you, world: make good choices. The antidote to hatred is education. The antidote to hatred is

education. There should be no more genocide or another Holocaust, and no more antisemitism.

-----  
<sup>3</sup> This paper is based on remarks delivered at the United Nations Holocaust memorial ceremony in January 2019.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. 1. We live in an era where the Holocaust survivor generation is dwindling. What is the significance of having survivors who are the witnesses to the atrocities, share their memories? What is the danger of no longer having the opportunity to hear their testimonies? What role do historians play in keeping the memory of the survivors alive?
2. 2. Mr. Turski and Ms. Auerbacher tell of the Nazis taking their names from them and giving them tattooed numbers instead. What was the consequence for the prisoners of having their names replaced by tattoos? How did the replacing of names with numbers reflect the attitude of the Nazis to the prisoners?
3. 3. Mr. Turski says that for him, the worst suffering during the Holocaust was humiliation. How was Mr. Turski humiliated and dehumanized? What are the effects of dehumanization on the victim?
4. 4. Ms. Auerbacher speaks of her life after the war. What are some of the long-term effects of trauma, especially for child survivors? In what way might trauma be passed on to the next generation, to the children and grandchildren of survivors? What does this say about the duration of trauma caused by genocide?
5. 5. What are the lessons that Mr. Turski and Ms. Auerbacher want us to learn from them? Give some examples of how organizations in your community are working on these goals with which the survivors entrust us.

**Mr. Marian Turski** was born Moshe Turbowicz in 1926 in Lodz. In 1940, the Nazis forced Moshe, his parents and his younger brother into the Lodz Ghetto. In August 1944, the Nazis deported the Turbowicz family to the Auschwitz Birkenau German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945). The Nazis murdered Moshe's father and most likely his brother upon arrival. Moshe and his mother survived the Holocaust. Mr. Turski has had a distinguished career in Poland as a journalist and Jewish activist. Mr. Turski has been recognized widely for his work in promoting human rights and the memory of the Holocaust. His awards include the Honorary Medal of the Commissioner for Human Rights for his service and achievement in the protection of human rights, awarded by Poland, and the National Order of the Legion of Honour, awarded by France. Mr. Turski is the founder of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, a former vice president of the International Auschwitz Committee, and an active member of the Committee's international council.

**Ms. Inge Auerbacher**, the only child of Berthold and Regina Auerbacher, lived in Kippenheim, a village in southwestern Germany. During the Kristallnacht pogrom, 9-10 November 1938, the Nazis arrested her father and grandfather and sent them to the Dachau concentration camp. Although released a few weeks later, her grandfather died of a heart attack the following May. At the age of seven, Ms. Auerbacher and her parents were deported to Theresienstadt in the former Czechoslovakia. Liberated three years later, the family emigrated to the United States in 1946. Ms. Auerbacher has received numerous awards including the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1986, Ms. Auerbacher published her first book about her childhood memories titled *I am a Star*. She has authored six books about her experiences and was the subject of a play, "The Star on My Heart".

---

The discussion papers series provides a forum for individual scholars on the Holocaust and the averting of genocide to raise issues for debate and further study. These writers, representing a variety of cultures and backgrounds, have been asked to draft papers based on their own perspective and particular experiences. The views expressed by the individual scholars do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations.