

Rede - Idit Gil

Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet laureate wrote a poem articulating the suffering, and the dreadful conditions of the workers, the silent masses, who lost all their identity in the construction of the Peruvian city of Machu Pichu.

Today, I would like to commemorate the voices of 1,158 human beings, who perished (on this very ground on which we tread) while brutally being worked to their death. Those "WO" human beings are the silent masses, most of whose identity has been reduced to human dust. These masses are my heroes.

They perished here in the winter of 1944-1945 having been compelled at gunpoint to leave their homes, their loved ones and friends to suffer brutality, disease, starvation, freezing cold, to go to their near certain deaths devoid of any pity, hope and dignity.

While the workers of Machu Pichu worked and suffered as part of the way of life in the Inca society, the Jewish workers in Bisingen were enslaved in the modern era in the most civilized of all western societies in which the autonomy of individuals was exalted.

The workers of Machu Pichu remained anonymous, but their work created one of the seven most beautiful treasures of the modern world. The anonymous Jewish workers in Bisingen created no monument and had no constructive work. They were worked to death in a futile effort to save a defeated dictatorship. While the work in Machu Pichu did not intend to kill, this was not the case here in Bisingen.

The work ethic is revered in the enlightened era. Work is virtually a god. It gives meaning to life, it gives status and respect. It has value. "Arbeit macht frei", work gives freedom is written on the famous entrance to Auschwitz. However, work at Bisingen at the end of the Second World War was not for freedom. For many of the prisoners here it was not a way to survive as it was for many Jews, who survived the Holocaust. Work in Bisingen was another means to murder human beings.

Among the faceless and nameless heroes, who are buried here in an undignified mass grave lies my private hero, my uncle Jacob Gelibter. Unlike the biblical Jacob, who worked for 14 years for Leban, but eventually achieved his aspirations and received his wife Rachel, my Jacob was forced to work in intolerable conditions for more than 5 years of the war. He was denied life!

I don't know much about him, but from the little that I do know I understand that Jacob was a young man with clear views, who was not passive. He was determined to change things and improve conditions. Following his Zionist beliefs he crossed Europe to immigrate to Palestine, but the frontiers were closed and he returned home to Pryzhitik. During the war he was active, trying to improve his conditions by escaping three times. He left the Scarisow ghetto to fight with the partisans. Most of them were killed he returned to the ghetto and then fled from a truck that led him to the labor camp of Skarjisko-Kamina, returning to see his mother in Schidlowitz, and finally by his mother's intuition and advice he left the ghetto in Schidlowitz, which was liquidated a few weeks later and ran away to the Radom ghetto.

At first he was hiding and then tried to survive through work in an armament factory. When he departed from his brother we don't know about his actions. All I could do was to trace his transfers through various documents. So we now know that in January 1944 he was transferred from Radom to Majdanek and 7 months later he was moved to Vajneguet for 3 months and finally to Bisingen where he perished on December 14th 1944 at 7 o'clock.

However, documents can tell us about administrative changes. They can teach us about physical conditions, but they don't reveal moods or thoughts or feelings. Since we learned a few months ago about the circumstances of his death I often think about his days in Bisingen and especially his last agonizing hours. What he was thinking about? How he felt? Were his eyes sad like the pictures I saw of other prisoners? Did he realize he was dying? Did he die alone or was his friend Mietek beside him? Did he think about his last farewell from his mother?

Did he think about the first three years of the war he experienced with his brother Haim? Did he think about the last time he saw him in a glimpse and waved good bye to him from the window of the train parking in Auschwitz in August 1944?

I will not know the answers for these questions, but I know that raising questions even if they are not answered are constructive. Raising questions helps us search and understand things and human relations. They let us think and not accept things blindly. They help us to be better.

Two of the basic human beings' needs that distinguish us from other living creatures are the will to know and the will to understand. They are the drive behind our development.

During this journey we gained some knowledge about the final burial place of my uncle Jacob Gelibter. We know now at first hand, about the place in which he suffered in the last month of his short and tragic life.

We shall never fully come to terms with reason why he and 1,157 human beings were worked here, in this place to their deaths, to become no more than human dust.

By placing this memorial stone with Jacob's name in his burial place, you abba, (daddy) restored Jacob's identity. He is no longer an anonymous victim but a human being who perished alone before he had family who could care for him.

It is impossible to forgive those who committed such heinous crimes, but as Hans emotionally told us: "There are 'other' Germans."

Indeed, during our journey we have met 'other' Germans who supported and encouraged us in this most difficult journey and through conciliation they have gone out of their way, beyond the call of a certain duty to make our momentous visit to be productive and enjoyable.

We would like to thank all those who accompanied us and helped to lay the foundations in erecting this memorial stone: the members of the "Association", Dr. Andreas Zekron, Uta Hentsch who was instrumental in facilitating our contacts with the community; Mayor Joachim Krüger, who supported us, and for his warm hospitality, and last but not least Hanne Grunert who made our journey so meaningful.

We hope that the memory of the victims who perished here at KZ Bisingen will be not just a cornerstone but a catalyst for a meaningful ongoing dialogue and reconciliation between all human beings, and especially between Israelis and Germans.

Vielen Dank and Shalom! - Idit Gil

Abba, daddy, in your long search you did receive only some of the answers, but I learned from you an important lesson about family ties and fidelity.

For 63 years you searched for your brother and when recently you learned about the circumstances of his death you wanted to visit the place and to properly say goodbye.

I, who have accompanied you in this search and learned how your brother was so important to you and promise to tell my children your mutual story, I hope your brother Jacob and the other victims who are buried here will rest in peace.

On behalf of the two of us, I want to express our deep appreciation to those gathered here today and to Uta Hentsch, who helped in connecting us to the people here and especially to Hanne Grunert who has kindly hosted us here. Thank you so much!

As the great German and later Israeli philosopher Prof. Martin Buber once wrote, "All life is meeting". Here at Bisingen let this meeting be meaningful to all generations to come.

Shalom!