

Holocaust Memorial Day, Interfaith Harmony, Forgiveness and Healing

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February 6, 2012



Forgiveness is an extremely complex issue which I see very much in terms of an individual process of self-acceptance. By this I mean acceptance of the aspects of our self that we would rather not own.

Reverend Braybrooke opened the evening by expressing the horror we all feel at the utter brutality and depravity of what was perpetrated in the Holocaust - and, sadly, in so many genocides and atrocities since. Expressing horror at such evil is natural and human but at the same time locates the atrocities outside ourselves. Forgiveness begins, in my opinion, by owning the capacity in oneself (which is part of every human being) for acting in this same evil manner. Only by owning our darkest thoughts, urges, ideas and interest in evil, are we in a position to take control and choose not to act violently but responsibly, not to retaliate or exact revenge but to seek understanding through dialogue. When we own our own dark shadow we are able to empathise with others and forgive ourselves for our own vengeful thoughts and wishes.

We need to develop the courage to care and the will to act before it is too late when atrocities against humanity are developing. We need to open ourselves to awareness of the destructiveness of denial. There have been so many atrocities that our minds rebel and protect us by convincing ourselves that we don't know what we do know but have denied. If we allow ourselves to know that a people is suffering immensely, we can no longer be indifferent. In the face of feeling powerless to stop the atrocity, or guilty for not having intervened in time, we slip back into 'not knowing' - into ignorance and indifference. So many atrocities have not yet been processed (justice felt to be achieved, memorialisation and closure) that, as a community we are traumatised and protecting ourselves through denial. But denial provides impunity for further atrocities.

In my opinion, the Holocaust could have been prevented if the Armenian Genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks under cover of WWI, had been brought to justice and closure. In the 50 years after the end of WWII, silence and disbelief inhibited the process of Holocaust acknowledgement and healing, which is even now not yet complete. This has created impunity for further violence and genocides, further traumatising and retreat into ignorance and indifference.

A part of the Holocaust has yet to be fully acknowledged, memorialised, compensated and closure through acceptance of the survivors. At least half a million Sinti and other Gypsies were deliberately murdered by the Nazis for the same reason that Jews were murdered - because the Nazis decided they could not fit into the Aryan 'master-race'. Since 1945 Roma/Gypsy/Travellers have been persistently and increasingly persecuted, evicted, deported, their homes torched or bull-dozed, and murdered Gypsies not considered important enough by police to find the perpetrators.

We have another genocide emerging under our noses all over Europe, including England. Are we going to develop the Courage to Care and the Will to intervene this time? Or are we going to allow the persecution and injustices suffered by Gypsies to continue until the massacres begin?