

RUTI KATZ speech at the event of Standing Together in Vienna – Karlsplatz - 7.7.2024

Karl Gustav Jung said: “We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself. He is the great danger, and we are pitifully unaware of it. We are the origin of all coming evil.”

It has been 9 months today, since a profound evil spread in our country and took it over. A kind of evil, which I have not imaged could exist in our present-day-society. Of course, I am aware of the daily atrocities, of the day-to-day evil which prevails in Palestine-Israel. But I am referring to a different, profoundly more frightening kind of cruelty. I want to focus on that cruelty and evil, which are inherent in the present war, in which it seems that the Israeli government, as the ruling body, its right-wing racist fanatic manipulators, and its fanatic followers, aim to eliminate the Palestinian presence in Gasa strip and the West Bank.

Resistance, even violent resistance, was to be expected as a reaction to the ongoing occupation, oppression, humiliation, and dehumanization of the people in Gaza and the West Bank. Shortage of water and only limited hours of electricity - which the supply of both is under Israeli control, extreme poverty, high unemployment, and sever restriction of movement which impairs every aspect of life, – all these led to losing hope for a better future, to realizing that there is no prospect for better, dignified lives. No chance at all to any dignified lives. These produced deep frustration and immense rage, which wide opened the doors for violent actions of resistance. All this was expected even as a logical outcome of the unbearable situation. Violence did not necessarily have to be the outcome, but this is the bitter fruit which grows in an oppressive violent environment. The attack of October 7th was predictable. What was not predictable was the level of cruelty that was involved and manifested through this attack.

Yet, October 7th was only the first day. What followed is for me inconceivable, impossible to understand and to digest. I expected Israel to react ferociously. In the very first days I said that there will be an unimaginable act of revenge. I said that I do not want to even begin to imagine what is awaiting Gaza. But as we know, sometimes reality accedes any imagination. The worst that I could imagine wasn't even the beginning of what has actually happened.

I am not referring to the scope of the revenge – the massive attack on an entire population, which took the lives of dozens of thousand Palestinians, among them too many children, women and elderly; Women, children and elderly people, none of them, I believe, belonged to the fighting squads of Hamas. The destruction of Gasa strip, making it inhabitable, ruining all its infrastructure, erasing its social, cultural and spiritual centres, its hospitals, universities, schools and mosques, and the ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza and the WB - all are manifestations of evil. But I am referring to an even deeper and more frightening layer of evil.

In my April 7th speech I explained how Israelis are indoctrinated into being loyal obeying soldiers of the IDF. The Israeli Defence Force or should I call it the Israeli Destruction Force? This is achieved by one-sided learning of history with some false and twisted information, and by almost imperceptible restriction of free thinking. Channelling the young children and teenagers towards a super nationalistic attitude, which makes them believe that “we are the best of all, and this ‘all’ wants at he best to hurst us if not to eliminate us”. This is achieved through holocaust overdoses, and degrading descriptions of the Palestinians in particular, and gentiles in general. The entire nation is being manipulated by fear: The ongoing existential threats by the Palestinians, by the Arabs, and by Muslims, by the Iranian bomb, and by the new Hitler. Even upcoming earthquakes are also very scary.

The Israeli prime-minister is a master who knows how to play with all these fears, many of which he himself has implanted in the Israeli psyche, and he does it very efficiently. This may explain the Israelis' consent to the endless vicious circle of violence and fighting, to even willing to sacrifice their own lives believing that they are defending their land, their mothers, their children, their future. But nothing can explain the evil that has prevailed during the last 9 months of the destruction of Gaza. I am not arguing that evil wasn't present before Oct.7. Not at all. You can not be an occupying force without being cruel and bigot. I am referring to a new kind of cruelty, a new level of evil that I was sure, that the people who experienced the holocaust would never have an affinity for.

I want to elaborate, what is this new evil with which I am obsessed. The mass killing of the population is a most obvious evil. Many Israelis justify the death of so many civilians, as an outcome of the Gazan population being used by Hamas as human shields, thus this is Hamas's responsibility not Israel's. Assuming this is the case, which some of us doubt it is, can't we at least expect from those who are doing the killing, to have the slightest feelings of pity towards this miserable population, who is being killed, while functioning involuntarily as human shields? Not even some minimal remorse?

Let's assume that during the first month, the soldiers were driven by rage, revenge and conviction that this is the way to release the Israeli hostages, let's assume that this is the case also in the second, third, fourth months. But 9 months? How long does the outburst of rage and desire for revenge last? Let's assume that the soldiers really believe that their mission is to eliminate Hamas, and this is doable, however, how come there are no feelings whatsoever towards those poor people who are considered "collateral damage." No pity at all, but a lot of disdain and even malicious joy. To this kind of evil, I am referring. To this loss of humanity.

It seems that the hearts of many Israelis have been blocked. But let's assume that during wars, soldiers must block their hearts, must have hearts of stone. But I know its not necessarily true, because my father, as a Partizan during the 2nd WW, felt for the Wehrmacht soldier, the human enemy he was facing, even after he knew that his mother and her family were murdered by the Nazis in concentration camps. But let's assume that a heart of stone in the battlefield is a precondition. How come then, all those who support the soldiers from a distance, the civil population who is not involved in combat, have also developed this kind of sealed hearts, blaming the victims for their own death.

Now let's assume that because it is a modern war in which people are not fighting face-to-face, but eliminating each other by bombs fired from a distance, and the shooter has no contact with his victims. The killer does not carry much burden for killing a woman, or a child, or elderly because he has never seen them. Practically, the bomb did it – nothing personal. There is no place for personal responsibility. Fine, so we can leave those soldiers and proceed to another assumption.

How can we explain the abusive behaviour of settlers and soldiers in the West Bank. Stealing cattle from impoverished Palestinian families, shooting their water tanks, water that they pay so much for it and is so scarce, contaminating their wells, -let me remind us that it is being done in the very hot and dry desert-, cutting and burning their olive trees, demolishing their houses, beating fathers and mothers in front of their children, sometimes kidnapping them and locking them in Israeli jails, often with no reason. Occasionally they also kill a Palestinian. This is done very personally. Very much face-to-face. The settlers are so determined to hurt the Palestinians, to drive them out from their homes, to expel them from their homeland, that they are also ready to hurt Israeli activists, who are there to help them.

What these settlers are doing, they do because they feel they are the Lords of the land. They do it with faces glowing with joy and enthusiasm, and hearts darkened by hatred, malice,

contempt and disdain. In the West Bank one can observe dehumanization in progress – but who is the de-humanized? Absolutely not the victims. Not the Palestinians. The dehumanization is a boomerang – it's the settlers who got stripped from humanity, they become the non-human.

I want to make one thing clear: due to Israel's policy, the West Bank is being separated from Gaza, so the Palestinians there did not participate in the with Oct. 7th attack. There are no excuses for such celebration of evil –revenge, no need for protecting our mothers from the violent Palestinians. The reason for the persecution of the Palestinians is them being there. Existing! It has been happening for years, but since Oct.7th the settlers and the soldiers that accompany them. are celebrating daily this pure vicious racism protected by the divine promise to the chosen people.

Let's proceed further in this road of evil. How can we explain what is happening in the prisoners' camps? While the people in Gaza are anonymous because they are killed by bombs fired from a distance, and the soldiers who fired them have not a clue whom they were killing, the Palestinians prisoners are being kept anonymous on purpose, because a person without a name, is not a real person. Unfortunately, we are familiar with this practice of stripping persons from their personalities. In Sde Teiman the prisoners are being kept most days with eyes covered, hands and legs cuffed, not allowed to talk, 1-minute-shower per week, one minute! and severe and painful punishments if this minute is prolonged a bit, so many prisoners give up this privilege. 100 people share a single toilet-paper-roll, no beds, no prayers, and here I stop. Because the dehumanization and humiliation are so shocking, that the paper can not bear it, and my mouth can not speak it. A doctor from the camp's clinic, testified that some prisoners had to have their hands or feet amputated because of deep cuts, and untreated infections which were caused by the long and tight cuffing. All these atrocities were done on a very person to person level. This is the evil I am speaking about.

How did the Israelis become so cruel and immersed in evil. We were never saints, but we were not always like this. Even 20 years ago it was different. We Israelis took pride in having some positive emotions. The Israeli soldiers were sensitive, at least that's what was conveyed to us, they shot and wept.

In 2002 when a bomb aimed to kill the Hamas member Salah Shehade killed 14 civilians, among them kids, it caused an outrage in Israel. Today, dozens of people as collateral damage is the norm. Starvation of an entire population is acceptable. What happened during the last 20 years? A lot, but explaining it is beyond of the scope of this speech. One thing has not change - the false sense of Israelis that they are RIGHT. They are MORAL. They are the VICTIMS. The more moral, righteous and victimized a person feels, the easier it is for the evil within to emerge in its full glory. Not being conscious of the evil within us is a dangerous state. Quoting Jung again: "Much of the evil in this world is due to the fact that man, in general, is hopelessly unconscious." If we were aware, if we were conscious, perhaps we would have gone through a process of introspection and reflection and chosen a different path.

Why so many Israelis never woke from their delusion that they are SO RIGHT and MORAL, is a topic for a fertile topic for research, but I will boil it down to a few words: super right-wing nationalistic and racist propaganda, manipulations, indoctrination through education and the media, cultivation of fear and hatred, and in less words – nationwide brainwashing. All the above was and still is conducted masterfully by the prime minister of Israel. He is not alone in this Tango, but he is the leading ONE.

So, is this the end? No. There are many people like us, who would always stand together for peace, equality and justice, in Israel and Palestine. We are a minority, but we are determined and growing. Recently we can witness a beginning of processes that herald a change. Last Monday over 6,000 people gathered in a former basketball hall in Tel Aviv, to declare their

obligation for peace, equality and safety for all. Among the participants were Israeli Jews and Palestinians, orthodox Jews, Muslims and Christians, secular members of these religions, representatives from the new Democrats party, and a representative from the communist party. Many of these people lost their loved ones on October 7th and later – they do not seek revenge – they seek safety and dignity which can be achieved only by peace. More signs heralding change are a couple of dozens reserve soldiers that declared that they refuse to continue serving, and some soldiers started testifying for the organization Breaking the Silence. It seems that the left is awakening from the shock, the trauma, of October 7th.

Many believe that cease fire, or any agreement, can be achieved only with the help and the will of external forces, the very same force who are manipulating the middle east. It seems that without that, we will be stuck eternally in our circle of violence. But once a cease fire is on its way, and negotiations to obtain certain normality, or even peace, will begin, we will be HERE, there, and everywhere to facilitate it, because without the civil work, without dialogue between the people, the cease fire will not be sustainable. And we want a sustainable just peace.

While we and many other groups are demanding ceasefire in Israel-Palestine and are protesting the elimination of Gaza, the earth continues to burn, the war in Ukraine is still going on, there is famine in Africa, modern slavery prevails, LGBTQ communities are persecuted also in the Western so called liberal world, and women are discriminated - and all this while the far right is rising. The far right that offers no solutions just more racism and destruction.

In such a disturbing reality, I find the words of Walid Daqqa, a Palestinian who died recently in an Israeli jail, after being denied an early release, which he requested because of his illnesses which eventually killed him, in such a reality I find his words of utmost importance:

When someone ceases to act as a person, it is disintegration. The essence of man and human culture is to feel the other. Numbness in the face of horrors is like a nightmare for me. To feel people, to feel the pain of humanity — this is the essence of civilization. The will is the essence of the intelligent man. The act of doing is our physical essence. Emotion is our spiritual essence. And feeling — sensing people and feeling their pain — is the essence of all human culture.