

WHOEVER YOU ARE, YOUR WORD WILL GIVE YOU AWAY

A Meditation by Marijana Ajzenkol, Belgrade, Serbia

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No matter who You are, Your words will show Your true self! Peace and values have never been discussed as much as nowadays. The well known rule says that the more you talk about something, the more problematic it becomes. Indeed, we have never witnessed more riots and deeper crises of values. When solid values are questioned society gets into a crisis and uncertainty. This is why the contemporary world crisis should be approached as a crisis of values. However, crisis is not always entirely negative – it is an opportunity and invitation for a consistent search for a better quality of life.

Whenever there is a crisis there is inevitably also hope. Is it only a cheap consolation to those who don't have anything else left, or is it still a value and gift of human beings? A human being believes in what he or she hopes for. And it is from such a hope and belief in a better, normal life that the Interreligious Center in Belgrade has been established.

The Interreligious Center is an association of people who are followers of Abrahamic traditions, namely Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Its founders (beside the author) are mostly religious dignitaries and administrators. The aim of the association is for people to get to know each other. It was not born on an idea of a *religious dialogue* but an urge to live normal lives, meaning living with each other and not being scandalized by the mere existence of different religions and traditions but accepting and regarding this as an test of faith, purity, and the strength of one's own faith.

The Inter-religious Centre was registered in March 2000. However, it has been unofficially active since 1996 when we, with a blessing of the Bishop Sabac-Valjevo, Rev Lavrentije and Roman Catholic Archbishop Monsignor Franc Perko, started getting together to discuss various topics and slightly opened the door of toleration since our fears, prejudices, and ignorance are huge. Throughout all these years we had a number of three-day gatherings (in Sabac, Valjevo, Banja Koviljaca, Novi Pazar, Monastery of St. Nicholas in the town of Soko), afternoon coffees and chats in different churches, mosques as well as monthly gatherings in the Zemun Club of Home Culture. We organized concerts of spiritual music of

different traditions (by Mrs Ljiljana Arseneovic, a pianist, a Youth Choir of the Zemun Church of the Virgin Mary and a Roman Catholic Youth Choir from St. Peter's Parish). We also organized evenings of spiritual poetry and a prayer for unity of Christians in Christ the King Church of Belgrade's Roman Catholic Archbishopric.

The nature and dynamics of any communication including inter-religious ones require a lot of investment and effort. This is why we might ask ourselves to what extent are we ready for such investments. I believe that there are some key questions when we talk about communication: what do we do to help ourselves to understand others and others to understand us? Have we forgotten about self-criticism and got scared to make an effort to understand others? Where are we led by escaping the responsibility? Is keeping it to oneself a good approach and solution? Isn't it natural to step away from one's own self and turn to God?

Prayer is our deepest communication with God. Prayer as a cry of longing, prayer as work, prayer as silence, as devotion...and all that in God's presence. People pray when they are in trouble, when they are helpless, alone and when suffering. They believe, hope and wait. They wait for a word to be cured. In the process of waiting they feel the Presence and gradually open up to God's secret. This is the beginning of self-awareness: who we are and what we have been created for. This is the beginning of acceptance of meaningful sufferings, troubles, and everything else that our *ratio* cannot accept but fights against without real understanding and justification. And while we are roaming around, life passes by in meaningless fights. However, the foundation of our prayer is, after all, life's reality which directs our hearts and lives towards God. Thus prayer gives a much deeper meaning of God's compassion.

If our faith represents love towards God in its complete humility and trust, all that we see, especially our fellow brothers and sisters, will be seen through this light. Our faith is a belief in Someone who remains the same despite our own changes, and whose value is love by which we are attracted (love and not justice makes God so great). God's love for us as we are, with all our sins, miseries and darkness, must be limitless, in order to cure and comfort us. And we, we offer only a hesitant, uncertain kind of love. We find new strength through faith, open our hearts for what we get, and with a prayer build a kind of community with God in which we become transformed by God's image.

All around us is soaked with blessing: we were given a breath of life, activated by an immortal soul and were given a free will. We have been prepared to be creators within the creation. Living with God, the source of our own beings, we are the winners in this world. Humans think what is inside them. These thoughts radiate and create sub-radiation which we call a spirit of the times or view of the world. Our words are one of the ways to present our thoughts and even our own selves. With words we open or close many doors. Positive and pure thoughts and words win because they are in alliance with God. We always have to expect the best and the best will penetrate into our lives and the lives of people around us. Indulging in blessing means the revival of our wealthy beings and richness that we possess. That is our hope, and happy are the ones with pure souls because they will see God; happy are the peacemakers because they will be called the sons of God.

Thank God for the gift of words which we give to others and others give to us. Only pure words, born in the heart of one person and spoken and aimed to another person, constantly create and represent signs sent by God enabling us to feel the grace of a new creation. We are responsible for our thoughts and words and therefore by aiming at creation of a better world let us bring in with clean hands words born by common sense and situated in warm hearts.