

*Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow  
because even today I still arrive.*

*I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,  
in order to fear and to hope.  
The rhythm of my heart is the birth and  
death of all that are alive.*

### Returning to Auschwitz

On September 22nd 2008, I visited the concentration camp in Auschwitz, Poland with the „The Whole World Is a Single Flower“ conference tour.

It was the second time that I visited a concentration camp: I had been to Dachau in Germany with my parents, when I was a teenager. My memories of this visit are still strong: I remember that I broke down when I saw the exhibit on medical experiments that were conducted on prisoners.

When the conference tour was put up, I felt that the time had come to renew my connection to the past events and to enquire deeper into their meaning for me.

### A quest for identity

My family has its roots in Northern Germany, but I was born and brought up in Luxembourg. This gives me a peculiar perspective onto both nationalities:

In one way, I am German. My family is German. German is my mother tongue. On the other hand, I come from Luxembourg: I was born and grew up here. It is where my schooling in an international school helped me see through boundaries of nationality and made me identify as „European“ much more than as belonging to any one country.

When I moved to Germany in 1998 to begin my university studies, it was also a quest for identity: What does „being German“ mean? Where do I come from? Who am I?

Even after ten years of living in Germany, I am still in the process of finding out.

## Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, there is still some resentment against the „Prussians“, as the Germans are sometimes called here. Germany overran Luxembourg in World War II and subjected the population to grave indignities.

As a child, I could always relate to these feelings of the Luxembourgers. But I also felt that the resentment projected against *me* was unjustified: What did I have to do with the war?

At the same time, when I heard young Germans argue that they were not connected to the things their parents or grandparents had done, I also felt that this was not correct.

## An angry guide

In Auschwitz, my group was guided by a middle-aged Polish man. He spoke resentfully about the Nazis and turned cynical when he described the suffering of the Polish people. The more he spoke, the more his feelings carried over to me. I also got angry, then sad and felt small and powerless.

He was speaking in terms of „us“, meaning the Polish victims, and „them“, the Nazis, the culprits. The more I listened to him, the more his distinctions appeared bizarre to me: In front of him was an international group of Poles, Germans, Americans, Chinese and Koreans peacefully united. What did these distinctions mean to us?

I asked myself how I fit into his concepts: Was I one of „them“? Or was I a victim too? Which side was I on?

As we kept on walking, we all suffered. My friend Arne from Berlin who was walking next to me was suffering just as my Korean and Chinese friends were, and just as I was. I felt strongly connected to the people who had lived and died in the exact places we were walking on.

Inquiring deeper into my feelings, I realised the fundamental error: This place was not about victims and culprits. It was not about „us“ and „them“. This was a place of universal suffering that left nobody untouched. This was the chance to look deeply into suffering and the origins of suffering.

Where did Auschwitz come from?

As I was walking around, I wondered where all this had started. Where had Auschwitz come from? What was its original cause? And had it ever ended?

In meditation, I realised:

It was not the Nazis who killed these people: It was us. And it was us whom we killed.

*I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river,  
and I am the bird which, when spring comes, arrives in time  
to eat the mayfly.*

*I am the frog swimming happily in the clear pond,  
and I am also the grass-snake who, approaching in silence,  
feeds itself on the frog.*

*I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,  
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,  
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.*

*I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat,  
who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate,  
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.*

*I am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands,  
and I am the man who has to pay his "debt of blood" to my people,  
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.*

#### Cutting Karma

Our visit ended on the extensive grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Auschwitz' second camp and site of the largest exterminations. More than a million people were murdered here.

I was walking with a group of three, guided by a young Polish girl, who spoke compassionately about the living conditions in the sheds in which the prisoners had been kept. Her strength, warmth and care impressed me and touched me deeply.

Outside the fence, as the sun went down, I spoke with Peter Voke and Corrin Chan about my experience of the day. I related how I had felt the first guide's anger and bitterness carry over to me: "It's sad: An angry Nazi kills an uncle, who's nephew gets angry and gives tours to visitors who get angry..."

Peter looked at me and said:

"And now we cut."

The three of us embraced one another.

Where are we now?

Auschwitz comes from a misunderstanding: The misunderstanding that „I“ am German, and „you“ are Chinese. The misunderstanding that „I“ have to protect myself from „you“ who could harm me. The misunderstanding that „I“ know better how things work than „you“ do. The misunderstanding that „I“ am superior to „you“, that „my“ opinion is more important than „yours“, that „my“ people deserve more than „yours“.

Have we learnt? Where is Auschwitz now?

Kwan Seum Bosal

*My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.  
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans.*

*Please call me by my true names,  
so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,  
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.*

*Please call me by my true names,  
so I can wake up,  
and so the door of my heart can be left open,  
the door of compassion.*

May we use our experience of places like Auschwitz to learn about suffering and the origin of suffering. May we use their energy to walk the path. May we constantly renew our vow to save all beings from suffering. May all beings be free. May all beings be happy.

Author Notes

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The verses printed in italics are from the poem *Call Me by My True Names* by Thích Nhất Hạnh.