

To coincide with the presentation of the "Bridges of Tolerance" project in Sofia, Professor Hannah Lorer wrote a fascinating essay on how she sees tolerance through the ages. She gives some interesting examples of bridges of tolerance, starting in Greek and Roman times where tolerance was shown towards Christians, continuing with examples from the Old Testament when the Persian King Cyrus liberated the Jews from slavery, reminding us of Pope Clement VI who in 1348 issued a papal bull urging Catholics not to persecute Jews who were being blamed for the plague. She quotes Voltaire's famous words of tolerance "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it". She also quotes John F. Kennedy: "Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others."

Professor Hanna Lorer's essay should be read in full.

Bridges of Tolerance

Tolerance is a behaviour that is dictated by common sense and refers to the acceptance of the different lifestyles, religion, traditions, rituals, etc., whereas toleration is the behaviour in which differences are accepted without being considered fatal to the co-existence. Etymologically, the word "tolerance" was first used in 15th century to designate the behaviour towards minorities in certain geographical regions.

In ancient Hellas, a frequently used concept was the term "barbarian", whose meaning was "a foreigner". Barbarians were all people who were not Greek, mostly the Persian, the peoples from Asia, including the Jews. Later, that view was imported into Europe and the term "barbarian" used to refer to the non-European, and initially was charged with a pejorative meaning, which, however, changed in the course of time. In one of his works, the ancient Greek scientist and historian Herodotus wrote, "One should not forget over time what humankind has done, so that one day the wonders created by either Greek or 'barbarians' would not remain nameless, which is an important step towards the acknowledgement that the authors of wonders are not a priority only of the Hellenes."

An incontestable proof of the existence of bridges of tolerance has been known since antiquity. In the beginning of 4th century in Sofia (Serdika at that time) was signed the earliest document for tolerance towards the Christians, the so called "Edict of Toleration", prepared by the Roman Emperor Galerius.

According to the Old Testament, the Persian King Cyrus the Great, who is considered to have liberated the Jews from slavery in the period 539-530 BC, allowed them to return to their native land. In the Hellenic town of Alexandria, founded in 331 BC, there was a considerable Jewish community, which existed in peace and understanding with the Greek and Egyptian ethnic group – an excellent example for co-existence of different ethnicities. In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance tolerance was shown towards some denominations of Christianity, the Romans demonstrated a certain extent of understanding towards Jews and Muslims, which was especially maintained by Protestant reformers of traditional Christianity. An example of

tolerance towards the Jews is the behaviour of Pope Clement VI (1291-1352), who in 1348 issued a papal bull to all Catholics urging them not to kill the Jews who were blamed for the plague pandemic. He emphasised that the Jews died of the disease, too, just as all other people, and the pandemic encompassed territories where there were Jews. An illustrative example of this Pope's tolerance is the fact that he personally took over the protection of the Jews, which, however, did not lead to creating its followers.

Another wonderful example of such a person – a Dutch Renaissance humanist and a Catholic, who preached religious tolerance in his works, was Erasmus of Rotterdam. He is credited for the appeal, "It is better to cure a sick man than to kill him". Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Dutch philosopher of Jewish descent. He, following a thorough research of some biblical texts, came to the conclusion that tolerance and freedom are important to humankind and that every person should achieve their way of thinking in accordance with their own world view. The great German playwright and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) depicted in his plays "The Jews" and "Nathan the Wise" traits of the Jewish character. They clearly demonstrate his view on the social and religious tolerance. As Voltaire claims, "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

What is tolerance? This is empathy and agreement with the beliefs and traditions of different countries which are in conflict with each other. This is behaviour to the different races, religions, and nationalities that are different from those of the respective country, a benevolent and positive attitude towards the views and actions consistent with the peculiarities of different ethnic groups. This is a liberal attitude towards the differing viewpoints. When demonstrating tolerance, one accepts other people's ideas and beliefs, and when one respects another person's opinion, even if one disagrees with it or considers it useless, one shows tolerance. In John Kennedy's words, "Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others."

In the years preceding and during World War II, Nazism, which was proclaimed by Germany and affected the countries occupied by it, defined the notion of racism, xenophobia, and especially anti-Semitism as an exact opposite of the ideas of tolerance between people, nations and races. To oppose this antihuman philosophy, a number of works of art and literature were created, as it was considered they could change people's way of thinking formed by the antihuman philosophy of racism. Through these artistic means carrying their aesthetic influence, together with the systematic training in tolerance at the educational institutions, human thinking should change in a positive direction.

In this respect, music, fine arts, literature, etc. are of great importance and have a predetermining role. The great English playwright and writer Oscar Wilde said, "Without music, life would be a mistake." It is not by chance that in 1974, by decision of UNESCO, October 1st was declared a World Music Day.

The Jewish daily round has been accompanied by songs ever since Biblical time; music is an integral part of Judaism and it is known from the Holy Books that synagogical rituals were accompanied with melodic performances of the psalms. Thus, in divine service, through music, the main divine message, turns into a common appeal to the realisation of the offered prayers.

The Jewish people presented itself through songs. Their lyrics gave information about the fate of kings and prophets. The synagogical music (hazanut), secular music, folk songs and dances are integral part of the Jewish musical heritage. It is deemed that motives of the cult ritual music have persisted in some music works as part of their content. In the synagogues, the sound of Shofar – an ancient Jewish folk instrument, an ordinary animal horn from a cow or a ram – can be heard on some holidays.

The Jewish people has always had an inclination to preservation, a result of historically fatal, almost eternal persecutions and victimisations, which has turned into a life-saving instinct that has never, which does us credit, crossed the frontier of tolerance. The Jewish musical culture, which in its essence is originally Oriental, coexists with the Ashkenazi Western music, performed by Ashkenazi Jews from Western Europe and Russia – Klezmer music. Sephardic music is distinguished by its specific features and is characteristic of the Jewish communities populating the countries of the Mediterranean, including Bulgaria.

The Jews are famous for their attachment to music and it is an integral part of their lifestyle. Amateur bands were formed – the Jewish folk choir was established in 1911 by the conductor Mois Tsadikov. The repertoire of this choir-turned-orchestra included complex and difficult oratorios and large-scale choral works. Gradually, the musical talent of the Bulgarian Jews started to find expression in a wide range of choirs and musical formations, chamber ensembles, concert soloists such as Bitush Davidov, Rafael Pinkas, Milyo Basan, pianist Emi Behar, conductor Izhak Graziani, Prof. Mati Pinkas, Prof. Mayer Frank, Aaron Arnov, Benedict Molhov, Leon Souroujon, etc. Great appreciation should be demonstrated for the musical colossi that have become world-famous, such as Pancho Vladigerov, Alexis Weissenberg, Jules Levy, Milcho Leviev, Alexander Vladigerov, Academician Nikolay Kauffman, Peter Stupel, Benzion Eliezer, Maurice Aladjem, Simo Lazarov, etc. The Bulgarian musical culture owes a debt of honour to the work of the Bulgarian musical figures.

There are world-famous works in the musical culture that include themes from Judaism, musical characters of persons, events and holidays, which bear all prerequisites to teach tolerance - Ernst Bloch, a composer who wrote symphonic music based on events from the Old Testament with elements from the Jewish folklore, bearing the spirit of humanism. Max Bruch – a composer whose magnificent work "Adagio" on Jewish melodies for cello and orchestra - Kol Nidrei is a popular liturgical piece charged with very strong emotion and spiritual energy, engendered by the deep faith, and celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Georg Friedrich Haendel, a great composer, created a number of works which are often performed on the concert stages, including the "Messiah" oratorio. Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy is the author of numerous works, among which is the "Elijah" oratorio, which is highly appreciated by the specialists. Niccolo Paganini composed "Moses Fantasy" – a musical piece for violin and orchestra. The palette of all works specified in this short and incomplete reference bear the appeal for the triumph of tolerance.

It is well known that the written and oral Torah depicts characters that played a role in key events from the past of the Jewish people. Extremely interesting is the story told in the Book of Esther, which could qualify as a dramaturgical piece. The protagonists and antagonists are depicted in complex relations and depending on the role they play in the development of the

events in which they participate, they became a byword for selfless heroes (Esther and Mordecai), or of vindictive villains in the persons of Aman and the jealous and bitter wife of Ahasuerus, the King of Persia – Vashti. The dramatis personae depicted in the Book of Esther are the momentum in the plot development of the story; they express the clash between the representatives of the protagonists and their antipodes, of the expressions of Esther and Mordecai's humane tolerance towards their enemies. In Esther's story, the magical powers of different arts unfold with all their might and the range of the vehicles of expression is broadened, so that there are works of art dedicated to this story in literature, music, and fine arts, which have drawn the attention of great artists such as Rembrandt, Rubens, Boticelli, Tintoretto, Poussin, Dali, Chagale, etc. The story of Esther's feat is immortalised in musical pieces such as Haendel's oratorio and the American opera by Hugo Weisgall. Ray Goody's musical was created based on the same theme. Films dedicated to Esther's story were the object of attention of different cinematographers, such as the one directed by Robert Troesh (1962). Another Israeli film with the same title was directed by Amos Gitai (1986), and there is a film by director András Fésös, titled "The Girl Who Became Queen" (2000) and the film "Esther and Ahasuerus – One Night with the King" (2006).

Although Germany is the native country of Nazism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, especially in 20 century, it offered favourable conditions for the work of intellectuals and innovators, artists and all other types of creators. The German universities gave higher education to the ingenuous physicist Albert Einstein, the sociologists Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer, the philosophers Ernst Cassirer and Edmund Husserl and political theoreticians such as Arthur Rosenberg and Gustav Meyer. Five Jewish scientists won Nobel Prizes. The scientific discoveries and theoretical treatments of the Nobel Prize winners are distinguished by their characteristic humane traits of tolerance, especially those of the ones dedicated to the medical profession.

In the field of literature, very famous were the writers Shalom Aleichem, Erich Maria Remarque, brothers Heinrich and Thomas Mann, whose works are clearly dominated by the idea of tolerance. The same is valid for the German writer Hermann Hesse, who converted to Buddhism during the time of fascism, which left a deep mark in his works in defence of tolerance during the obscurantism of fascism.

The theatres in Berlin and Frankfurt am Main staged plays by Bertold Brecht, directed by Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator. The Jewish intellectuals enlisted so far, as well as a number of others, who contributed to the German culture and science during the establishment of the total domination of fascism, enforcing complete domination of non-tolerance to the other and otherness, either managed to leave the country or died in the death camps. In parts of his literary works, one of the most prominent contemporary Israeli writers Amos Oz emphasised the need for tolerance in the country, with a view to achieving long-lasting peace and understanding with the neighbouring countries.

In the 21st century the world faces misunderstandings, contrariness and conflicts that lead to important consequences. The human notion of tolerance can be expressed with the words 'I accept the other as he or she is, and to a no lesser extent than the he or she accepts me. Otherwise, the peaceful coexistence, tolerance in the society, the progress and survival would

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Written by Anouk

be impossible.

We are different, but have common human needs and values. One of people's callings is to build bridges, to start a dialogue, to seek understanding in the diversity of opinions, beliefs, conceptions and viewpoints. They should unite people around tolerance, until they recognise and assert the universal human rights and liberties of the others. Only thus can we appreciate the wealth of cultures in our world, which in turn is a guarantee for peace, economic and social progress.

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