

Editor's Note: The author of this article is Martin Röhl (Son Kwang) who practises with the Kwan Um Zen Sangha in Dresden, Germany. Martin was born and brought up in Luxembourg but his family root was in Northern Germany. The article was a frank and deep revelation of author's transcendence over his emotions after visiting the concentration camp in Auschwitz, Poland on September 22nd 2008 with the „The Whole World Is a Single Flower“ conference tour.

The Angry Guide. My group was first 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?

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As we kept on walking in Auschwitz, 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 had Auschwitz come from? What was its original cause? And had it ever ended?

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In meditation, I realised:

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

CUT! 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.

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.

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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.*

** from the poem *Call Me by My True Names* by the Vietnamese Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh.

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.