



Who are you without memory?

01.02.2025 | Piotr A. Cywinski

27.01.2025 - Address of the director of the Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau at the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child,
felt like a child, and thought like a child.
But when I became an adult, I left behind the ways of childhood.

Except for memory.

Memory endures. Even from the earliest experiences of our lives.
Today, we must reflect upon memory and experience.
I realized this as I grew up and, most importantly, in this very place.
Nowhere else have I matured more.
After all, I became aware of Auschwitz thanks to you and through you - Survivors.

Every generation needs a lens to evaluate its time.
Today, we all stand together, looking at the world through the lens of adulthood.
We must look within ourselves and ask: What have we done with memory?

Memory is polyphonic; it both divides and unites generations.
It has divided and united me in my own experience.
For eighteen years, I have stood here, experiencing both division and unity.

We teach history, but this is not the same as teaching memory.
History is the knowledge of facts,
Memory is the awareness of those facts, which is precisely what we so desperately need today.
History does not create trauma. Memory can.
Memory is the key to understanding today's world and designing tomorrow's.
Yet, we continue to focus solely on teaching history, not memory.
Our educational programs must be changed. They must.

Because memory is not just a matter of culture;
it is a matter of identity.

We are standing here with the people who bear responsibility for the world we live in today.

Like you, I was born after the war...
Like you, I do not remember those times....
Like you, I listened to the stories of the Survivors
.... but what am I doing today?
And what am I neglecting?

What decisions do I make today?
And are they guided by memory?

Memory hurts.
Memory helps.
Memory guides.
Memory warns.
Memory raises awareness
Memory obliges.

Who are you without memory?

Without memory, you have no history.
You have no experience, and no point of reference.
If you have no memory, you may not know which path to choose.
And if you truly lack memory, be sure: your enemies will design one for you.

And you, our dear Survivors.
Beloved ones. You have come here.
Our memory is primarily shaped by your experiences,
The fruit of your lives.
There are no words, dearest ones, to express the depth of our gratitude.

But what are we to do with this memory today?

If today, my friend, you feel uncertain about what to do,
if you feel powerless,
if you feel you cannot go on,
then perhaps you have reached your limit.
If so, know that limits are only imaginary.
You can always do more.
Do something good – whatever you can, in the best way you can.
Do it for others, and you will find that you have done it for yourself as well.
Do it within the scope of your abilities.

But do something.
Act
You will recover from feelings of helplessness and apathy.
Take action. Begin.
But always: remember.

Let your memory finally come alive.
Today.

Because your memory is your pillar, your aid,
Your instinct.

Source: [Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau](#).