“HouSe of Memory”

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An independent public organization, the Study Centre for the Holocaust and Jewish Culture in Lithuania, was officially registered at the end of February. We, the hundreds of this Centre, have created the “House of Memory”. True, we do not yet have a house in the real sense of the word, but we have decided to take the initiative in order to create one.

It is probably not entirely correct to think that the catastrophe which has hit us was erased from public consciousness during the decades of the Soviet occupation. Otherwise, it was hidden, generalized, and labeled as the mass killing of Soviet Jews. But the Holocaust did happen, and we are aware of its consequences, especially in the small towns. We also know that in many places it has been repressed, denied, and even partly erased from the fundamental memory. Yet that knowledge was somehow sharpened and improved. In this part is probably the result of ideological training, for Soviet ideology always opened its doors to the anonymous mass.

But at the same time, it was the expression of a traditional attitude towards the Jews as being different and foreign. Of course, the brutality of the events of 1941 shocked the Lithuanian people and left an indelible impression, but this was neither your, nor your family’s, nor your friend’s tragedy. You were just a bystander looking on. Perhaps this psychological environ- ment partly explains why the percentage of those killed was so high, why the Jews could hardly expect any help or shelter, and why the ground was so favorable for the Holocaust in Lithuania. The Jewish tragedy was not just the murder of those who were Jewish, but the extermination of the intelligentsia and the national leaders; the extermination of the nation - all the more so when spoken of in terms of the historical and intellectual experience of the Jews. You intellectuals, we can understand the feelings of those who were involved in these events; at the same time, it seems foreign, distant, and somehow remote to us from our everyday life.

To a normal way of thinking, the Holocaust is basically in the past, a historical event. It is not an event that we will experience in the future, but an event that we have experienced in the past; an event that we have experienced in the past, and we have experienced it in a way that is not our own, in a way that is not our experience.

The turning point came when I visited the Yad Vashem International Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem. I stood in front of a huge photograph of the “Lithuania’s Mace”, and suddenly felt that I, personally, am also very much connected to this photo. The photo with the flourishing white horse man in yellow dress now, it illustrates the Latva- nian theme in school history book. And that is a good thing. Only, I don’t know whether it has any effort on the students, for after all, everything depends on the pre- sentation, on the emotional environment in which it is communicated.

But what affected the most people was a relatively small room in the museum, called the “Memory Archive”. There is nothing in it except a great many shelves containing thousands of paper files - the personal files of those who were killed. Each file contains a list of all the dead and their description turned into a page. And the files are kept growing. When you come to the “Memory Archive” you can, for example, find out when the Vilna Ghetto was liquidated, or when the last Lithuanian Jew was buried in the Vilna Jewish cemetery.

You can understand that it all should not be forgot- ten. The核定 should be so that you cannot disregard from it - not only in the name of the memory of the victims, but also in the name of your own country. Perhaps the matter is that you simply do not know what is happening in your own country. I think that similar interintermediate motivations call all to forget the past, and it is a pity to refer to them, to remind one could refer to our colleagues as like-minded people who went a similar route - who at some moment discovered that this is really very important.

I am convinced that a great many of the myths, ste-