



January 25, 2017

Auschwitz, the factory of death established by the Germans in south east Poland, was liberated by the Soviet Military on January 27, 1945. Before its fires were extinguished Auschwitz consumed over 1.2 million people, some of the victims were political prisoners, some of them were P.O.W.s the vast majority were simply guilty of being Jewish. The size, scope and depth of the tragedy that we call the Holocaust, which Auschwitz represents, is awesome and terrifying.

It took the world sixty years to create a global day of commemoration, and not without reason. What relevance should an offense, no matter how horrendous, committed against another group or groups of people hold for the rest of us who are neither victims nor perpetrators? What should we fortunate enough to live in the United States of America learn from a crime that was committed in another continent, by a different nation and in a time before most of our parent were born? Finally how should it affect the mission of you who have been chosen to lead the U.S. Armed Forces, the defenders of American liberty?

The Holocaust did not merely happen, it is a crime that evil men and historical circumstances gave birth to. By coming to understand both of these factors we seek to halt their progress as similar situations arise throughout the world. We need to liberate ourselves from the illusion that democratic institutions and personal freedom will safeguard our country against such excesses. Weimar Germany was one of the freest societies in the modern era and the Nazi conquered Germany through the ballot box. Institutions are not enough to protect a country from the hands of tyranny. We need citizens who are engaged in civil society and who respect the rights of all other people as stated in the Constitution.

Finally to you the future leaders of the Armed forces, I charge study the history of the Nazis. Their rise to power and their ability to commit the most atrocious of crimes against man and God was only thanks to their military backing. You defend not only the borders of our county but its liberty and virtue as well. Make sure that each of you understand the sacrifices made so that we might be the land of the free, inspire your troops to fight for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The forces of hate and intolerance will raise their heads again, it is inevitable. I bless you and the great nation you defend with the strength, courage and wisdom to defend our nation and the values that enliven it.

Michael Schudrich
Chief Rabbi
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