

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

As your beautiful saying has it, he who saves the life of one man, saves the world. It is not at all difficult for me to fully enter into the spirit of this thought, for I myself could not be here with you, I could not have looked up at the trees planted in honor of the rescuers and I would not have been able to experience that vivid pain in the Children's Memorial, had my father not been saved in those days.

From November 1944 till the liberation of Budapest in February 1945, my aunt sheltered my father who was a fugitive because he refused to join the regular army. That is how he was able to escape. My father's best friend was called up for forced labor service – nobody has ever seen him since; it has not been possible to discover his whereabouts, or the circumstances of his death. Both paths of life can be said to be typical Central-European histories – with the sad addendum that the story and the tragic fate of my father's friend was more typical.

We know – and it is remembered in many places of reverence here at Yad Vashem – that every tenth victim of the Holocaust was of Hungarian extraction. We know that the largest Hungarian graveyard is in Auschwitz. We know that the effects of the Shoah span generations: we feel it in our bones, in our nerves, in our dreams. It was given to us to live in an age, of which our Nobel Prize winner Imre Kertész wrote: "This century, the twentieth, was like an execution squad on unceasing duty".

It is our responsibility – the responsibility of those present here – to reinvigorate national remembrance everywhere; the disciplining and attentive national remembrance. That which, through personal histories, presents patterns of lives that warn and are worthy of following. With our national cultures and specific national message, we all have to render the past experienceable, for the sake of a future worth living.

Yad Vashem, unifying the technical achievements of our age with the universal of aesthetics, is an example of this. We also drew inspiration from it when last year as a result of the efforts of our government, the Museum of the Hungarian Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection Public Foundation was opened in Budapest.

It was here in Yad Vashem, in the Children's Memorial that I recalled the lines of your great poet, Mordechai Avigdor Shaul (who also stemmed from Hungary): "... They cannot ask: why/ they no longer see the tiny wooden horse, / the chatting doll, the chattering bird / that is capering about in the book. // Of this generation, merely a photo remains..."

It is our common responsibility that the children of the new Millennium be conscious of the lessons of the horrors of the Shoah. Israel's history includes that of Central Europe; while I wish us all strength, imagination and will for this shared work, allow me to greet you with the words of the Talmud: "Hai to you, People of Israel! You are all truly wise, from the great to the tiny".