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THE MIRROR

CAN WE TRULY CONFRONT OURSELF

My conversations with Jezya, ambassador of an alien culture that perpetrated horrors upon the population of Earth, stirred quite a lot.

...A lot.

I knew they would. There are subjects one can approach intellectually, from a comfortable distance, and there are others that touch wounds so deep that the mere suggestion of dialogue feels like a provocation. For many people, the Kiily-Tokurt belong firmly to the second category. Set aside, for a moment, the crude historical facts as she has reported them: millions of human abductees, the trafficking of human beings as a workforce, the trade in live human flesh, and commercial agreements with some of the darkest organizations operating on and around our planet. Set aside the cold machinery of exploitation, the agreements, the transactions, the facilities, the suffering. Set all of that aside, not to forget it, not to diminish it, and certainly not to forgive it blindly, but because something else emerged from these conversations that deserves examination. Something I had not entirely anticipated.

Some people wondered why I would sit down with Jezya at all. Why give a voice to someone representing a civilization that had participated in such things? Why listen? Why exchange ideas? Why laugh, even, at certain moments? Why allow curiosity to enter a space where anger might seem more appropriate? Because listening is not absolution.

Understanding is not forgiveness. And dialogue does not erase accountability. In fact, I came away from these encounters believing precisely the opposite: that genuine accountability may be impossible until we are willing to look directly at the consciousness that produced the actions we condemn. It is easy to call something evil and turn away. Sometimes that judgment is entirely justified. But once we turn away, our understanding stops at the label. We know what happened, perhaps. We know who suffered. We know whom to blame. But we still do not necessarily understand how it became possible. That question matters.

Because atrocities are rarely born in the minds of people who wake up one morning deciding that they are monsters. They emerge from systems of thought. From values. From hierarchies. From definitions of superiority and inferiority. From the gradual normalization of what should never have been normalized. And that was what fascinated me about Jezya. She did not arrive carrying the moral vocabulary of humanity. She carried her own.

Throughout our conversations, Jezya forced me to confront something uncomfortable: morality can look extraordinarily different when seen through the architecture of another culture. This does not mean that every morality is equally acceptable. It means that if we wish to understand another civilization, we must first understand the internal logic by which it judges itself.

The Kiily-Tokurt did not necessarily perceive their historical dealings with humans through the emotional and ethical framework through which we perceive them. Commerce, collective advancement, biological hierarchy, strategic advantage and the expansion of their civilization occupied places in their worldview that were profoundly different from ours. And yet, beneath those

differences, I discovered points of contact. Children were one of them. This was perhaps the contradiction that had fascinated me most from the beginning. How could a civilization fiercely protect its own young while participating in the trafficking of the young of another species? How could tenderness exist on one side of that equation and complete objectification on the other? That contradiction became a doorway. Because once you recognize something precious in yourself, sooner or later someone may ask whether the same thing is precious in another.

And then the mirror appears....

This is where my conversations with Jezya changed something in me. They made me realize that, no matter how determined we are to move forward, moving forward cannot simply mean leaving everything behind. We often speak about a new era, a liberated Earth, disclosure, contact, sovereignty and humanity finally taking its place among other civilizations. But what do we carry with us into that future? Unexamined wounds do not disappear because the calendar changes. Neither does guilt. Neither does inherited hatred. Neither does collective trauma. If we bury the past in the name of progress, we do not transcend it. We merely build the future on top of it. Eventually, the foundations crack.

Healing therefore requires something far more difficult than forgetting. It requires us to revisit the past without becoming imprisoned by it. It requires accountability without vengeance. Memory without obsession. Discernment without hatred. And, perhaps most difficult of all, the willingness to hear the other side without surrendering our own.

Jezya made me realize that the only way to heal every fractal of the past is to place a mirror before it. But that particular mirror I am speaking about is a strange one. When we look into it, we do not initially see ourselves. We see the other side. We see the enemy. We see their reasoning, their history, their justifications, their blind spots and contradictions. We see the mechanisms by which they managed to consider acceptable what we consider horrifying. And if we remain before that mirror long enough, something unexpected happens. Our own reflection begins to appear behind theirs. Human history is hardly innocent.

We too have enslaved.

We too have conquered.

We too have classified other human beings as inferior.

We too have separated children from their families, exploited populations for labor, transformed living beings into commodities and constructed sophisticated moral arguments to justify actions that later generations would regard with horror.

Behold. This does not diminish what was done to us. It makes the lesson larger. The mirror is not

there to tell the victim and the perpetrator that they are the same. They are not. It is there to reveal the mechanisms by which consciousness loses sight of the sacredness of another being. And those mechanisms are worth understanding wherever they appear.

Something changed over the course of my conversations with Jezya. Not suddenly. Not dramatically. There was no theatrical moment of repentance, nor did I expect one. Instead, there were small shifts. Questions. Pauses. Moments when certainty encountered something it had not previously needed to consider. And perhaps that is how real change often begins: not with a declaration, but with a disturbance in an old certainty. I was studying her culture. However, gradually, I realized that she was studying mine. What began as an encounter between representatives of two very different histories became something more intimate: two beings attempting, however imperfectly, to understand how the other saw existence.

We did not erase the past.

We placed it between us.

We looked at it.

And we spoke.

That distinction is important. Because reconciliation without truth is merely avoidance dressed in beautiful language. Forgiveness demanded before accountability is another form of violence. Peace constructed upon silence remains fragile. But when two sides can look at what happened without turning away, when the harmed can speak and the other can remain present to hear it, something genuinely new becomes possible.

Not the erasure of history. The transformation of our relationship to it. Perhaps this is ultimately why these conversations stirred so much. They challenged a comfortable boundary.

Enemy.

Friend.

Victim.

Perpetrator.

Good.

Evil.

These distinctions can be necessary. Sometimes they are essential. But they are not always the end of the story. What happens after the war? What happens when the weapons are lowered and civilizations that once exploited one another must exist in the same greater community? What

happens when yesterday's enemy sits across a table from you and speaks? Someone has to ask the first question. Someone has to listen to the answer. And someone has to be courageous enough to say:

What you did was wrong. Now tell me why you believed it wasn't.

That question does not weaken accountability. It completes it. Perhaps the greatest victory over an enemy is not destroying them. Perhaps it is reaching the point where the consciousness that created the conflict can no longer reproduce it. That requires truth. It requires memory. It requires boundaries. And sometimes, it requires a conversation we would rather not have.

Jezya became, for me, that mirror. And when I looked into it, I discovered that understanding the other side was not a betrayal of those who suffered. It was another way of making sure the past would not become the future.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB50wEtXFNs>

With Love, always

Sumaa

