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The brutal systematic torture and murder of millions of innocent Jews and other minorities of Nazi Germany that came to be known as the Holocaust is one of the most emotionally and intellectually provocative social occurrences in the history of the modern world. The Holocaust made the entire world aware of how prejudice can lead to brutal persecution and mass genocide. However, in studying the Holocaust, we are able to derive important information about the nature of human beings. The remembrance and analysis of the Holocaust is extremely imperative, not only as an event in human history, but as an example of what should never happen again. Through understanding the psychological and emotional effects of the Holocaust, both among the oppressors and the oppressed, it is possible to create preventative measures to ensure that such persecution and suffering shall not again be endured.

The lessons of the Holocaust taught the world about the possible dangers of both mindless obedience and conformity. The question is asked many times, within thousands of different settings: how could the SS soldiers have put aside their morality and carried out the atrocious murders of millions of innocent people? The question is seemingly unanswerable - is it possible that this particular group of people was more inherently violent than the rest of the world? Psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a set of experiments in 1961 that set out to answer this question. He pulled together a group of average Americans and told them that they were part of an memory experiment, in which they were "teachers" who would administer an electric shock to their "subject" (who was actually an actor) each time the "subject" could not correctly state the answer. The "teachers" believed that the maximum electric shock was 450 volts, which was labeled on the fake machine as being past the "Danger: Severe Shock" and into the ominous zone labeled "XXX." The "teachers" were supervised by a man in a gray lab coat who, though he encouraged them verbally to continue administering shocks, did not threaten or

harm them in any way if the "teachers" chose to discontinue the experiment. However, despite the pleas of the "subject" on the other side of the wall of a defective heart, and despite the painful screams that could be heard, 65% of the "teachers" continued the experiment to the maximum shock. This experiment showed that ordinary Americans could obey unethical orders, just as the Nazis had done during the Holocaust.

The psychological experiments performed by Milgram as a result of the Holocaust provided important information about the role of obedience within the terms of immoral actions. The presence of an authority figure, whether a commanding officer or simply a man in a lab coat, compelled people to perform actions they wouldn't normally commit. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote, in one of his Rosh Hashanah sermons, how the mentality of such obedience is that, "Nothing you do wrong is your fault. You were only following orders. [...] That reduces us to the moral level of children and pets, for whom 'being good' means being obedient, doing what you are told" (Kushner). Yet, with the knowledge that such obedience can lead to unthinkable disaster, how can anticipatory action be taken? Though communication has advanced tremendously since World War II, there have been genocides that have occurred after the Holocaust. There are two measures which can and should be taken to ensure that such genocides do not occur again. Firstly, measures must be taken within political systems to ensure that power is balanced evenly enough so that there is not one sole person who is obeyed. There must be a spectrum of people guiding the country, allowing checks and balances of authority so that many different opinions and viewpoints are heard and represented.

Secondly, individuals must take responsibility for themselves and allow themselves to view others as individuals as well, rather than as groups. When sorting people into distinctive groups rather than realizing them as individual people, unfair stereotypes and biases are created

which ultimately harm the discriminator, the discriminated against, and society at large. The attempt to overcome prejudice and discrimination is a historically present battle with which society has always struggled. Some feel the need to harness their fear and hatred towards other groups of people into forms of oppression, in an attempt to feel superior, stronger, or more powerful; whether by inflicting or attempting to inflict physical or emotional harm upon people whom they fear or hate. These prejudices that exist towards specific groups of people are harmful to all parties involved, as prejudice and discrimination divides our world into groups based on differences rather than finding commonalities amongst all people. Stereotypes that exist about specific groups of people, whether based in fact or fiction, serve as barriers between that group and the rest of the world. Stereotypes create an excuse to focus on perceived differences and form biased opinions without justification.

Yet, although prejudice and discrimination still exist within the modern world, the number of people who are openly prejudiced is decreasing with each new generation. However, it is no longer enough to simply not be prejudiced - as human beings and citizens of the world, it is the responsibility of each individual to not only have tolerance for those who are different from us, but to be active allies. Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel explains this concept best in his 1986 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, when he says, "[...] if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices. [...]. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere" (Wiesel). The most important thing that people of all ages, both young and old, can do to combat prejudice and persecution is to speak for those who do not have a voice, regardless of whether or not they have any personal connection to these

people who are prejudiced against. As fellow humans, it is our responsibility to be the active opposition of discrimination, and to ensure that all human beings feel as though they can safely be themselves within society.

The lessons of the Holocaust live on within each person who fulfills their human duty to discourage discrimination and encourage compassion and understanding. The millions who died as a result of hateful prejudice in the Holocaust should not, and will not, be forgotten; as the remembrance of what they suffered is vital for the human species to move forward. However, the goal to abolish prejudice and bigotry cannot be achieved without the conscious attempt to do so; therefore each individual must recognize their own power to change and reduce discrimination within their smaller communities, and thus within society at large.

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