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First, let Marek Edelman speak:

“Basically, the most important thing is life. And when there is life, freedom is the most important thing. And then one sacrifices one’s life for freedom and we do not know anymore what the most important thing is.”

“Regardless of who is beaten – you should be with him. You should give a shelter to the beaten person, you should hide this person in the cellar. You should not be afraid of this and you should be against those, who beat.”

“A doctor has no choice; he is obliged to treat a patient, regardless of who this patient is.”

“Democracy and freedom are not given for ever; one should struggle for them every day.”

“Hate is easy. Love requires effort and sacrifice.”

“One must not be passive in face of evil. An indifferent witness, who turned his face away, is also responsible; till the end of his life he will remain tainted with the evil, which he tried not to see.”

“Courage? I do not know, what it means. There is no such thing. Your mentality is shaped in such a way that you do something you believe to be necessary to do. Not to block the manhole with your body, but because your friends are there and you have to help them – this is not the question of courage, this results from friendship, solidarity, trust, and love.

“There is a thin and delicate division line between patriotism and chauvinism.”

Marek Edelman is usually mentioned in the context of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This was, undoubtedly, an important period in the Marek’s life as a young man, which he once commented on, in one of the April “journalist seasons” for interviews with him, a bit jokingly and a bit bitterly: “So much noise about two weeks of jumping on the roofs...” In the life of Marek Edelman we can find the opposition activity, the introduction of revolutionary methods of surgical treatment of heart diseases, and social activity; his interest in politics and social interest but also in the lives and fates of individual persons.

Marek Edelman lived for ninety years and his achievements are so great that would suffice for several persons. But all his rich biography is characterized by coherence and consistency, as well as sticking to the values he believed in, which are, to a certain extent, expressed in the fragments of his statements quoted above.

From his childhood he was attached to Bund organization. Co-organizer of the resistance movement in the Warsaw ghetto and co-founder of the Jewish Fight Organization. Participant and one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising who

one year later fought in the Warsaw Uprising. After the war he consistently refused support to the new regime, which, in return, made his life difficult. He worked as a doctor and, at the same time, he was active in the opposition movement and was one of the founders of “Solidarity” movement – he was elected as a delegate for its congress. His internment at the time of the martial law gave rise to protests all over the world. Released from internment after a short time, he became one of the leaders of the underground Solidarity in Łódź. In 1988 he organized an independent ceremony of the 45th anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising, which was attended by thousands of people and which became a big anti-government demonstration. He was a member of the Civic Committee cooperating with Lech Wałęsa and a participant of the Round Table sessions. He was enthusiastic about changes and a new vision of Poland. In the nineties he spoke in defense of Sarajevo and Kosovo– he gave interviews, participated in the public debates (also on Italian TV), twice he participated in the humanitarian help convoys to Sarajevo, he wrote open letters to the rulers of the world. President Clinton referred to Marek Edelman’s letter when justifying the need of the military intervention in Kosovo. He also protested against murders and ethnic purges in Rwanda and Zair, against discrimination of any kind, persecutions, and cruelty in SAR and Israel, against acts of violence directed against Romani people in Poland and in the Czech Republic. He also intervened when an individual was harmed – he contributed to the release of the Albanian poetess and doctor Flora Brovina. Even though he demanded the military intervention in Kosovo because he was of the opinion that force was the only thing that dictators understood, he became a member of the Committee of Supporters RAW in WAR Anna Politkovskaja Award. Although he was a doctor, he condemned strikes of medical staff since he believed that the main purpose and sense of this profession is to save life.

His voice was heard not only in Poland.

When I met Marek Edelman thirty years ago, he already knew that the crimes of the Second World War were not a warning for societies, that freedom and democracy are not given forever and that one has to struggle for them every day. He would be glad to be in the company of the brave fighters, who struggled for the same cause: Giacomo Gorrini, who noticed homicide in Armenia, Wasilij Grossmann, who described the crimes of Hitler and Stalin, Guelfo Zambonini and Enrico Calami, who – first of them during the Nazi rule, and the second during the rule of Argentine junta – managed, like consul Chiune Sugihara and consul Jan Zwartendijk, to force bureaucracy machine to save human lives, and Neda Soltan, who, like his friends in the ghetto, sacrificed her young life protesting against terror and violence.

“We, who stayed alive, leave it to you to keep the memory of them alive.” These words end “The ghetto fights,” testimony of twenty six years old Marek Edelman. All his life he cherished the memory about people and values, for which they had given their lives. I was lucky enough to meet Marek Edelman and to deserve his friendship and trust; this friendship and trust make me responsible for causing the next generations to keep this memory and to believe in the same values.

I am honored to be invited to this ceremony. Thank you for inviting me and for the way in which GARIWO initiative serves the life work of Marek Edelman.

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