2015: WHERE HAVE WE COME? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Posted on March 30, 2015 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By **Lucine Kasbarian**, New Jersey, March 2015

> ***This article is an edited version of a presentation given by Kasbarian before New Jersey Armenian-Americans in March 2015.***

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Our parents and grandparents believed that through sincerity, truthfulness and activism, we could educate the world to achieve our dreams of a just resolution to the Armenian Cause. Our survivor elders were genuinely grateful to the First World and other nations who took them in – the United States perhaps being chief among them. But how much did our grandparents really know about America's and some other countries' complicity in abandoning the Armenians, even 100 years ago?

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What we have learned in this country, through observation and experience, is that, with noted exceptions, our government, mass media, universities and book/film industries often work at cross-purposes with *Hai Tahd,* seeking to sterilize our cause, keep us down, divide us, diminish us, and wear us down.

We must rely on ourselves and our own assets to retain what we have, and prepare our youth to lead us into the future without being influenced by forces working against us.

In 2015 and beyond, our children will not necessarily receive a better Armenian education from universities that have Armenian Studies programs. This is because we Armenians usually have little

control or influence over their faculty or curricula. Our children are not necessarily going to get to tell the Armenian story fully or truthfully by mainstream American newspapers or book publishers. They will be better off supporting and contributing to non-mainstream, alternative, and our own ethnic media and self-published books. The Armenian identity is going to be instilled at home and through our organizations. Both have been salvation for bringing our values to our children, and responsible for bringing the spirit of Armenia to many generations, especially when Armenia was physically inaccessible to our youth.

2015 is a waystation in our long road to liberation and restitution. Acknowledgment of the genocide is not the end. Are our exiled Diasporan communities equipped and prepared for the long haul?

Armenians in the Diaspora have historically looked to the home country to carry on the culture. From what we've seen, the situation in present-day Armenia may be even more perilous than in our Diaspora communities. Oligarchic corruption is strangling Armenia. And there is immense pressure by world powers to neutralize, co-opt or simply get rid of Armenia -- which is considered an impediment and even a nuisance to the Great Game they're playing in the Caucasus and Near East. As a result, the future of our homeland is in jeopardy – including by Pan-Turkism -- just as it was 100 years ago.

If something were to happen to Armenia or Artsakh, such catastrophes would put the burden on the Diaspora to perpetuate the culture. Not long ago, we had rooted Armenian communities of the Middle East where our time-worn traditions were preserved and practiced. These Armenian strong-holds have been weakened and in some cases, destroyed. We can't afford to assimilate any further. We must stop this erosion. Otherwise, we are committing national suicide.

We Armenians have a saying, *"Baikar minchev haghtanag."* It means "Struggle until victory." However, we are past the point where we could use such a term. We must live by the parallel saying, which is *"Baikar minchev verch,"* and which means "Struggle until the end."

This requires even more courage than the first slogan, because it takes a lot of strength to stay on the path in the face of looming defeat, destruction and extinction when you know the prognosis is not good for the survival of Armenia, Artsakh, the hidden or captive Armenians in W. Armenia, or the global Armenian Diaspora.

The above and other cartoons by Lucine Kasbarian are part of "The Armenian Genocide Centennial Exhibition," on display through May 2, 2015 at several venues in Providence, Rhode Island.

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Our obligation is to continue the struggle – and to go down fighting if we must – in this new battle of Sardarabad.

Today's battle is, once again, the battle for our existence. To shrink from this battle out of depression or discouragement is to let down our ancestors, our history, our culture, and our faith – all which we love so much.

We must bear the pain when we see the continuation of the Genocide through the deliberate destruction of Der Zor, Kessab, Haleb, Damascus and Mosul. It is not lost on us that after 100 years of genocide perpetrated on the indigenous Christian Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks, powerful forces behind ISIS – the US, Turkey and Israel among them – are today removing all traces of ancient Christianity in the Middle East.

To be an Armenian is a burden and a duty. But it is also a joy. We must accept all of these aspects with the knowledge that perhaps, as the first Christian nation of the world, we were destined to be the earthbound *madagh* (sacrifice). Perhaps it is our fate to be constantly tested for our faith and endurance precisely because we are a strong, capable and amazing people.

Soon, we will celebrate the resurrection of Christ. Let us remember that Armenia, too, was crucified and later resurrected. We have struggled for rebirth many times and succeeded. We may succeed still. But even if we don't, we must remain strong at a time when our adversaries would like to see us crumble.

Our adversaries have made a high art of finding Armenians who are seeking career advancement and fame at any cost and who are willing to work against or compromise our Cause, if necessary, to get it. Much of the "Western establishment" uses such people as conduits to deliver damning messages to us; to make us doubt ourselves and our own history; to tell us that our goals are unreasonable or impossible; to poison and further traumatize us; and to discourage us.

We must be cautious about who we invite into our circles to influence our children. To this end, I insist that you read books before you invite an author to speak to your community. Study the curriculum of an academician before you invite a scholar to speak to your community. Understand the intentions behind the so-called "reconciliation" movement and who benefits from it.

To quote from the book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, "Real courage is when you fight for what is right regardless of whether you win or lose."

So today, we must say – in the face of all that our people suffered and endured, and have yet to still suffer and endure – *Baikar, baikar minchev verch.*