

HOW TO SURMOUNT OUR PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

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Armenians entered the 21st century with the internationally-recognized state of the Republic of Armenia, the yet unrecognized Republic of Artsakh, and an Armenian Diaspora whose population is twice the size of the Armenian homeland's (RoA, Artsakh and Javakhk). While Armenia wrestles with its multiple internal and external challenges, the Diaspora has numerous problems of its own, starting with the absence of unity and the risk of assimilation at the top of the list.

In recent months there has been a surge in efforts to unify Diaspora Armenians at a global level or within a given country. Since the concerns regarding unity within a Diaspora Armenian community are global they can be resolved only if the whole Armenian Diaspora gets into action. For example, it would be naive to expect successful cooperation between two or three Armenian political entities in one country when they do not cooperate elsewhere. Our global efforts may succeed if we, as a nation, overcome a number of psychological barriers, some accumulated through the centuries while others materialized as a result of the horrific events our nation experienced in the early 20th century.

Specifically, what are these psychological barriers?

1. Armenian Identity

While we tend to divide ourselves into different geographic or religious sub-groups, it is often non-Armenians who unify us as a single group, calling us all Armenians. A few weeks ago a number of Diaspora Armenians felt victimized when they were identified as members of the same ethnic group as that of an allegedly major criminal organization whose members were apprehended in the United States. Because the arrested people were from RoA, many Armenians, who do not reside in RoA or were born in the Diaspora, wanted to distance themselves from Armenians originating in Armenia. So, is our Armenian identity defined by us or by odars (non-Armenians) who call all of us Armenian? Is our identity based on our past or it is willingly chosen by us as we peer into our future? Is it really possible to be an Armenian without having strong feelings towards contemporary Armenia? To what extent does our religion shape our Armenian identity? How long will Armenians in Diaspora be able to sustain their Armenian identity without strong ties to homeland Armenia? Is in this sense our national cause ("Azkayeen Tadd") a good substitute for our feelings towards Armenia?

2. Historical Armenia

A significant percentage of Diaspora Armenians do not have close ties to current Armenia; there are many who have not even visited Armenia, although they frequently vacation elsewhere around the globe. For many of us Armenia means historical Armenia, not to mention those who consider Cilician Armenia as their true homeland. Most of us don't even know the boundaries of historic Armenia or where Armenia Major ends and Armenia Minor begins. We live with dreams of a historical homeland and do not assume sufficient responsibility for contemporary Armenia--a state which faces many fundamental and crucial problems. For example, how many Diaspora Armenians have acquired Armenian citizenship?

Is the concept of "Historical Armenia" nourished as an excuse to stay away from current Armenia and its existential travails? Ironically, the idea of a "Historical Armenia"--if not combined with strong ties to the current republic--not only excludes helping Armenia but also may be a serious limiting factor for us, including decisions regarding the extent of territories which should be under Armenian control. After all, Tigran the Great did not have this burden of limitation and could march to Jerusalem. On the contrary, Serzh Sargsyan's "Is really Aghdam an Armenian land?" expression is the typical retort of the victim mentality and of the psychological limitation of "Historical Armenia" concept. So, perhaps the "Historical Armenia" dream is an excuse to be willfully blind to the problems Armenia faces almost twenty years after its establishment.

3. Independence

Can Armenians really claim to have an independent country called Republic of Armenia when, for over a decade, we have been unable to form a more or less legally-elected and democratic government? Is the Armenian ethnicity of the ruling kleptocracy credible reason to believe we have true national independence? Under these circumstances, and facing enemies east and west of our borders, how long can such an "independence" last if polls show that 40% of the population would leave the country if it had the chance? Does the Armenian Diaspora bear any responsibility for the state of affairs in Armenia? Is it not high time for all Armenians to set a clear goal of achieving real independence in our homeland? Why isn't Diaspora's stance towards the Armenian government not based on Yerevan's desire and ability to move the country forward but is rather based on RoA authorities' not necessarily sincere statements about the painful moments of our history? Is it not ironic that the Diaspora is continuously manipulated on the Armenian Genocide issue not only by foreign governments but also by our own government in Armenia? How real it is to expect our demands to be met by others when we fail to put our house in order?

The bottom line. We will only succeed in our sacred mission if we show that the homeland and the Diaspora are mutually responsible for each other, and act as a single entity. No matter how bright the history and cultural heritage of a nation, its lessons belong to all humanity. Yet pride in our rich history and cultural heritage belongs only to us, and we must demonstrate rightful ownership of that accomplishment by building a strong state in our precious homeland. That state belongs to all Armenians--whether in Armenia or in Diaspora. Our Armenian identity can not be real and convincing when it does not reflect responsibility for current Armenia. Without such an avowed responsibility our ethnic identity in the Diaspora becomes, at best, a religion but more often a lifestyle barely transferable to future generations living away from Ararat.

