

NOT COMMEMORATING, BUT ALSO UNDERSTANDING

Everyone has a father figure in life. For a child, father is someone who both loves and protects unconditionally.

Sometimes “father” gets associated with fear. No one dares to speak in front of him or question his authority thus everything he says are only said once and needs to be done at that instant.

Sometimes “father” is the ideal human being. Every word coming out of his mouth sounds enchanting, every act of him is expected to set an example.

The bigger the child gets, the bigger his world becomes. The father who seems so mighty and unreachable until this day suddenly obtains a more humane image in his eyes. This leads to collision and questioning for the first time.

In time the child grows a little more and gets more mature. He knows that his father is not a supernatural being. He understands him with his flaws and frailties. He observes and learns these through living. This becomes much more valuable and permanent than memorized preaching because a human exists through thinking not memorizing.

Then one day, the time comes and the father leaves the child’s life. No matter how old he is, it comes as a shock to the child. It feels strange to say goodbye to someone who had always been in his life. From now on, it’s his responsibility to stand on his feet and use initiative. That’s why I think when we are asked when a child truly grows up, the answer should not be searched specifically at any age. A child truly grows up when he’s left without a guide.

When I look at our nation and Atatürk, I see this father-child relationship. Out of a collapsed society, he ensured the birth of a nation, a family that has goals, fights for its own rights and a family that is bonded like siblings despite religious and ethnical differences. While he was teaching terms like nationalism, revolutionism, statism, populism, republicanism, secularism, while he was advising us to give importance to being a modern civilization and to find the power we need in ourselves, he was like a father who wanted to prepare his child for the future. His death was early like every death, his departure was poignant like every departure.

Death is not something that people can accept easily. The beautiful graves we build after deceased ones, the colorful flowers we put on cold marble on special days are something of an expression of this denial. The photographs we hang on our walls, the stuff we keep as memory are nothing but a desire to make those deceased ones continue being alive.

We are a young republic. Loaded upon us, we have the immaturity as we try to adapt to changing conditions and on our shoulders, we carry the responsibility of being worthy to the legacy that is given to us. What did we do? We built an enormous mausoleum for Atatürk. We sculptured his statues all around the country and hanged his pictures on every classroom wall. We displayed his belongings and wrote songs after him. We engraved his signature to everywhere from our cars to our bodies. We visited his grave on every October 29th and November 10th.

But now, it's time to face ourselves and question our deeds because besides doing all those things, we got cross with each other like siblings who got in an inheritance fight, we became strangers living in the same country. Instead of reading and searching we were tricked with candy and we became slaves of the values that are imposed to us. Instead of getting ahead in science and arts, we played hopscotch in the backyard and whenever we fell down during hard times, we called out his name. We wanted him to get out of his grave and show us the way. Do you think that we really, truly understand his principles? No. After forgetting everything he tried to tell us, would not forgetting him make any difference?

Nations also have memories just like humans and they also exist through thinking, not memorising. Today I stand against the misconception between understanding Atatürk and memorising Atatürk. Creating solutions are possible with our faith, determination and hardwork. Being desperate and giving up can not be considered as the outcomes of the Atatürk' teachings.

“Oh new rising generation! The future is yours. We established the Republic, it is you who will elevate and sustain it!”

Atatürk didn't affect a single child's life, he affected the lives of millions of children who were born in this country and he still continues to do so. However, he was a human being and like himself once said, his humble body became soil. Atatürk knew that only humans are destined to be mortal, not their ideas. That's why in his every word, instead of himself, he emphasized the need to maintain and cherish the Republic and its values. This is the most meaningful immortality.

Today, if nationalism and racism, being modern and trying to emulate, loving your country and showing off are the concepts that are mostly misinterpreted, it's not Atatürk's fault. It's the inevitable outcome of memorising instead of thinking.

Of course we will hang his pictures, of course we will visit his grave. We won't let him to get cleaned from our national identity. Along with it, what we must do is to stop looking for his duplications in visible places and start nourishing, elevating his thoughts in our minds and in our hearts.

This November 10th, instead of only commemorating him, let's make an effort to understand him.

Our founding father Ataturk, for the liberty and citizenship awareness that you gave us but mosly for the trust that you put in us, the youth, thank you! We promise to protect the Republic and its values under all circumstances, and we bend in front of your precious memory with everlasting love and respect.

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