

Vaclav Havel was an inspiring czech political leader whom every european country would have been proud to have as its own...

But he was much more than that. Vaclav Havel was a complete human being, in all the best but elusive dimensions of human uniqueness. He opposed evil but did not vengefully hate evil-doers. He fought for righteousness but was not self-righteous. He loved and was sustained by love in his darkest moments. A man for whom power as well as poetry were symbiotic. A statesman with an enchanting personal appeal. A thinker of great depth, yet a man of action. A romantic with an iron will. A humanist but not a pacifist when the defense of national freedom was at stake.

At one critical moment in his life, when incarcerated alone in his prison cell by a seemingly all powerful and enduring regime, he was offered freedom – yes, freedom but in exile in America. He proudly refused, in the conviction that by remaining a prisoner he was gaining freedom for his compatriots.

At one of my encounters with him as President in the Hradcany Palace, he suddenly asked me: „Will America come to our defense if Russia tries to occupy us again?“ Surprised, I answered instinctively with a counter-question: „If the Czechs and Slovaks do not resist, why should Americans fight for them?“

I sensed that Havel was taken aback... and I felt uneasy... but he promptly responded: „As soon as we finish our lunch, I am recording a regular radio talk to the Czechoslovak people. Please, join me, and I will ask you on the air the same question... be sure to answer me exactly the way you did a few seconds ago“.

In the recorded exchange, he repeated the question, I answered as before, and he went on to state that the lasting lesson of 1938-9 was that a nation to be free must be willing even to die in order to be free.

Havel was a man who knew who he was, what both his destiny and his duty were, and his life contains an enduring lesson for us all:

That to defeat evil you must love passionately what you seek to defend, inspired not by hatred but by love, conviction, and compassion.

Zbigniew Brzezinski  
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