

extracts from an upcoming publication by
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Joyful Tragedy



Today, Georgia is still standing at the crossroads: it will either take its place in the civilized world, or remain on its brink as a post-Soviet state that missed its historical chance.

According to recent social surveys, 90% of Georgian citizens want to join the European Union. This number is an indicator of the fact that integration into Europe is the will of the entire nation. This is the only issue around which there is a general consensus in the country.

In this sense, Europeanism is determined not by the geographical location of the country, but by the mentality of its citizens. Mentality or culture.

A Georgian feels European because, with its values, content and intonation, Georgian culture itself is European.

European, and at the same time, peculiar, independent and different. This is our niche within the Western civilization.

Culture - in the broadest sense and in all its aspects: wine-growing, diverse cuisine, ancient centers of education in Ikalto and Gelati, fields of art, with its strong humanistic flow: architecture - so naturally combined with nature, literature, music - polyphony, painting, theater, cinema...

This is what makes us interesting and attractive to the West.

And one more, in my opinion a very important, characteristic feature of Georgian culture, which Merab Mamardashvili made clear for me with his most interesting and witty discussion:

"There is one coded element in Georgian culture - I would call it joyful tragedy. A nation that has barely survived for centuries is tragic, and so is its culture. But at the same time, this nation has the talent of joy, that is, the talent of life - one of the greatest achievements of culture. A cry of joy runs through our blood, and this is our challenge to fate." I am fascinated by this interpretation of Georgian culture!

The talent of joy, equated with the talent of life! The cry of joy, or life, which pulses in our blood and defines the character of our culture!

For me, there lies the answer to the eternal question: How did we get to where we are today?

The pursuit of joy, perhaps, is the quality by which we overcame all the trials and tribulations that inspired us to create "The Knight in the Tiger's Skin", the Kintsvisi Archangel, and the Polyphonic Hymns, which saved us as a nation.

The talent of joy and life has defeated the ever-present tragedy of our history...

More precisely, it did not defeat it, but absorbed it, grasped it. And from this arose such an ambivalent and attractive concept - Joyful tragedy...

Later, while reading "The Life of Kartli", I found out that by the 12th century, they already knew that cheerfulness was a national characteristic of Georgians. This is what the chronicle of the time of King Tamar writes about Tamar's death: "Georgian joy has changed its color".

Such eloquent words: the time of mourning has come and the color of Georgian joy has changed...

It is no coincidence that Georgia is recognized as the cradle of wine in the world.

Wine is so directly and closely related to joy! Table, feast, toasts - this is the area where a Georgian feels so good and natural!

Because Supra (gathering around the table) in its essence is being together, the happiness of being together, where each person is open to the other, and where everyone enjoys saying good things about others and hearing good things from them.

At the same time, this is the feature that brings us closer to the Mediterranean culture, and in particular French culture, where there is such a concept - bonvivant. Literally - those who live well, that is, enjoy life. In the Georgian language, the word "laghi" [delightful] is equivalent to this concept.

Delightful is a very rich concept. It is much more than just joyful, it refers to a person who is open to others, to the world, who has the ability to face ups and downs of life calmly and firmly.

Bonvivant, that is, pleasant. I have said it many times and I will repeat it again: Vazha Pshavela has expressed this attitude towards the world with the elegance and strength of a great poet:

The life offered me a poison and I received it as Kakhetian wine.

Poison turned into Kakhetian wine in the hands of a Georgian! Life offers us a poison and we drink it like a fine wine...

And while thinking about this, a 2800-year-old small statue found in the excavations in Vani comes before my eyes: a man holds a wine horn and enthusiastically drinks from it... This amazing artifact, called "the first tamada" man with a wine horn!

You might think that Vazha was writing about this person!

I have personally experienced the power of this innate quality.

I am talking about the period when a person is formed - the transition period from childhood to youth. It so happened that we - a few boys and I - went through this most important stage of life together as a group. From today's perspective, I know that I could not have found spiritual strength alone, I could not have coped with that dark, hopeless environment: it was the fury of a dictatorship, to which the world war was added.

As a result, objectively, the existence of the Soviet man was determined by two things - constant fear and also constant hunger. But we survived! And we not only endured it, but managed to live with all the fullness of feelings, because, as it turned out, it sounded in us - the cry of joy, that is, the talent of life, as a national characteristic and a challenge to fate or misfortune!

And we, little Georgian bonvivants equipped with this inherent genetic quality, enthusiastically skipped school and spent whole days together - in the office of the literary circle of the Youth Palace, we all wrote poems, regardless of the fact that some were poets by vocation, others - just amateurs. We organized very popular evenings of poetry attended by huge audiences and most importantly, we loved poetry and each other deeply, and we also enjoyed our life thoroughly!

And today it is clear to me: in the most difficult years of the Soviet reality, we, Soviet children, accepted the poison offered by life, like a fine Kakhetian wine...

The only conclusion I can make from all this discussion is:

We must take care of our greatest treasure - Georgian culture permeated with joyful tragedy. And we must not forget that it needs a democratic environment like air for its development.

That is why it is necessary to understand this culture and modern democracy as the most important values intertwined with each other and to recognize their development as a strategic priority for the construction of Georgian statehood.

Yes, our centuries-old culture is our niche and an entrance pass into the Western civilization.

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