

THE PEOPLE WHO LOOK THE OTHER WAY

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[Alexei Navalny gave this speech in a courtroom

in 2014. Kisin translated it into English because it is so powerful and important for us all, not only the Russians.]

How many times can a man who isn't breaking the law give his last words? Zero. If he's really unlucky, once. But over the last two years, I've been asked if I have any last words six, seven, maybe ten times.

I've heard this phrase many times now: "Mr. Navalny, do you have any last words?" I get the sense that my last words mark the last days for me, for someone, for everyone. I keep being asked for my last words and when I give them, I notice that these last days don't seem to come.

[Speaking to the judges] If I took a photo of the three of you, or better still, a photo of you together with the counsel for the so-called victims in this case, you are the people with whom I have spent my recent days. I call you "people who look the other way."¹

Do you even notice that you are constantly looking down? You're looking the other way. I am talking to you but you're looking down all the time. None of you have anything to say.

[Speaking to the presiding judge] Elena Sergeevna, what is the phrase you keep repeating to me? All of the people I deal with—investigators, prosecutors, prison wardens, civil and criminal judges—you all keep saying the same thing to me: "Alexei, you understand the situation." It's true: I understand the situation, but what I don't understand is why do you keep looking the other way?

I have no illusions. I know that none of you are going to jump up, flip the desk over, and say, "I've had enough." I know that the counsel for my accusers will not stand up and say, "You know what? Navalny has changed my mind with his brilliant speech." Human beings don't work like this.

The human psyche finds a way to avoid the feeling of guilt. If it didn't, we would throw ourselves onto the shore like dolphins. You can't just go home tonight and say to your family, "What did I do at work today? I put an innocent man in prison. I am suffering for it and will continue to suffer."

People don't work like this. That's why you say, "Alexei, you understand the situation," or "There's no smoke

without fire.” Or they’ll say, “He knew what he was doing when he came after Putin,” as someone from the Investigative Committee was quoted as saying recently.

“Why did Navalny have to draw attention to himself? Why did he get in the way? If he had kept his head down, he’d be fine.”

But, in spite of all of this, it’s important to me to address you, the people who will watch or read my last words. It’s more or less pointless, but the people who look the other way are also a battlefield.

On one side of it are the crooks who have seized power in our country, and on the other are people who want to change this. We are fighting over the people who look the other way, the people who shrug their shoulders, the people who are in a situation where all they have to do is not do something cowardly, who do it anyway.

There’s the famous quote from Dragon²: “Yes, everyone was taught to be evil, but why did you have to be top of the class?” I’m not just talking about this court. A huge number of people are either forced to act like cowards or act like cowards without being forced or even asked to.

They just look the other way and try to ignore what is happening. We are fighting for these people. We are trying to get them, you, to admit that everything that is happening in our society is based on endless lies.

I am standing here and am prepared to stand here as many times as I have to prove to all of you that I don’t want to tolerate these lies. I refuse. Do you understand that everything we are being told is a lie?

I keep being told that Russians have no interest in Turkmenistan, but Russians do have an interest in Ukraine and that is why we need to start a war.

I am told that nobody is mistreating Russians in Chechnya. I am told that nobody at Gazprom is stealing.

When I obtain documents which show that these officials have unregistered property and companies I am told, “You are mistaken.”

I say, “Let’s have an election—we’ll hold elections and win. We’ve registered a party and [are] working on lots of things.” I am told, “This is rubbish. We are going to win the elections, and the reason you aren’t allowed to take part is because you didn’t fill in the documents correctly.”

Everything is built on lies. Do you understand? And the more convincing the evidence any of us produces, the bigger the lies that are thrown back at us. These lies are the tool the state uses. They have become the very essence of our society.

Our leaders lie about everything, big and small. Putin gave a speech yesterday in which he said “We don’t have palaces.” We’ve been taking photos of his palaces for ages—three a month! We publish them and we’re told, “We don’t have palaces”!

Why do you tolerate these lies? Why do you look the other way? I’m sorry if I’m dragging you into a philosophical discussion but life is too short to look the other way.

A blink of an eye and I'm almost 40. Another blink and I'll be looking after my grandchildren. Another blink and I'll be on my deathbed, surrounded by relatives who'll be thinking "Get on with it—we need the inheritance."

For all of us, the moment will come when we will realize that none of the things we achieved by looking the other way and keeping quiet mattered. The only moments that matter in life are the moments when we're doing the right thing.

When we don't have to look the other way, when we can raise our eyes from the floor and look each other in the eye. Nothing else matters.

I will never accept the current system because it [is] a system designed to rob all of us. Let's be honest—we are ruled by a junta. Twenty people who became billionaires by taking over everything from state procurement contracts to oil sales. Plus a thousand people feeding off them. Members of Parliament, crooks.

There are a few percent of the population who don't like it. And then there are millions of people who look the other way.

I am not going to stop fighting this junta. I will keep fighting them, starting trouble, and trying to rile up the people who are looking the other way. You included. I will never stop.

Many years ago, my lawyer said something to me: "Alexei, they will definitely throw you in prison. The way you're going about it, they won't tolerate it. They'll lock you up sooner or later."

And again, our psyche finds a way to ignore this. A man cannot live with the constant expectation of being imprisoned. You find a way to force it out of your mind but nonetheless, I understand everything.

I don't regret anything I did. I will continue to encourage people to take action, including exercising their right to free assembly.

People have a right to rise up against this unlawful, corrupt regime. Against a junta that stole everything. That pumped trillions of dollars out of our country in oil and gas. And what did we get?

I am repeating the last words I said in another case against me: nothing has changed. We let them rob us by looking the other way.

I call on everyone to live not by lies³. I know that it sounds naive, and there is a certain pleasure in laughing and grinning sarcastically as I say it. But there is no other way. There is no other solution for our country right now.

Thank you, everyone, for your support. I know for a fact that when they isolate and imprison me, another will take my place. Nothing I did was unique or special. Anyone can do what I did. Live not by lies.

¹ The Russian phrase is "people who are looking at the table," but the meaning is someone who is avoiding eye contact and, by extension, looking the other way.

² Plays by Evgeny Lvovich Schwartz

³Essay by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Also a book by Rod Dreher

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