

They Went Like Sheep to the Slaughter and Other Myths. Just As They Left Egypt After Oppression. They Fought in Egypt to Survive

Contributed by [Rabbi Dr. Bernhard H. Rosenberg](#)

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By Rabbi Dr. Bernhard H. Rosenberg

As a child of survivors of the Nazi death camps who has published extensive articles and editorials regarding the Holocaust, I am deeply disturbed and sense the deep pangs of anguish of those who still cannot either comprehend or appreciate the true acts of heroism which prevailed. As a practicing rabbi who refuses to allow the memories of the past to be distorted, I appeal to our fellow Jew: "Never forget the acts of heroism which made it possible for us to exist."

The recurring questions which haunts survivors and their children echo through the halls of time. "Why didn't they fight back? Why did they enter the chambers of death like sheep to the slaughter?" By our standards, such actions as placidly lining up against a wall to be shot or walking silently into the gas chambers or standing nude and obedient at the edge of a ravine filled with blood-covered bodies awaiting one's own turn to die, defy all understanding. Indeed, anti-Semites would suggest that Jews were different, somehow not quite as brave, not quite as courageous as the average person. Our enemies will even conclude that the Jews were guilty of the crimes they were accused of, and hence with heavy conscience and accepting the punishment for their "crimes," the Jews quietly submitted to their deserved punishment.

Nothing could be a greater falsification of the truth. The hopelessness seen in their faces was not a reflection of guilt; rather it was a realization that they had been completely deserted and betrayed by humanity. The light of morality, conscience and brotherhood had been completely extinguished and for them life became a terror-filled abyss. Responsibility for their death clearly lies with the Nazis and their collaborators.

Individuals confronted by the Holocaust often ask obvious questions to which there are no simplistic answers. One needs to read, to study, to discuss, to reflect and to interview individuals who have lived through the tortures of hell on earth. Since it is evident that many will not read the volumes necessary for research, allow us to attempt to analyze the crucial and sensitive issue of "sheep to the slaughter."

In order to understand the Jew of the Holocaust, we must attempt to put ourselves in his place. He knew of centuries of persecution carried out by the drunk and the sober, by the church and by government dictum. He had suffered many instances of prejudice, degradation and depersonalization prior to the Holocaust. The Holocaust begins with the Nuremberg Laws, anti Semitic newspaper articles, cartoons, radio broadcasts, rallies, humiliations, beatings, intimidations and economic boycott. The Holocaust victim begins to feel as if he is choking; fear becomes a part of daily life.

Maybe he should leave Europe, he things. But to where should he go, and should he not stay together with his family? The International Conference at Evian, France, demonstrates that the world does not want the Jew. Not one country is willing to open the doors of freedom. The victim is trapped, like a child in a cage with a ravenous lion. The victim's passport is marked with the letter "J" for Jude and Kristallnacht results in vast destruction; his home, his shop and even his place of worship cannot escape the wrath of maniacs bent upon the complete annihilation of the Jew.

Some Jews are arrested and sent to concentration camps and the victim is informed that his children are expelled from school. The children do not understand, the victim is powerless to explain these atrocities to them. A yellow badge is to be worn and to be found on the streets without it means death.

The innocent victim and his family are uprooted and resettled in a ghetto, seven people in a room, little food, almost no medicine. The old and the young perish in the street. The victim's child falls ill and dies. He cries and screams in anguish. He is helpless to save her. A four-month-old baby perishes and the world remains silent.

His family is ordered to report to the train station. On the journey there are no sanitary facilities, pressed together like sardines, there is no room for the corpses to fall. They stand like the rest for nine days. The victim's grandfather dies begging for air.

Finally, the concentration camp. They arrive ravenous with hunger, nearly unconscious. Here, a short man motions with his finger to the left or to the right. The victim goes to the right; his family to the left. He soon discovers that the only means of escape is through the chimney.

His family, his wife, his two children are already in the next world. The chimney continues operating at full capacity. The heart and the soul of the world remain uncompassionate.

An inmate attempts to overcome a guard. He is tortured brutally and hung in front of the inmates. Each victim begins thinking to himself that he wants to avoid that suffering, revolt is meaningless, and even if he escaped where would he go? No one wants him.

The victim dreams and longs for a better world. He yearns for the time to come when he will no longer suffer and will begin to rebuild anew.

The world remains silent to his pleas. His dreams remain unfulfilled. His heroic vision of hope for the future is clouded by the reality of the inferno surrounding him. He is tormented by recurring nightmares. He hears the voices of his children, wife, his parents and loved ones. He remembers the sight of Joseph, his friend and neighbor, who was buried alive. In front of his eyes stand Yaakov, his uncle who was disemboweled, Chaim who was hanged and Chana who was subjected to medical experiments and then tortured to death. Tears flow as he envisions Pinchas who was drowned and his brother who was trampled to death. He awakens, scarred by the memory of Shmuel who was burnt with cigarettes and then thrown into the burning crematorium while still alive.

Today the world has the audacity to exclaim "Why didn't they fight back? Why didn't they rush the armed guards? Why didn't they attempt mass suicide?" The world refuses to realize that courage and heroism is often expressed in the individual's will to live; to seek to survive and build a better life, a better world for himself and his future family. The world dares to forget that numerous heroic uprisings did occur.

The remnants of Hitler's inferno came back from the grave to build a new nation, a nation conceived in blood and tears, a nation which loudly proclaims, "We will not be silent, Jews return to your own home, our gates are eagerly awaiting you." These survivors dedicated themselves and their children to a new purpose; the atrocities of the past, the inhumanity of mankind, could not extinguish the Jewish spirit.

Our young must be told that we have always fought tyranny, we did not die like sheep for the slaughter. The Jewish nation has experienced the inferno of humanity. Jews have been criticized, labeled, stereotyped and maligned, we have experienced anguish and peril, many have tried to murder us; others to missionize our young and yet, through it all, we unlike any other people, have survived.

Sophisticated 20th ? Are the numbers branded on the arms of survivors beauty marks, reminders of the good old days when the orchestra played such melodic tunes as "Arbeit Macht Frei?"

The propaganda machine rings aloud with the deceptions of Hitler's Mein Kampf. Twentieth century anti-Semites declare that Jews control industry, that Jews operate the banks, direct Wall Street and t.

We Jews have been gassed in the bathhouses of humanity, burned in crematoria constructed by the world's intellectuals, our children bayoneted, their blood spilt on the walls of the most civilized nations in the world. We have returned from the grave. We did not perish in the inferno. Our nation will never march like sheep to the slaughter. The people of Israel shall live.

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