



# Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: **Torn from home**

## **Nottingham Civic Service of Commemoration**

On Sunday 27 January a Civic Service of Commemoration was held at Nottingham Council House to remember the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, and all those others who have died as a result of genocide around the world.

Jonathan Shaw, our Director of Investment and Business Services spoke at the event. Here is what he said.

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**There are very few things that are more precious to us than our homes.**

Our families. Our health. Our physical safety.

These might be seen to be more precious to us than our home.

But being torn away from your home can destroy all of what you hold precious.

Being able to look after your basic needs and the needs of your family are removed when you are torn away from your home.

How vulnerable you must feel when you don't have a roof over your head and no control over your destiny.

On Holocaust Memorial day it is our duty to remember the appalling Nazi actions against the Jewish people, disabled people, people with learning difficulties, black people and Roma people, homosexuals, communists and freemasons and many others.

Millions cruelly torn from their homes and communities; enslaved, tortured and brutally murdered.

We also remember the victims in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and in Darfur, and most recently the mass forced and brutal displacement of the Rohingya Muslims

Peoples who, **through the actions of their oppressors**, have been marginalised, devalued and hated.

The world has failed to prevent holocausts from happening.

What can we do to stop this? We can do our bit by remembering.

In a recent survey two-thirds of people surveyed could not say how many Jews were murdered. Five per cent do not believe the Holocaust took place.

Each year that passes there are fewer who can personally remember the Nazi atrocities and we must take it upon ourselves to remember those that lived and died through such horrific events. To share their stories and their plights so the world will not forget.

As I grew up in Glasgow I had the privilege to go to a Synagogue under the chaplaincy of Rabbi Gottlieb.

He was a tall thin man with a grey-white beard and always seemed to wear a long dark cloak. He knew all of his congregants by name and he'd take this opportunity at the end of the service to shake everyone's hand and enquire after everyone's week. Like any good minister he was not only concerned with the spiritual needs of his community, but also their welfare and health.

As far as I knew he'd always been the Rabbi of my synagogue. We knew little of his past.

It was only recently that his wartime history came to light when one of his daughters came across some of his old correspondence.

When Austria was annexed by Germany Rabbi Gottlieb was then in his 20s and working in Vienna. This was deeply worrying for the Jews of Austria who had seen the severe hardships faced by their friends and relatives throughout Germany.

In the days following the annexation he sought permission from the Nazi authorities under Adolf Eichman, for the Jewish community to open a special 'school for emigration'. Eichman's mission in Vienna seemed to be the 'forced emigration' of Jewry. So this idea was welcome, and Rabbi Gottlieb became the school principle.

He described his shock at seeing how there could be a complete change in the Viennese community in such a short time period. Citizens who had previously accepted and respected the Jews of the city now looked on them with disdain and disgust.

The school provided a temporary safe haven from the violence on the streets for Jewish pupils in Vienna, and its applications increased quickly. Upon graduation the children were supposed to be given permission by the Nazis to emigrate to Palestine.

Although initially an Orthodox Jewish school Rabbi Gottlieb opened the school to children from the wider Jewish community and also to children of families who didn't consider themselves Jewish – but to the Nazis they were definitely Jewish.

In July 1938 his synagogue was destroyed in Kristallnacht (a night of horrific organised attacks on Jewish institutions, businesses and homes). He was arrested the next week by the Gestapo. He was released because he held a British visa, others were not so fortunate.

Rabbi Gottlieb immediately went back to the school and increased his efforts to find ways to get the children out of Austria. He found out about the opportunity Britain was giving to Jewish children through the Kindertransport initiative.

Through his efforts 640 children went from his school either to Palestine if they were old enough, or to Britain via the Kindertransport for the younger children.

He never spoke about what he did before he came to Glasgow. It was as if it was a different world.

It should have been a different world.

His daughter described him holding a very strong conviction “that every human being was made in G-d’s image, and must be treated as such”.

And that is a maxim that we should perhaps think about when we listen to the radio, watch television and be bombarded by social media.

Racism is an easy song to sing.

There are far too many around us in the UK, USA and elsewhere in the world who still seek to accentuate the difference **between** communities. It is **such actions** that Rabbi Gottlieb, and countless others too, abhorred and acted against in the 1930s and 1940s.

And it is for us to be prepared to act similarly.

People in Britain welcomed 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children before the Second World War. How many Syrian children were we allowed to take?

We can do our bit by recognising and accepting that everyone is different.

We can do our bit by looking at what we have in common rather than that which differentiates us.

We can do our bit by challenging. By calling out when atrocities happen to peoples like the Rohingya in Myanmar.

We can do our bit by helping to create homes where people want to live. To create communities that are supportive and welcoming.

We can do our bit by standing up.

Standing up and offering assistance to those that need it as individuals and as a community. Providing places where people that have been torn from their home can try and build a new home.

In Nottingham we are committed to provide people with a home that is secure and safe. Within a community that is friendly and supporting. Providing a democratic and tolerant society.

A place a million miles from where you can be torn from your home.

But where we also strive to ensure the memories of these atrocities are never forgotten.

And the victims torn from their homes are never forgotten.

And that those that tried to help them are also never forgotten.

**Thank you.**

Jonathan Shaw