

Good Morning Everyone. First, I would like to thank you all for being here to commemorate this dark period in Jewish history and to honor those survivors of the Holocaust who are here with us today. And secondly I would like to thank you for asking me to address you today. When Dr. Puckett first called me, I was rather intimidated at the idea of making this address. And frankly, I still am.

I think one of the most profound questions that we ask when looking at the events of the Holocaust, is How could this happen? How could this atrocity occur in our civilized day and time? I don't have the answer to that question, and any so-called answers I have read have been less than satisfying. What I would like to do today is look at the massacre of Jewish citizens which occurred in York, England in the year 1190. Perhaps if we look at the factors that led to the killing of the Jews in York, it might shed some light on some of the factors that led to the murder of 6 million Jews in Europe about 750 years later.

In the Fall of 1998 my sister and I took our first trip to the home of our ancestors, England and Scotland. On the way from London to Scotland, we spent several days in York. It is a beautiful, bucolic town dominated by a large stone tower at one end, and a lovely cathedral, the York Minster on the other. Many streets and buildings still exist as they did in the Middle Ages. My image of a bucolic town was shattered when we toured the large stone tower, Clifford's Tower, and I learned that over 150 Jews lost their lives there at the hands of an angry mob in 1190. I was shocked. I had never imagined that large scale anti-Semitism existed in the homeland of my forefathers and mothers. I knew that pogroms had happened in what is now Eastern Europe, but England? So I did some research to find out what happened there.

The first record of Jews in England was in 1066 when William brought Jews from Rouen, France to England. He desired feudal dues be paid to the royal treasury in coin rather than in kind and needed people who could supply the necessary coins. Jews were talented coin makers and fit the need nicely. During the next 100 years, Jews settled in York. York was attractive to the Jews because it had a castle which could be used for protection and there was demand for credit on the part of upper classes and the clergy. As Cecil Roth pointed out in his groundbreaking book, History of the Jews in England, money lending was one of the few occupations open to Jews in Angevin England. The church had outlawed the charging of interest by Christians, not realizing that credit is necessary for an expanding society. Other occupations were closed to the Jews because they required the taking of a Christian oath. And Jews were forbidden to own land. Therefore the Jew was driven to employ his capital in the only means open to him; that of financing others by lending his own capital at interest. The financial community in York by 1185 was dominated by two prominent Jews, Josce and Benedict who had become the prominent money lenders. The community was probably 20-40 households by the year 1190. With two prominent rabbis in residence, York was a thriving scholarly community.

One of the prominent financiers, Benedict lost his life in 1189. He made the mistake of attending the coronation of King Richard the 1st as part of a delegation of Jews. Both women and Jews had been forbidden to attend. When the word that Jews were actually attending the coronation when they had been expressly forbidden to do so, the crowd set upon them. Benedict was forced to convert to Christianity, but later died of his wounds after recanting his conversion. In the meantime the incited crowd set the Jewish section of London

on fire, and several residents perished. The newly crowned king ordered that the Jews be left in peace, but then he left for France to muster forces for his crusade. In his absence there were sporadic acts of violence against Jews in several towns. One night in March, a group of townspeople led by a man named Richard Malebysse, took advantage of the confusion when a fire broke out in York. His mob broke into the house that had belonged to Benedict of York, murdered everyone there, and stole any valuables they could find. Many Jews, including the financier Josce grabbed their valuables and took refuge in the Clifford's Tower. When the warden of the castle left and attempted to return, the Jews, probably out of fear, refused to let him back in. He in turn, went to the sheriff, John Marshall who summoned the armed forces of the county and they prepared to storm the castle. On Shabbat haGadol, March 16, 1190, realizing that their situation was hopeless, Rabbi Yomtob convinced most of those in the castle to take their own lives in an act of Al Kedushat haShem. A fire was set at the castle that night, although it is disputed whether the remaining Jews or the mob was responsible. The next day, the Jews who survived the bloody night offered to convert to save their lives, but as they left the castle, Malebysse and his followers butchered them. Once that was accomplished, Malebysse's posse went to the York Minster and burned the bonds that recorded their debts to the Jews. 150 Jews lost their lives.

The Jews were supposed to be under the protection of the king, so how could this happen? There were three institutions that failed the York Jews that fateful night; the church, the king, and their fellow countrymen.

The Church, was first of all, indebted to the Jews as they had borrowed capital for their building projects. Secondly, the Jews did not accept church doctrine, and that in itself

was seen as damaging to the church. The church was not above fomenting lies about the Jews, including the famous story about the death of a child who was part of a ritual murder committed by the Jews. Church officials were no friends of the Jews.

The Jews were also protected by the government starting with Henry the First in 1100, but not because the monarchy liked Jews. It was because the government was protecting a valuable asset. The government, like the church, was deeply indebted to the Jews. Not only that, but if a Jew died, any debts owed to the Jew went to the Crown. In addition, the Crown taxed the Jews at a much higher rate than it did Christians. In short, the Jews were needed for capital to the crown.

Richard the First ascended the throne in 1189. He was determined to bring to fruition a crusade to deliver the Holy Land from the Muslim infidel, and left England shortly after his coronation to spend six months in France mustering forces for his crusade. Crusade fever spread throughout England and the Jews were seen as enemies of Christianity as well. The church was instrumental in feeding this anti-Jewish sentiment. So not only is the church and the government heavily indebted to the Jews, but both institutions were fomenting anti-Semitism as well. The protection of the crown, was unfortunately, in France with Richard the first as he gathered forces for his crusade. The leadership vacuum was exacerbated in York, because several other government officials were also absent the fateful night of the massacre.

The third institution to fail the Jews were their fellow citizens. The landowners were also heavily indebted to the Jews, and were resentful of the protection the king afforded them. Many of the Jews we know of were quite wealthy. The landowners who felt financial

pressure as their debts mounted, had to resent the wealth of the Jews to whom they were indebted. It only made sense, especially to a man like Richard Malebysee who was nicknamed the Evil Beast by one of the Jews who recorded his debt, if you get rid of the Jews, you can also rid yourself of the debt you owe them.

Jews came to England with William the Conqueror because he needed a commodity they could supply. The subsequent rulers protected them while using their capital and taxing their assets. The church used the Jews' money to build their cathedrals, but despised them for their refusal to accept the Christian faith, and roused popular sentiment against them. The barons and the upper classes were deeply in debt to the Jews, and resented both the king's protection of them, and their wealthy lifestyle. Add to this mixture of anger and resentment, a Crusade to further whip up sentiment against the infidel and a leadership vacuum, and the massacre at York was not only possible, but probable. The Jews were never accepted as part of the English society, and it is not surprising that in the years following the massacre in York their condition worsened until 100 years later they were expelled from England.

What can we learn from the massacre at York which can help explain the enormity of the Holocaust?

The massacre at York began before there were Jews there. It began with identifying a people as someone not like us. And when we have someone not like us, we have someone to blame for our misfortunes, whatever they are. It is much easier to reconcile the cause of problems to be human beings whom we can defeat. If we think this way, we end up with what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his recently published book, *Not in God's Name* calls

pathological dualism. Dualism because it separates a good God from a bad situation, and pathological because it does become like an illness separating humans into two groups; one bad and one good. We are good, they are bad, and bad things are happening to us because someone bad is doing them. According to Rabbi Sacks, pathological dualism in its extreme forms leads to three things. First, it leads to dehumanization. The bad people or the enemy are demonized, and becomes less than human which leads to the destruction of empathy and sympathy in the so called good people. Then the good people are bereft of emotions that would prevent them from harming other people. Secondly, it can allow the good people to see themselves as victims. If they are victimized, then moral responsibility goes down the drain, because it's not our fault, it is theirs; the other. Finally, and most frightening, pathological dualism can lead to what Rabbi Sacks calls altruistic evil or killing in God's name. Ordinary people, people like you and me, become murderers for a higher purpose. And that is what happened in York. The Jews were considered the infidel, they murdered a child for ritual purposes, and most of all were the cause of the financial problems of the wealthy landowners, the church and the crown. Murdering the evil Jew becomes a prerogative.

On a much larger scale, the causes of the York Massacre mirrored the Shoah. The Nazis painted the so-called Aryan race as good, and the Jews were pictured as the epitome of evil. Jews were dehumanized and called lice, racial tuberculosis, or cancer which, of course needed to be eliminated. Hitler also blamed the Jews for all of Germany's many problems. Jews, he claimed, were trying to kill all the Aryans, had engineered World War I, were responsible for the opposition to Germany by Great Britain, and the US, were responsible for communism, and once the second world war started, were trying to destroy Germany. Quite

a litany. Look what the Jews have done and are doing to us, Hitler said. We are the victims of this vast Jewish conspiracy. So of course, the Jews had to be destroyed. And Hitler declared in *Mein Kampf* that in destroying the Jews, he was doing God's work. According to Rabbi Sacks, the murder of six million Jews is the prime example in the 20th century of altruistic evil. Performing horrific acts against fellow human beings because it is the right thing to do.

In another remarkable book by Rabbi Sacks, (can you tell I really enjoy Rabbi Sacks?) entitled *The Dignity of Difference*, he argues for us to embrace our differences by remembering our common humanity, that we are all created in God's image. He says, "We are defined as a humanity by our commonalities and our differences. If we were completely different, we would not be able to communicate, but if we were exactly the same, we would have nothing to say. That is how we have to do it, strive to find our common humanity and then celebrate our differences. Let us thank God that we have these differences and every time we embrace somebody of a different faith or culture or experience, our world is enlarged. Let us strive to see the image of God in the face of a stranger."

For me that is the answer to Never Again. It is something all of us can and should do. We need to look at the face of each person with whom we come into contact and strive to see the image of God within them. And more importantly, when we hear friends or acquaintances use terms to denigrate someone not like them, or to blame people not like them for problems both big and small, we should never remain silent. Silence signals agreement. We need to tell them we do not agree and we need to tell them why.

If we can all see the image of God in the stranger and can help others do the same, we will at least make the world a better place to live, and possibly prevent violence on a small or large scale.

Keyn Yihi Ratzon