



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS **YAD VASHEM, JERUSALEM**

What was the Holocaust?

The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Nazi Germany and its accomplices strove to murder every Jew under their domination. Because Nazi discrimination against the Jews began with Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, many historians consider this the start of the Holocaust era. The Jews were not the only victims of Hitler's regime, but they were the only group that the Nazis sought to destroy entirely.

The term Holocaust is defined by the New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1989) as a large-scale sacrifice or destruction, especially of life, especially by fire. As the research of Jon Petrie shows, Holocaust was already used by some writers during the war itself to describe what was happening to the Jews. Alongside it, various other terms such as destruction, disaster, and catastrophe have been and are still being used today to describe the fate of the Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe, although the dominant usage in American English since the middle of the 1960s is of the word Holocaust. In Hebrew, the word Shoah is used, and it appears more and more frequently in English-language texts. Genocide is a legal term for the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups. It may include, but does not necessarily include, the physical annihilation of the group. The Holocaust is an expression, and arguably the most extreme expression, of genocide.

Is the Holocaust a singular event in history?

There are other historical events similar to the Holocaust, but the Holocaust has characteristics that, in the opinion of many scholars, make it unique. Mass murder, sometimes on a scale of millions and targeting specific religious, ethnic, or social groups, has occurred in history. Governments other than that of Nazi Germany have used camp systems and technology to serve deadly plans, and the Jews have been persecuted throughout much of history. However, the Holocaust may be considered unique for two main reasons: 1) unlike their policies toward other

groups, the Nazis sought to murder every Jew everywhere, regardless of age, gender, beliefs, or actions, and they invoked a modern government bureaucracy to accomplish their goal; and 2) the Nazi leadership held that ridding the world of the Jewish presence would be beneficial to the German people and all mankind, although in reality the Jews posed no threat. Grounded in a spurious racist ideology that considered the Jews "the destructive race," it was this idea, more than any other, that eventually led to the implementation of the murderous policy known as the Final Solution.

How Many Jews were murdered in the Holocaust? How do we know? Do we have their names?

There is no precise figure for the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. The figure commonly used is the six million quoted by Adolf Eichmann, a senior SS official. Most research confirms that the number of victims was between five and six million. Early calculations range from 5.1 million (Professor Raul Hilberg) to 5.95 million (Jacob Leschinsky). More recent research, by Professor Yisrael Gutman and Dr. Robert Rozett in the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, estimates the Jewish losses at 5.59-5.86 million, and a study headed by Dr. Wolfgang Benz presents a range from 5.29 million to six million.

The main sources for these statistics are comparisons of prewar censuses with postwar censuses and population estimates. Nazi documentation containing partial data on various deportations and murders is also used. We estimate that Yad Vashem currently has somewhat more than four million names of victims that are accessible. This figure is based primarily on some two million Pages of Testimony, which often contain information about more than one Jew who perished in the Holocaust. As of early June 1999, more than 1.6 million Pages of Testimony have been computerized. In addition, we have thousands of documents containing names from the Holocaust era, many of which are those of victims. This body of documentation has yet to be fully researched and added to our computerized database. Eventually we hope, through our computerization project, to provide as much information as possible about each victim.

How many Jews were murdered in each country?

Because there are no hard and fast statistics for all the Jews murdered in countries under Nazi domination, and due to frequent border changes before, during, and after the war, it is difficult to enumerate the victims by country. The following information is taken from the Encyclopedia of

the Holocaust, based on research at Yad Vashem. The Encyclopedia explains the figures presented here for each country.

Country	Pre-war Jewish Population	Minimum Loss	Maximum Loss
Austria	185,000	50,000	50,000
Belgium	65,700	28,900	28,900
Bohemia and Moravia	118,310	78,150	78,150
Bulgaria	50,000	0	0
Denmark	7,800	60	60
Estonia	4,500	1,500	2,000
Finland	2,000	7	7
France	350,000	77,320	77,320
Germany	566,000	134,500	141,500
Greece	77,380	60,000	67,000
Hungary	825,000	550,000	569,000
Italy	44,500	7,680	7,680
Latvia	91,500	70,000	71,500
Lithuania	168,000	140,000	143,000
Luxembourg	3,500	1,950	1,950
Netherlands	140,000	100,000	100,000
Norway	1,700	762	762
Poland	3,300,000	2,900,000	3,000,000
Romania	609,000	271,000	287,000
Slovakia	88,950	68,000	71,000
Soviet Union	3,020,000	1,000,000	1,100,000
Yugoslavia	78,000	56,200	63,300
Total	9,796,840	5,596,029	5,860,129
Rounded	9,797,000	5,596,000	5,860,000

Who were other victims of Nazism? How was their fate similar to and different from the fate of the Jews?

Numerous people fell victim to the Nazi regime for political, social, or racial reasons. Germans were among the first victims persecuted because of their political activities. Many died in concentration camps, but most were released after their spirit was broken. Germans who suffered from mental or physical handicaps were killed under a "euthanasia" program. Other Germans were incarcerated for being homosexuals, criminals, or nonconformists; these people, although treated brutally, were never slated for utter annihilation as were the Jews.

Roma and Sinti (often called by the derogatory term Gypsies) were murdered by the Nazis in large numbers. Estimates range from 200,000 to over 500,000 victims. Nazi policy toward Roma and Sinti was inconsistent. In Greater Germany, Roma and Sinti who had integrated into society were seen as socially dangerous and eventually were murdered, whereas in the occupied Soviet Union, Roma and Sinti who had integrated into society were not persecuted, but those who retained a nomadic lifestyle were put to death.

The so-called Slavs, the peoples of Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, were also deemed racially inferior by the Nazis. Yet it was not racial ideology alone that determined how the Nazis treated particular ethnic groups - the issues of realpolitik also came into play. Despite their supposed inferiority, the Slovaks, Croats, Bulgarians, and some Ukrainians were allies of the Nazis. Russian prisoners-of-war died from neglect or hard labor, or were murdered, because of the Nazis' racism and loathing of Communism. Owing mostly to their plans to reorganize Europe on racial grounds, the Nazis treated the Poles terribly. The Nazi plans, however, did not target the Poles for complete annihilation. Polish children who "looked German" were to be raised as Germans, intellectuals and leaders to be murdered in order to prevent rebellion, and the rest to be enslaved.

When and how did the Nazis come to power?

Contrary to a common misconception, Hitler did not come to power through a terrorist coup against a democratically elected government. Although the Nazis had the support of many millions of German voters, owing largely to the continuing social, economic, and political crisis that had struck Germany especially after 1929, Hitler was never elected by a clear-cut decision of the absolute majority of the German electorate. Nor

did such a majority ever give him a clear mandate to become the dictatorial ruler of Germany. In the last democratic elections - on November 6, 1932 - the Nazi Party, though the strongest, actually declined from the 37.3 percent of the total vote that it had earned in the previous elections - on July 31, 1932 - to 33.1 percent. Hitler attained power when President Hindenburg appointed him Chancellor on January 30, 1933.

Once in power, Hitler and his accomplices lost no time in broadening their base of power and dismantling the democratic constitution piece by piece. A crucial landmark was the so-called Law of Empowerment, which authorized the government to enact laws without recourse either to the parliament or to the president. The autonomy of the individual German States (Länder) was abolished in a bylaw passed on March 31, 1933. The Nazi seizure of power was completed, in a sense, with the Law against the Establishment of New Parties on July 14, 1933, by dint of which the Nazi Party became the only legal political party in Germany.

How did the Nazis treat the Jews for the first years after their accession?

The pre-war persecution of Jews in Germany took place under very different circumstances from that of the Nazis' extermination campaign during World War II. The operative aim of Nazi policy during the first years was not yet the physical annihilation of the Jews but rather their social and economic displacement and their removal from German soil. In pursuing these goals, the regime was still subject to internal and external constraints that restrained the brutality of its antisemitic measures. Most of the anti-Jewish campaign was carried out in the full glare of world publicity. Its typical manifestations were discriminatory legislation, economic deprivation, public defamation, administrative harassment, and social ostracism rather than physical torture and murder.

A distinctive feature of Nazi policy before the war was the confusing interplay between repression and normalcy, the constant tightening and untightening of the antisemitic pressure. spurts of intense antisemitic activity were buffered by prolonged periods of deceptive stabilization. By and large, the pre-war antisemitic campaign crested at three junctures:

- The boycott of April 1, 1933, and the ensuing wave of racial legislation aimed at Jewish employees in the public services and the various professions.
- The Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935, which put the final seal on Jewish emancipation in Germany and defined Jewishness in racial terms.

- The state-organized pogrom on the night of November 9-10, 1938, the so-called Kristallnacht ("Crystal Night").

How did the Jews in Nazi Germany respond to their persecution before the war?

German Jewry, the first victims of the Nazi regime, represented one of the oldest established Jewish communities in Europe. Until 1933, German Jews had been widely regarded as a virtual model instance of the success of emancipation, and of the creative interaction between the Jews and their non-Jewish environment. Most German Jews considered themselves no less German than any of their Christian compatriots. Some 12,000 of them had died on the battlefields of World War I, fighting for the interests and honor of their beloved country.

During the first days of the Nazi regime, it was difficult for them to grasp that anyone could strip them of their German rights and identity, that they could be turned into pariahs in their own land. "Germany remains Germany," stated a leading article in the newspaper of the organization that represented the majority, the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith. "No one can deprive us of our homeland and fatherland." On the other side of the ideological divide, the German Zionists, who were more pessimistic about the viability of a German-Jewish synthesis, seemed better attuned to the new times. Even they, however, could not fathom the full extent of the Nazi threat to Jewish existence.

They, no less than other Jews, tended to assume that the revolutionary ardor of the Nazi regime would spend itself after the first months in office and that its bite would not prove to be half as dangerous as its bark. In a way, the first to be aware of the danger were those individuals of Jewish origin who were active in the Socialist and Communist movements and, for this reason, were doubly exposed to political and racial persecution.

After the initial shock, German Jewry began to reorganize in response to their new circumstances. Already in April 1933 the Central Committee for Help and Reconstruction was established, which coordinated the wide-ranging welfare activities of the beleaguered Jewish community. On September 17, 1933, the National Representation of the German Jews came into being and assumed responsibility for overall political representation.

As a small minority living under a violent authoritarian regime, German Jewry could not mount a political opposition against the Nazis. Their

hope that through negotiations carried out between the Jewish leadership and the regime, the status of the Jews in Germany could be settled in a tolerable fashion proved to be futile. Thus, what remained was for the Jewish leadership to focus on the internal life of the Jewish community. An important by-product of this focus was a deepening of Jewish consciousness and a strengthening of inner bonds of Jewish solidarity under persecution.

As the isolation of the Jews increased, the Jewish organizations focused on social work and aid to the needy. They established a Jewish educational system for children who had been ousted from the German educational system. They fostered adult education and founded the Kulturbund, an organization in which Jewish artists of various types could find expression. By the mid-1930s, the Jewish organizations increasingly emphasized activities that fostered emigration. They disseminated information about various countries of destination, and they offered language and vocational classes. This wide range of activities continued until the advent of the pogrom of November 1938. After the pogrom, the Nazis circumscribed these activities, and the Jewish organizations were only able to continue them on a much narrower basis.

Why didn't more Jews leave Europe before the war began?

The most straightforward answer is that they simply had nowhere to go. For the Jews of Europe, as noted in Chaim Weizmann's famous remark, the world was divided into two: places where they could not live and places where they could not go. The restrictive immigration practices of the major overseas countries vis-à-vis Jewish refugees reflected a global climate of economic protectionism tinged with xenophobia and outright anti-Semitism. An international conference on refugees at Evian (France) in July 1938, initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, proved to be a complete fiasco. Except for the Dominican Republic, none of the representatives of the 32 countries invited offered prospective Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria any hope whatsoever.

Another explanation is that the intermittent and uneven application of the anti-Semitic pressure during the Nazi regime's first years sent confusing signals to the Jewish victims, lulling their sense of danger and allowing them to believe that the worst had already passed. A panic exodus of Jews from Nazi-dominated Europe ensued only after the spring of 1938, in the wake of the annexation of Austria in March of that year, and intensified after the November pogrom. By that time, Jews were willing to emigrate to any place they could.

Why didn't more Jews go to Palestine before the war?

The basic reason was that control over immigration to Palestine between the world wars was held by the mandatory power, the British, who cited the formal criterion of "economic absorptive capacity" to regulate Jewish entry in accordance with their own imperial and strategic interests. In essence, there were three legal ways to immigrate to Palestine before the war:

- "Capitalist" visas were issued to immigrants who possessed capital of at least 1,000 Palestine pounds. To put this in perspective, the annual wage of a policeman in 1933 was less than 50 pounds;
- Halutzim, young Zionist pioneers who had undergone a period of vocational –mostly agricultural – training abroad could enter the country as "laborers." The exact number of certificates granted to laborers was determined by the Palestine Government in six-month "schedules" reflecting the economic situation at the time, especially the level of unemployment;
- "Dependents" – direct relatives of Palestine residents.

After 1937, in the wake of the Royal Commission report, Jewish immigration into Palestine was subjected to an overt political threshold.

The other side of the coin, however, was that the Zionist establishment, which was embodied in the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, constantly disputed the actual size of the "schedules" allocated by the Palestine Government but never challenged the system in principle. Unrestricted and unimpeded immigration would have clashed with the Agency's prevailing conception of Zionist fulfillment as a slow, organic process, in the course of which the economic, social, and cultural interests of the collective Zionist enterprise in Palestine should take precedence over the needs of the Jewish individual.

To which countries did the Jews of the Reich immigrate before the outbreak of the war? How many entered each country?

In the first years of the Nazi regime, most German Jews who emigrated went to neighboring European countries and to Palestine. However, the picture changed considerably after 1936 and especially in 1938. During this period, as immigration of refugees to Palestine and most of the countries of Europe became increasingly difficult, and the circumstances of Jews in Germany deteriorated, Jews became more willing to go to places they considered more remote, especially South America. With the desperate plight of Austrian Jewry after the Nazi annexation of March 1938, and the Kristallnacht pogrom in November that struck the Jews of

the entire Reich, the United States and Great Britain relaxed their restrictive practices. In their frantic efforts to break out of the Nazi death trap, the Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria went as far a field as Shanghai, one of the few places that accepted immigrants freely. Others tried to reach Palestine stealthily in order to circumvent British restrictions on Jewish immigration.

Emigration of Jews from Germany and Austria in 1933-1939, by destinations

United States	85,000
Latin America	85,000
Palestine	60,000
Shanghai	18,000
Great Britain	60,000
Switzerland	12,000
Total	320,000

Some 110,000 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria escaped to neighboring countries only to fall again into the Nazis' clutches during the war.

Why did the Nazis murder the Jews?

Many answers to this question have been offered - theological, historical, philosophical, psychological, and Marxist - but none alone will ever be satisfactory. The historical answer might read something like this:

In the 1930s, large segments of the German populace consented to live in a society based on the tenets of hatred, ethnic utopianism, and violence. They went to war to redress every wrong and every perceived wrong perpetrated against them over the previous 200 years, and to create their version of a better world. A central belief in the system by which they lived was that the Jews (or "The Jew") represented everything diametrically opposed to them and, for this reason, had to be removed. This belief was closely connected to a racial worldview, shared by many, which defined the Germans as members of a master race - the Nordic Aryans - and the Jews as an "anti"-race befouled by destructive physical characteristics. The utopia toward which these Germans strove would be unattainable if the Jews remained. When the geographical removal of the

Jews proved infeasible, they resorted to the most radical of solutions: a Final Solution.

When and how did the Nazis decide to murder the Jews under their control?

The exact date of the Nazi policy decision to murder all the Jews is not entirely clear. No written order from Hitler to this effect has been found. Currently there is a consensus among historians, however, that before the outbreak of the war the Nazis did not have a definite plan to murder the Jews of Europe. Rather, the policy that came to be known as the Final Solution, which called for the murder of all Jews, developed during the war itself.

At the time of the German conquest of Poland, in the autumn of 1939, the Nazis crossed the line from earlier forms of discrimination to murder. At this point, sporadic mass killings in the Generalgouvernement alone, the area where most Polish Jews were gathered, resulted in the deaths of at least 7,000 in the last months of 1939. With the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, murderous activities against the Jews were greatly intensified. German armed formations, chief among the special units of the SS known as the Einsatzgruppen, began shooting Jewish males as well as Communist political officers in a mass and systematic fashion.

In early July, the "No. 2" man in the SS, Reinhard Heydrich, was made responsible by Hitler's deputy Hermann Goering for a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question in Europe." In mid-August, when the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, visited the newly occupied Soviet areas, it was decided to extend the killing to Jewish women and children. Soon thereafter experiments began on the use of Zyklon-B gas as a means for mass murder. These experiments were conducted in Auschwitz on Soviet prisoners of war. In mid-October the deportation of the Jews from the Reich began, and just a few days later, Jewish emigration from the Reich was forbidden. Also in October, sites were chosen for the extermination camps Chelmno and Belzec. In early December, the first extermination camp, Chelmno, went into operation. There Jews began to be murdered with carbon monoxide gas generated by large diesel engines that pumped gas into gas chambers.

On December 12, it is known that Hitler met with some of his intimate circle and told them that the systematic mass murder which had begun in the Soviet Union would be extended to the Jews of Germany, the last group to be included in the plans for murder. From this meeting we know that the decision to include all Jews in the murder was made before

December 12 - most likely during the autumn of 1941. On January 20, 1942, after hundreds of thousands of Jews had already been murdered, Heydrich convened various senior members of the German bureaucracy in what has come to be known as the Wannsee Conference to discuss and coordinate the "Final Solution."

It is clear from this series of events that Hitler, Goering, Himmler, Heydrich, and other Nazi leaders were closely involved in the decision-making process which led to the mass murder of the Jews.

What were the largest ghettos, how many Jews were in them, and when were they liquidated?

The largest ghetto was in Warsaw, which held up to 480,000 Jews and was liquidated in May 1943, after massive deportations to Treblinka in the summer of 1942 and two uprisings in January and April of 1943. The Lodz ghetto contained 160,000 Jews at its peak. This ghetto was liquidated gradually: in a first wave of deportations to Chelmno between January and May of 1942, many subsequent deportations to Chelmno and other camps, and final liquidation on September 1, 1944. The Lvov ghetto contained nearly 150,000 Jews when established in November 1941; its last few thousand inhabitants were removed in June 1943 after the rest had been deported to their deaths in Belzec and Janowska. The Minsk ghetto held 100,000 Jews from this city and the surrounding towns and villages. The Minsk ghetto was liquidated on October 21, 1943, after most of its Jewish inhabitants had been shot or deported to their deaths in Sobibor. In Vilna, most of the 57,000 Jews who initially inhabited the ghetto were shot to death in the nearby pits of Ponar. In the wake of a failed Vilna ghetto uprising, the last few thousand Jews were sent to camps in Estonia on September 23, 1943. The Bialystok ghetto, which originally contained 50,000 Jews, was liquidated on August 16, 1943, following five days of fighting by the Jewish underground.

What conditions prevailed in the ghettos?

During the Holocaust, ghettos were small and, in most cases, poor areas in cities and towns, to which the Jews were confined and from which non-Jews were generally barred. Many ghettos were surrounded by walls or fences in order to help enforce the Jews' isolation and separation from their neighbors and the outside world. The ghettos were meant to serve as temporary, tightly controlled collection points, where the Jews' labor potential would be exploited until a future German policy led to their removal.

Jews in the ghettos were kept under horrendous conditions. The Nazis confiscated nearly all of their belongings and denied them access to most needs of daily life. Severe overcrowding, lack of hygiene, extreme starvation, and denial of basic medicines led to widespread epidemics in many ghettos. The harsh conditions and long hours of forced labor weakened the Jews further. In Warsaw, the largest of the ghettos, approximately 85,000 Jews (about 20 percent of the ghetto population) died from the conditions before the Nazis began to deport them to a death camp. Similar death rates were evident in other ghettos, and even where conditions were somewhat better, they were "narrow as the grave," in the words of one Vilna ghetto diarist, Dr. Lazar Epstein.

How did Jews cope with conditions in the Ghetto?

The Jews resorted to legal and "illegal" methods in their attempts to cope with the severe conditions imposed on them in the ghettos. Jewish councils arranged housing, distributed food, and provided social welfare, child care, refugee assistance, and other services - stretching their very scanty resources beyond the limits of their capabilities. In some ghettos, autonomous social-welfare organizations were created to deal with the same types of needs. Political parties and youth movements organized clandestinely to provide their members with supplementary aid and moral support. Additionally, families and friends tried to help their own.

Many Jews in many ghettos, singly and collectively, came to realize that the Nazis had placed them in a trap: If they obeyed the Nazis' rules, they stood to die prematurely of starvation or disease. If they were caught breaking the rules by smuggling food, supplies, and information, they faced certain death. In many instances, Jews chose to become "outlaws" in their struggle to survive.

What were the Einsatzgruppen and what was their role in the murder of the Jews?

Einsatzgruppen means "task forces." The SS set up such units before they entered Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union. The task of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland was to terrorize the local population and murder anyone whom the SS deemed undesirable. The most infamous Einsatzgruppen of all were formed before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Their primary task was to destroy what they regarded as the ideological infrastructure of the Soviet Union: political commissars, members of the Communist party, and above all, Jews.

Einsatzgruppen advanced into the Soviet Union along with the German army. Wherever they stopped, they collected and shot in cold blood as

many Jews as they could find (first Jewish males, and soon thereafter Jewish women and children, as well). They wrote detailed daily reports on their activities, copies of which still exist. According to their own incomplete reports, they killed at least 900,000 Jews and were assisted by other units in the murder of hundreds of thousands more.

Which German units took part in the murder of the Jews?

Approximately half of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust perished in extermination camps run by the SS. About a quarter of the victims were shot by the Einsatzgruppen and their accomplices – SS brigades, police formations, units and members of the German armed forces, and on occasion, unlikely groups such as construction crews and musicians. The entire Jewish community of Serbia was annihilated in a joint operation of the regular German army and the SS.

Many victims died in concentration and labor camps run by the SS, or in ghettos. Ghettos were generally run by civilian German administrations that included lawyers, engineers, physicians, and other officials. Tens of thousands of Jews escaped from various forms of incarceration and were painstakingly hunted down, one by one, by armed German formations. German industrialists put millions of people to slave labor, and the death rate of Jewish laborers, who were at the bottom of the social ladder, was exceptionally high. In all stages of the murder, many non-German civilians voluntarily participated in the killing operations.

At no stage was there a shortage of individuals willing to participate in the murder of Jews.

What were the gas vans? When and where were they used?

Gas vans were trucks used to asphyxiate Jews and others. At first, the carbon monoxide generated by the combustion of gasoline by the trucks' engines was channeled into sealed chambers. This method was initially used as part of the "euthanasia" program, in which the Nazis killed physically and mentally handicapped Germans. Later, in September 1941, Soviet prisoners of war were murdered in Sachsenhausen by channeling the fumes into the sealed compartment of the truck itself. Two months later, mobile gas vans were put into use in the Soviet Union as part of the murder of Jews spearheaded by the Einsatzgruppen. When the Chelmno extermination camp was established in December 1941, gas vans were used there as well. Gas vans were used in the murder of approximately 700,000 people throughout Nazi-dominated Europe.

Who built the gas chambers? What kind of gas was used to kill Jews there, and who provided it?

In the extermination camps built under Operation Reinhard – Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka – the gas first used to murder people was carbon monoxide, generated by gasoline engines or released from carbon-monoxide cylinders. Experiments in the use of Zyklon B, a form of hydrogen cyanide or prussic acid, began in Auschwitz in September 1941. The gas pellets were supplied by DEGESCH (a German cooperative that manufactured pesticides), which was controlled by I.G. Farben. Tesch and Stabenow Co. of Hamburg also supplied gas pellets. The improved gas-chamber and crematoria facilities at Auschwitz-Birkenau were built by J. A. Topf und Sohne of Erfurt, Germany.

What were concentration camps? When did they start to function, and what was their purpose?

Immediately after they came to power, the Nazis set up camps in which they imprisoned those whom they considered opponents to their regime and treated them with great brutality. As in other dictatorial regimes, these camps were designed to break that opposition and inspire fear among the population in order to ensure that new opposition would not arise. The first concentration camp was established at Dachau on March 23, 1933, just two months after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Dachau became the training ground for the SS. Its first commandant was Theodor Eicke, whose many precedents for brutality were followed throughout the expanding camp system. Among the major camps established in Greater Germany were Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Neuengamme, Ravensbrueck and Sachsenhausen.

At the time of the annexation of Austria and more so during the riot against the Jews of Germany in November 1938 (Kristallnacht), people were no longer imprisoned primarily because of their perceived actions, but they began to be imprisoned for reasons of race. From this point onward, Jews were placed in Nazi camps simply because they were Jews. As the Nazis conquered more and more territory, they expanded the camp system greatly and used it as a tool in their plan for the reordering of European society along racial lines.

Forced labor was always a component of the camp universe and as time went on, this component became more and more central to it. In fact, the Nazis did not call all of their camps “concentration camps”; some were designated as labor or hard-labor camps, others as transit camps, and others as exchange camps. Owing to the inhuman labor conditions, cruelty of the camp staff, and horrible physical conditions, many

prisoners died in the camps, especially during the war. With the coming of the Final Solution, six extermination camps were also established in which primarily Jewish prisoners were systematically murdered.

What were the extermination camps? When did they start to function, and what was their purpose?

The first camp specifically established as an extermination camp was at Chelmno (Kulmhof), Poland. It began to function on December 8, 1941, when Jews from the surrounding area were brought there. At first, gas vans were used for the murder. Eventually, approximately 320,000 people, mostly Jews, were murdered there.

Early in 1942 the Nazis began to build three extermination camps in the framework of Operation (Aktion) Reinhard: Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Most of the Jews from Poland were murdered in these camps in 1942 and 1943. All told, about 1.7 million Jews were murdered in the Reinhard camps. Majdanek, which was a concentration-labor camp, also had a killing center and is often cited as an extermination camp. Unlike in the Operation Reinhard camps, many of the victims of Majdanek were not Jews.

The most infamous of the extermination camps was established at Auschwitz. It began to function as an extermination camp in the spring of 1942, after larger gas chambers were built in nearby Birkenau (Auschwitz II). Eventually, more than a million Jews and several hundred thousand Poles, Sinti and Roma, and people of various nationalities were murdered there.

What role did German-dominated governments play in the murder of Jews?

As a rule, the greater the independence a state had, the more likely were the Jews to survive. Conversely, the Jews of countries ruled directly or almost directly by Germany (Soviet Union, Poland, Serbia, the Netherlands) had only the slimmest chances of survival. As long as Italy remained a full-fledged ally of Germany (until September 1943), the Jews there were not only untouched but, in Italian-occupied territories, were also protected. Romanian military forces murdered great numbers of Jews at the frontiers of their territories, but the government refused to hand over Jews in their core territories to the Germans. The Hungarian government did not accede to Nazi pressure to deport Hungarian Jewry until the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944. During the occupation, however, Hungarian forces played a major role in the deportation. The Bulgarian regime protected the Jews in its traditional

territories, but those of the annexed areas of Macedonia and Thrace were deported to their deaths.

Puppet states either brutally murdered their own Jews (Croatia) or turned them over to the Germans (Slovakia). Semi-sovereign Vichy France collaborated in the deportation of non-French Jews but by and large protected those who held French citizenship. The Jews of Denmark lived safely as long as a semblance of Danish independence was maintained; only when the Germans began encroaching on this independence did it become necessary to save the Danish Jews by smuggling them to Sweden. To the great credit of the Danish people, they managed to save almost all of the Jews residing in their country.

What role did non-German civilians play in the murder of Jews?

Without the active participation of a very large number of non-German civilians, many fewer Jews would have been murdered in the Holocaust. However, the number of dead might have been considerably higher had it not been for noncooperation and even obstruction by other non-German individuals.

Among the prominent participants in the murder were Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Latvian bands, operated by Germans, that slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews. Some partisan units in Poland and elsewhere murdered Jews even as they fought the Nazis. Jews attempting to flee or hide were often handed over to the authorities by locals who sought reward, hoped to usurp Jewish property, or simply vented their malice. The Nazi policy of forcing Jews to wear an identifying badge reflected their assumption that this would prompt the surrounding people to shun them.

Notwithstanding this, non-Jews saved tens of thousands of Jews and are therefore called the "Righteous Among the Nations." In some countries, such as Bulgaria and France, public opinion influenced decision-makers in ways that saved many Jewish lives.

How did the Nazis try to hide their atrocities?

The first method in camouflaging the murder of the Jews was the use of regulated euphemisms in many of their documents, such as special treatment for murder and evacuation for deportations. Even the term Final Solution is a code word for the extermination policy. Participants in the murder operation were sworn to secrecy. Jews were told various lies when ordered to prepare for deportation. Generally, they were told they were going to a "better place" where they would have to work but would

be able to live. In June 1942 onward, a special operation, Aktion 1005, was begun to destroy the physical evidence of the murder. Under SS Standartenfuehrer Paul Blobel, a special unit called Sonderkommando 1005 supervised the burning of the victims' bodies in the extermination camps. These operations assumed more importance with the growing consciousness among Nazi leaders that the war might be lost. From June 1943 onward, Sonderkommando 1005 returned to murder sites in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union dating from as early as June 1941, and tried to erase the traces of mass graves by burning the remains in huge pyres. Sometimes Jewish slaved labor performed this gruesome task. Although the Nazis did not succeed in wiping out all traces of the murder, their attempt to do so has made it much harder to determine the exact details and statistical magnitude of the crimes committed.

When did the world learn about the Holocaust? How did information reach the free world?

A distinction should be made between reports on specific mass-murder incidents and reports on genocide. Information regarding mass murders of Jews began to reach the free world soon after these actions began in the Soviet Union in late June 1941, and the volume of such reports increased with time. The early sources of information include German police reports intercepted by British intelligence; local eyewitnesses and escaped Jews reporting to underground, Soviet, or neutral sources; and Hungarian soldiers on home leave, whose observations were reported by neutral sources. During 1942, reports of a Nazi plan to murder all the Jews - including details on methods, numbers, and locations - reached Allied and neutral leaders from many sources, such as the underground Jewish Socialist Bund party in the Warsaw ghetto in May; Gerhard Riegner's cable from Switzerland in August; the eyewitness account of Polish underground courier Jan Karski in November; and the eyewitness accounts of 69 Polish Jews who reached Palestine in a civilian prisoner exchange between Germany and Britain in November.

On December 17, 1942, the Allies issued a proclamation condemning the "extermination" of the Jewish people in Europe and declared that they would punish the perpetrators. Notwithstanding this, it remains unclear to what extent Allied and neutral leaders understood the full import of their information. The utter shock of senior Allied commanders who liberated camps at the end of the war may indicate that this understanding was not complete.

What did the Jews of American do to help European Jewry during the war?

During the war, American Jewry found itself reacting to unprecedented and unbelievable news – the murder of all the Jews of Europe – at a time when ethnic assertiveness was unacceptable in American society and when anti-Semitism was clearly on the rise in the United States. Nevertheless, American Jewry organized to send funds and supplies into occupied Europe through aid organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. They organized mass rallies at Madison Square Garden in New York City, and at similar arenas, condemning the murder and calling on the Allies to help. American Jewish leaders pleaded with their government's leaders, including the president, to act on behalf of European Jewry, and they prepared rescue proposals, such as the one submitted jointly by eight American Jewish organizations to the Bermuda Conference in the spring of 1943. Rescue activities finally undertaken to a limited degree by the government, such as those implemented through the War Refugee Board in 1944, were largely funded by American Jewry. However, American Jewry was unable to overcome its internal differences and conflicts, which were both ideological and organizational. Thus, they rarely presented the government with a united front and united demands or requests, and the government did not display great resolve to rescue the Jews of Europe.

Why didn't the allies bomb Auschwitz?

The first detailed information about Auschwitz reached the Allies in June 1944, in a report from two escaped prisoners forwarded by Jewish underground activists in Slovakia. The information included a request to bomb the camp and the rail lines leading to it from Hungary, as masses of Hungarian Jews were then being deported to the camp. The Allies had command of the skies by that time, and air bases in Italy brought the Allied forces in the West within range of parts of Poland. From the spring to the autumn of 1944, Allied aircraft flew over the camp several times on a mission to photograph German industrial plants a few kilometers away. In the late summer these plants were bombed, but the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was never bombed.

The Allies explained their decision not to bomb the camp in several ways. They said it was technically impossible for them to reach the camp. The fact that they bombed other targets very nearby indicates that this was not true. They argued that such bombardment would not slow down the murder operation and would divert forces from decisive battles and endanger the airmen. The only way to rescue Jews, they said, was by winning the war. Their main arguments, then, were "rescue through

victory" and "no diversion from the war effort." Whether a bombing mission to the extermination camp would have succeeded or failed is an open question. However, it is clear that the Allies did not marshal the same energy and determination to rescue the Jews as the Nazis did to murder them.

What were the Judenraete (Jewish Councils)?

In every country that the Germans controlled during the war, they established a Jewish leadership organization commonly known as a Judenrat (Jewish Council) or an Aeltestenrat (Council of Elders). Many German allies, such as Slovakia, established similar institutions. The objective in establishing the councils was to have a tool by which to control the Jews, isolate them from the outside world, and implement various decrees. In general, the authorities tried to pack the councils with recognized prewar Jewish leaders and respected public figures. The councils were tragically torn between their desire to meet the Jews' needs and the harsh demands of the authorities.

Jewish councils attempted to adopt various policies to help their Jews, from active support for underground groups and armed resistance to nearly total cooperation with the authorities in carrying out their policies, in the hope thereby of preventing measures worse than those already applied. With the coming of the mass deportations and the sense among many Jewish leaders that they would be murderous, the issue of obeying or disobeying Nazi commands assumed a much greater significance. The chairman of the Warsaw Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide rather than give into Nazi demands that he provide them with Jews for deportation. In Lodz, the chairman of the Judenrat, Mordechai Haim Rumkowski, chose to continue obeying Nazi demands. Hoping to save at least part of the ghetto population, primarily workers who he believed had a better chance of being spared, he provided lists of Jews for the Nazis and even pleaded with mothers to give up their small children. In contrast to the situation in Lodz, in the small ghetto of Tulin the Judenrat planned and attempted armed resistance and mass escape - although with little success.

Because of their diversity, it is extremely hard to characterize the behavior of Jewish leaders under the Nazis in general terms. In the end, regardless of the policies of a given council, it was the German authorities who were in control and who determined the fate of the Jewish communities.

Who are some of the best known Jewish leaders during the Holocaust, and what did they accomplish?

Rabbi Leo Baeck and Dr. Otto Hirsch - Leaders of German Jewry during the Nazi years. Their leadership helped to unite and sustain German Jewry in the face of the regime's onslaught. Baeck and Hirsch gave up opportunities to emigrate in order to stay with the community. Hirsch paid for this with his life in 1941; Baeck managed to survive the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Adam Czerniakow - Chairman of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat. Czerniakow, an engineer by profession and a prewar leader of the second rank, assumed the chairmanship of the Warsaw ghetto after many of the first rank of leaders fled the German invasion of Poland. Responsible for the administration of the largest ghetto in occupied Europe, Czerniakow earned a reputation for fairness and wise leadership in an extremely difficult situation. When the Nazis asked him to provide lists of Jews for deportation in July 1942, he committed suicide rather than comply with their demand.

Mordechai Haim Rumkowski - Head of the Judenrat in the Lodz ghetto, 1939-44. He was an authoritarian leader who advocated a "salvation through work" policy, in which as many Jews as possible would work in industries for the Germans and thus assure their survival. At the end of July 1944, the remaining Jews in the ghetto - 65,000 out of 204,000 - were deported to Auschwitz.

Mordechai Anielewicz - A leader of the Hashomer HaTza'ir Zionist youth movement in Warsaw, who became an underground leader in the ghetto. He commanded the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in which he fell on May 8, 1943.

Tuvia Bielski - A Jewish partisan leader in the forests of Belorussia, Bielski set up a "family camp" in the forest for Jews who had escaped the Germans. Despite the difficulty of protecting a large group of civilians of all ages, and pressure from the Soviet partisan movement to disband the camp, he stubbornly continued to protect it. His group ultimately included some 1,200 people, most of whom survived.

Emmanuel Ringelblum - A Polish Jewish historian and social-welfare activist in the Warsaw ghetto, he created an underground archive code-named Oneg Shabbat, to which many people contributed and whose goal it was to record what was happening in Warsaw and elsewhere. He was murdered in 1944, but much of his archive was retrieved from the rubble of Warsaw after the war.

Robert Gamzon - A leader of the French Jewish Scouts who became an underground commander during the German occupation, he organized the establishment of many children's homes, and smuggled many youngsters to safety by having them delivered to neutral countries or into hiding among French peasants. He also led many raids against the Germans in 1943-44.

Reszo Rudolf (Israel) Kasztner - A Hungarian Zionist activist, in 1944 he negotiated with Adolf Eichmann and his associates in an attempt to halt the deportations to Auschwitz, facilitate the flight of Jews from Nazi territory, and later have the Nazis turn over their camps to the allies without further harming of the inmates. As part of the negotiations, one train carrying 1,684 Hungarian Jews was released and the passengers reached Switzerland. Kasztner was later accused of collaboration with the Nazis. Assassinated in Tel Aviv in 1957, he remains a controversial figure to this day.

How did the Jews resist the Nazis' murderous assault?

In the context of the Nazi policy of the systematic mass murder of all Jews under their control, Jewish resistance to their assault took many forms. The very acts of trying to stay alive and to maintain at least a remnant of human dignity constituted resistance to the Nazi effort to dehumanize and ultimately annihilate the Jews. Jews, on the personal, familial, and community levels, strove to sustain themselves both physically and emotionally in the face of the Nazi machinery of murder.

In many ghettos the Jewish councils (Judenraete) and various underground communal organizations did their utmost to distribute food and medicines, and to supply other essential needs to the suffering masses. In many places they organized cultural, educational, and religious activities, which were expressions of the still-vital human spirit of the ghetto inhabitants. The act of providing work took on great importance in many places, both for its practical day-to-day aspects and because in several ghettos, proving the value of Jewish labor evolved into a strategy for safeguarding as many as possible from the Nazis. In some localities, attempts were made to document the ever-deepening suffering under the Nazis. In an organized fashion and sometimes on their own, Jews acquired false documents that identified them as Gentiles, and used them to hide and even to cross international borders.

As Jews became aware of the fact that the Nazis were out to murder them, armed underground organizations came into being. In more than 100 ghettos, groups prepared for armed resistance against the Nazis, either within the confines of the ghettos or by joining the partisans in the

surrounding forests, swamps, or mountains. Not all of the planned armed resistance against the Nazis was actually carried out. The armed uprising of the longest duration occurred during three weeks in the spring of 1943 in the Warsaw ghetto. Other armed actions took place in Bialystok, Czestochowa, and Krakow, to name a few of the larger ghettos.

Some Jews escaped from ghettos that were relatively near to forests, mountains, or swamps, areas more suitable for hiding and for partisan activities. This was the case in Vilna, Kovno, and Minsk, as well as in many smaller ghettos. Not only did men and women of fighting age flee, but some older people and children escaped in a desperate attempt to stay alive. Facing the elements, hunger, disease, an often-hostile local population, Nazi hunts for Jews, and partisans who despised both Nazis and Jews, it is not surprising that in at least one area, the Parczew forest, only four percent of the Jews who escaped to there lived to see the liberation. Nevertheless, Jewish partisan leaders did their best to provide for non-combatants, establishing what came to be known as “family camps” for them.

In several Nazi camps – despite their brutal regimes – Jews also engaged in armed uprisings. In three of the extermination camps – Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz-Birkenau – Jewish prisoners, in some cases along with other inmates, took up arms against their oppressors. Resistance was offered by Jews in other Nazi camps as well, among them Janowska near Lvov and Minsk Masowiecki near Warsaw. Jews escaped from many camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau. Two sets of escapees from that camp in the spring of 1944 brought with them the first detailed report (the Auschwitz Protocols) that informed the Western world of the killing apparatus in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Who are the “Righteous Among the Nations?”

“Righteous Among the Nations” is the official title given to non-Jews who risked their lives in order to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. The deeds of each candidate for the title are reviewed by a special committee at Yad Vashem.

In many cases it was ordinary people who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. They chose, against all odds, to hide one or more Jews in their home or yard. Often, the rescuer would build a bunker for the Jew, who would stay there for weeks, months, or years, hardly ever seeing the sun. Food was very scarce during the war, and the rescuer would share the few pieces of bread he had with the Jews he was hiding from the Nazis.

There are also cases where groups of people, rather than individuals, rescued Jews. In the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, and France, underground resistance groups helped Jews, mainly by finding them hiding places. In Denmark, ordinary Danes transported 7,000 of the country's 8,000 Jews to Sweden in a fishing-boat operation.

In a few instances, highly placed Germans used their position to aid Jews. The most famous of these rescuers is Oskar Schindler, the German businessman who rescued thousands of Jews from the Plaszow camp by employing them in his factory.

Diplomats and civil servants have also been recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations." Some of the better-known ones are Aristides Sousa Mendes (Portugal), Sempo Sugihara (Japan), and Paul Gruninger (Switzerland), all of whom risked their careers to help Jews. But the most famous of the diplomats who rescued Jews is probably Raoul Wallenberg, from Sweden, who saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews. Despite his diplomatic immunity, he was arrested by the Soviets after the conquest of Budapest, and apparently died in the Soviet camp system.

By the year 2000, over 17,000 men and women had received the honor and title "Righteous Among the Nations." The many instances of rescue perpetuated by those designated as "Righteous Among the Nations" show that rescue was indeed possible, despite the dangerous circumstances. The recipients of the title not only saved Jewish lives, but help restore our faith in humanity.

In what condition were the Jews in Germany and Poland after the liberation? How did their rehabilitation start?

Germany - Immediately after the liberation, there were 50,000-75,000 Jews in the western part of occupied Germany. In the first few weeks after the war, hundreds of displaced-persons camps were set up provisionally in this area for people who did not want to return to their countries of residence, among them many Jews.

In August 1945, the Harrison Committee (appointed by President Truman to investigate the plight of the displaced persons) reported to the American Army on the desperate condition of Jews in the displaced-persons camps. As a result of the report, special camps with improved conditions were set up for Jews in the American occupation zone and, some time later, in the British zone as well. The Soviets, for their part, persistently refused to recognize the Jews as a distinct group and did not establish special camps for them.

The population of the displaced-persons camps in Germany, in Austria, and also in Italy kept growing, mainly because Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe continued to arrive. At the end of 1946, as a result of a mass flight of Jews from Poland (in the wake of the Kielce pogrom), there were about 15,000 Jews in the British occupation zone, 140,000 in the American occupation zone (mostly in Bavaria), and 1,500 in the French zone. In all, about 700 displaced-persons camps were active; among the best known were Landsberg, Pocking, Feldafing, and Bergen-Belsen. Notwithstanding the survivors' many problems, an intense and active lifestyle came into being in these camps - an educational and vocational system, cultural creativity, journalism, and even political life.

Most Jews in displaced-persons camps in Central Europe left the camps by 1950. Most emigrated to Israel; others emigrated to the United States, Canada, Australia, and other localities. Some stayed in Germany.

Poland - About 300,000 Polish Jews survived: 25,000 who survived in Poland, 30,000 who returned from labor camps, and the rest, who repatriated from the Soviet Union. The destruction of Jewish life, the harsh economic situation, and eruptions of anti-Semitism - peaking in the Kielce pogrom of July 1946 - caused the majority of Polish Jews to leave this country (clandestinely, for the most part), usually in the direction of Central Europe. Only 50,000 Jews chose to stay in Poland after 1946.

Under the Central Committee of the Polish Jews, an effort was made to revive various aspects of Jewish life in Poland. Most attempts to resettle Jews focused on the former German areas that had been annexed to Poland in the west.

What is Holocaust Denial?

HOLOCAUST, DENIAL OF THE: Claims that the mass extermination of the Jews by the Nazis never happened; that the number of Jewish losses has been greatly exaggerated; that the Holocaust was not systematic nor a result of an official policy; or simply that the Holocaust never took place. Clearly absurd claims of this kind have been made by Nazis, neo-Nazis, pseudo-historians called 'revisionists' and the uneducated and uninformed who do not want to or cannot believe that such a huge atrocity could actually have occurred .

Holocaust denial was attempted even before World War II ended, despite the obvious evidence at hand, The Nazis who attempted to carry out the "Final Solution"—the extermination of European Jewry—used euphemistic language like the terms "Final Solution" and "special

treatment” rather than gassing, annihilation, and killing, in order to conceal their murderous activities from the world. During the last two years of the war, *Sonderkommando* units, put to work in a secret program called *Aktion 1005*, were charged with digging up mass graves and burning the corpses. Again, the Nazis’ purpose was to hide all evidence of their activities .

In the present day, more than 50 years later, there are still some people who either completely reject the notion that the Holocaust happened or say that the Holocaust was not as widespread as it actually was.

“Revisionist historians” and other pseudo-scholars are active in much of the world. In 1978 a revisionist group in California established the Institute for Historical Review. The group, which claims to be scholarly, publishes the *Journal of Historical Review* and holds international conferences .

Revisionists often say that the Holocaust did not affect as many people as it really did. A Frenchman named Paul Rassinier, one of the original founders of the revisionist school, stated that only 500,000 to one million Jews died during World War II, mostly due to bad physical conditions and gradually—not systematically at the hands of the Nazis. Rassinier also claimed to have found the millions of Jews who disappeared from Europe, He maintains that the large number of North African Jews who moved to Israel both before and after it became a state were not always native North Africans. Rather, they were Jews who had fled Europe before and during the war .

Arthur R. Butz, an American revisionist, alleges that a mere 350,000 Jews were missing. He even goes as far as saying that some of them are not really missing, but rather just fell out of contact with their families, while only about 200,000 were executed by the Germans during the war. Butz also claims that many Jews were not killed, but rather immigrated to the United States illegally, changed their identities, and were absorbed into American life without leaving a trace of their former selves. Furthermore he maintains that the number “six million” was created out of thin air by the Zionists.

Revisionists claim that the Holocaust diaries, testimonies, and photographs are not credible and are full of lies. Some deniers say that the Nazis could not have physically cremated so many people so quickly, nor could Zyklon B gas have feasibly been used on a regular basis in one place. With the advent of the Internet, Holocaust deniers have used this medium to spread their messages of hate, Many websites, established by them or by related groups such as white supremacists, offer their skewed version of events .

Important steps have been taken to combat this misinformation. In some countries Holocaust denial has been made illegal and those who perpetuate it are punished. Many Holocaust museums have been established, and Holocaust education has been instituted in many schools—in order to ensure that, despite the efforts of deniers, it will never happen again.

Was religious Judaism the object of Nazi persecution and did the Nazis primarily harm religious Jews?

The Nazis did not view Judaism as a religion but rather as an anti-race in a mortal struggle with the Aryan race. A person's Jewishness stemmed from his biological roots, thus could not be altered by a change in religion, hence the rejection by the Nazis of all persons of Jewish origin, including those not of the Jewish faith. (Such as the progeny of mixed marriages.)

Nonetheless, from the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany (1933), their taking control of Austria (1938) and Czechoslovakia (1939), the religious life of observant Jews was also severely impaired. Religious institutions and religious symbols came to be looked upon as symbols of the hated Judaism and the kosher ritual slaughter of animals was forbidden on the grounds that it was inhumane. The main Nazi effort focused, at this stage, on the assimilated Jews and the Jewish sectors directly involved in their lives. Take, for example the night of the Nazi book-burning campaign, religious Jewish books as well as material authored by Jews and non-Jews "of the Jews" were thrown into the flames along with literature dealing with ideological issues rejected by the Nazis. Similarly, rabbis were kept under surveillance just as were other public leaders. The most significant assault on the religious life occurred on *Kristallnacht* wherein hundreds of synagogues all over the Reich went in flames.

In the eastern European nations, in contrast, and primarily in Poland, the Germans from the outset adhered to their concept of the traditional Jew who fit their traditional antisemitic concept and regarded as the "archetype Jew". Bearded, observant Jews with side-locks were hunted in the streets and constantly cruelly abused by the German Soldiers. There were incidents of their beards being torn out or even set on fire, others were taken to the barbers and forced to pay for having their beard shaved off. On occasion, the Germans forced the Jews to don their prayer shawls and perform some form of exercise or even forced to desecrate the sacred writings or places of worship such as their synagogues and schools, by their own hands. The rabbis, regarded as a source for the spread of Judaism, thus became targets for the Nazis abuse - many were murdered or became simply objects of violent abuse.

Surprisingly, even though the Germans regarded Judaism— its values and ideologies— as a major enemy that needed to be eradicated and though, as part of their fight against Judaism, they robbed, stole and burnt articles related to Jewish culture and art, they set aside various items which they considered symbolic of Judaism. In October 1940, Alfred Rosenberg established the Operational Staff Rosenberg (*Einsatzstab Rosenberg*), an organization that had as one of its functions, the preservation of articles of spiritual value making them available for “scientific and cultural research” - providing the framework wherein the organization collected historic Jewish scriptures and religious articles.

With the expansion of the Nazi occupation, the impact on Judaism broadened: synagogues went up in flames, Torah scrolls were desecrated and articles for traditional rituals defiled. Though, for the most part, the keeping of Jewish traditional law as such was not directly forbidden, and to a large extent Nazi legislation harmed ability of the Jews to maintain their normal religious lifestyle. Take, for example, forbidding the assembly of ten Jews - precluded a prayer quorum (*Minyan*) - the lack of food - made it difficult to keep kosher and the forced labor cancelled the option to keep the Sabbath. Furthermore, the circumstances under the Nazi regime permitted many to vent their popular antisemitic traditions, already widespread over Europe. The Jewish religion itself was not persecuted systematically as such, nevertheless religious life under the Nazi occupation became unbearably difficult and often, both the religious and secular Jews became the focus of Nazi persecution.

Did the Rabbis desert their communities during the Holocaust and, in general, how did the community leadership respond?

This issue is a result of the ideological polemics in the wake of the Shoah. From a historical perspective, the reactions of the various rabbis, throughout the Holocaust, were not uniform and, as in other disciplines, it is necessary to examine each case on its own, evaluating the reactions of the rabbis from within the context of their own circumstances and reality. Rabbis and religious representatives made up a significant part of the leadership within the European Jewish community prior to the war, and the assessment of their deeds needs to be judged against the rest of the Jewish community leadership during the Holocaust years. Their own conduct and guiding principles to which they adhered were influenced by ideological elements that also effected their concepts regarding Nazi regime. It is important to emphasize that no-one anticipated the subsequent final mass extermination.

It is also of significance that the community rabbis were viewed, not only as political leaders, but rather first and foremost as spiritual leaders, and

their actions, as did their sermons, sustained sometimes hidden as well as clear directive elements that were conveyed to their congregations and to the general public. There were those rabbis who maintained their authority by merit of their ordination from the Jewish congregations and there were those who simply by right of their own personality or spirituality acquired such roles. The rabbis' conduct throughout the Holocaust, as well as the expectations of the Jewish community, depended directly on their manner of leadership both religiously and socially.

With the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, and their takeover of the neighboring countries over the following years, the leadership of the Jewish community sensed the impending menace. Many of the Jewish spiritual, ideological and community leaders in Europe - rabbis, political party leaders and heads of the youth movements - sensed that their earlier public activities would eventually endanger them, on the assumption that the Nazi government would strike first at public figures who, prior to the war, had openly expressed their anti-Nazi views. There were also those who were of the opinion that the disturbances would not persist for long and that their own public activities on behalf of the community would be more effective from without the borders of the Nazi occupation. As a result, many public leaders, among them also the religious leaders, took advantage during the first days, while escape was still possible, to flee the areas of the Nazi occupation - especially in the first two months of the occupation of Poland - leaving their communities behind. Thus, for example, in the first two months of the occupation of Poland the prominent Rabbi of Gur, Samuel Zygelbojm of the Socialist Bund party and Menahem Begin, among the prominent activists among the young Zionist Revisionists, fled the area.

The public leaders, among them many rabbis who had chosen to remain with their communities, were executed during the first days of the occupation. Others took upon themselves, at later stages in the war, official leadership roles within the *Judenrate* and its departments or joined in the activities of non-official Jewish organizations. Many rabbis regarded providing social assistance as an important role and participated in setting up kosher public kitchens and assisting refugees, sick people and children.

Among the rabbis who chose to remain with their congregations was rabbi Joseph Zvi Carlebach of Germany who, despite being under constant observation by the Gestapo and despite being beaten by the mobs during the *Kristallnacht* riots, chose not to take advantage of the means at his disposal and leave, thus his actions as well as his exceptional personality proved to be a spiritual help to many. Rabbi

Carlebach continued his public religious duties also after being deported to the east. He was murdered by the Nazis in March 1942; the rabbi Leo Baeck, leader for liberal Judaism in Germany also remained in Germany. Elected as president of the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden* in Germany. (Reich Association of the Jews in Germany) - at its inception in 1933 and remained in this role till its eradication in 1943. He regarded his primary role as maintaining unity among German Jews and present a united front to the outside. Even upon his deportation to Theresienstadt he continued his public activities. After becoming aware of the fate of those deported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, Baeck kept the information secret and at the end of the war there were those who sharply criticized his judgment; the rabbi of Piaseczna was one of the outstanding young Hassidic leaders in Poland between the two world wars. He too remained with his Hassidic followers. During the war, the rabbi stayed in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he continued to conduct the '*tisch*' [Hassidic table] and give sermons encouraging his followers. The rabbi of Piaseczna was murdered towards the end of 1943. Naturally, there were rabbis who chose to react in a different fashion, some of them, as a result, receiving harsh criticism. For instance, throughout the war and during the post-war period sharp accusations concerning the reaction of rabbi of Belz who fled Poland for Hungary in 1943. The rabbi gave several speeches encouraging and calming the Jews of Hungary, however, following the occupation of Hungary in March 1944, he fled and survived while most of those to whom he had preached perished; a unique episode is the rescue of the Lithuanian yeshivas, their rabbis and pupils. The Mir yeshiva, and similarly several other yeshivas, succeeded in escaping in an organized manner, through independent Lithuania, Russia, Japan and China to Shanghai - and thus were saved from the terror of the Nazi occupation.

In general, despite the undermining of their official rabbinical status during the war, many of the Jews in the ghetto - including the leadership in the ghetto - continued to regard them as the authority on issues concerning traditional and Jewish law. Many Jews sought their dwellings, not only in order to participate in the prayers but also to listen to the discussions and sermons, and in some instances Jews, distanced from religion, turned to the rabbis for comfort and encouragement. Even the leaders of the *Judenrate* sought their advice and often included them in their meetings and in making paramount decisions. Overall, similar to the reactions of other public leaders, the behavior of the rabbis or traditional Jews was essentially based on personal considerations with most responding to their own personal reality and sense of public mission.

To what extent did Jews hold to traditional law throughout the Holocaust?

From the beginning of the modern era, the Jewish people have undergone a transformation and the enlightening and secularizing processes have left their mark. Among the Jews of Europe sprung new religious trends that related to the obligation observe the religious laws in a different manner, while there were also many who stopped observing many practical aspects of the law. As a result, even prior to the war, not all of European Judaism adhered, necessarily, to traditional Jewish law. Throughout the period of Nazi rule, the religious Jews endeavored to continue keeping the traditional law, however, with the deteriorating circumstances, maintaining a form of religious lifestyle became a major daily struggle.

During the first years following Hitler's rise to power, maintaining a religious lifestyle in Nazi Germany remained reasonably possible, both in the public sphere and in the home. Nevertheless, difficulties arose regarding issues such as keeping kosher, gathering a quorum and the like. With increasing legislation and control of the Jewish community, however, by the end of the 1930's and early 40's, any form of Jewish public life became extremely perilous. Likewise, with the Nazi invasion of other countries, community life in those areas became extremely difficult as did the public observance of traditional law which, in some places, almost completely disappeared. Only with this reality in mind can one evaluate religious life throughout the era of the Holocaust.

With the collapse of community life and undermining of the family structure, the religious lifestyle underwent a change. Those who persevered in keeping the traditional law attempted to maintain the few remaining expressions of the religious realm: kosher slaughter of animals, family purity, circumcision, keeping of the Sabbath, Torah study, keeping of annual religious holidays demanded devotion and resource.

In some ghettos in Poland, for example, over a period of time public prayer was forbidden. Nevertheless, even then a quorum would continue to meet though in private homes. On festivals and on various other occasions, prayers were said with a large gathering even though assembling without permission was considered a crime, being absolutely forbidden. Harsh limitations were imposed in other aspects of religious life. In the Warsaw Ghetto, for example, the kosher slaughter of animals was forbidden, even so, pious Jews found ways of smuggling kosher meat into the ghetto. Nonetheless, in lieu of the starving conditions, many Jews, among them religious traditionalists, expressed joy at any nourishment that reached their mouths without questioning its source. In

some places, the *Judenrate* attempted to find ways to maintain religious activities with the approval of the rabbis.

Rabbinic authorities on the Jewish Law attempted to cope with this unique situation of a religious person in war conditions. The rabbis declared the situation as life threatening, thus relinquishing adherents from many religious obligations. Take for example those, learned in the Torah who permitted the eating of non-kosher food or compelled the public to work on Jewish holidays in order to prevent the endangerment of lives under the command to “Thou shalt live by them” that they should not die. Nonetheless, there were those righteous individuals who acted in opposition to these rulings choosing rather to sacrifice their lives observing ‘to be heedful of a light precept as of a weighty one’. The majority of religious Jews attempted to observe those same laws that did not, by their observance, place them in mortal danger. As to their religious faith, there were those who, due to the difficult circumstances chose to halt their religious practices, remaining, however, true to their beliefs. Concurringly there was, in many instances, a weakening of faith, a direct defiance of religious institutions and religious personalities and even, in some cases, an outright declaration of profanity against God by those previously traditionally religious. Occasionally, in contrast, Jews from the secular bank would draw closer to their Jewish religious origins as a result of the difficulties.

As in all other spiritual activities, maintaining a religious lifestyle throughout the war, required great spiritual strength and in nearly every place there were Jews who persisted, at the risk of endangering themselves, to uphold Jewish precepts. Despite the compromise within the public sphere and that significant aspects of religious life had been severely damaged, many religious Jews continued to keep traditional law to the extent that conditions permitted.

Did the Holocaust cause a questioning of faith among the Jews?

Thoughts regarding the role of God in history, personal protection and the general question of the suffering righteous, accompanied the faithful from the days of the Bible, however the systematic murder of European Jews throughout the Holocaust served to intensify these issues.

Nevertheless, one must distinguish between the Jews dealing with issues of faith throughout the Holocaust era as opposed to the variety of theological issues raised by the Holocaust in the post-war era. A major part of contemporary dialogue on “faith in lieu of the Holocaust” reflects the views and life of the individual speakers - approaching the subject with the Holocaust being an event of the past and containing a certain retrospective view, as opposed to the reality during the war period.

Many Jews who had lived under the Nazi occupation, sought for a rationale for the horrifying events they had experienced, and those adherers to Jewish law sought purpose in their suffering. The questioning in itself and demand for a rationale for the persecution reveals the state of bewilderment and confusion that had pervaded the whole Jewish community throughout the period.

Among the few rabbis who left behind written well-structured proofs which attempt to confront the questions of faith and protection was the rabbi Kalonymus Kalamish Shapira - the master and teacher of Piaseczna. His writings include a collection of messages given in the Warsaw Ghetto on Sabbaths and holidays between the years 1940 and 1942, wherein the outstanding element is the honest search for a meaning for this verdict. In his writings the rabbi from Piaseczna, develops the thought that God is revealed through pain, in the suffering within the ghetto and thus among the Jews themselves. By his reasoning, suffering facilitated the ability to catch "rays of God" by means of a particular attitude toward suffering or the whole of Israel. He held the view that drawing near to God required the pain of the individual to extend to the pain of all and unite with the suffering masses without remaining apathetic. He depicted God as suffering with his people "for in all their suffering He suffers". The rabbi from Piaseczna was apparently murdered by the Nazis towards the end of 1943 and his sermons were found after the war in the Oneg Shabbat clandestine archives.

Another response to the questions concerning faith can be found in the writings of rabbi Shimon Huberband. At the outbreak of the war rabbi Huberband lost his wife and his only son then, after many hardships, finally arrived at the Warsaw Ghetto. In Warsaw, as a friend of Dr. Emanuel Ringelblums, he took an active part in the aid services and functioned in a central role in the underground publishing - the "Oneg Shabbat" clandestine archives. His compositions, characterized by his penetrating and non-compromising insights, have been compiled in the book "Martyrdom" (*Kiddush Hashem*) and deal with the issue of the Jewish faith during the war era. Rabbi Shimon Huberband was sent to Treblinka in one of the *Aktions* during the mass deportation of the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942, where he was murdered. Introspective queries regarding the role of God can also be found in many diaries - among them the diaries of the youth. Take for example, in the writings of Moshe Flinker, published in the book 'Young Moshe's diary', one finds expression of the struggle in the soul of the believing youth. Further echoes concerning issues regarding faith and protection, the meaning of suffering, the nature of man and reasons for his existence, all appear in compositions and testimonies from the period of the Holocaust as well as from the "Questions and Answers" directed at the rabbis.

In the lieu of the awful reality, there were those who sought to justify the judgment never doubting the divine providence. Others viewed what was happening as a punishment for sins or for the modern secularization among the Jewish people. Then there were those who endeavored to understand the events, concluding that it was beyond their ability to comprehend or provide an explanation; parts of the Jewish community turned heretical in face of the reality of the cruelty and terrible violence and then there were those who cursed the heavens. Surprisingly there were also examples of non-Jewish individuals who chose to convert to Judaism during this time.

In summary, among the Jews living under the Nazi occupation, the events of the Holocaust raised questions concerning faith that resulted in a variety of responses. The Holocaust caused some Jews to abandon their faith, while for others the increased persecution only strengthened their faith in God.