

Project Nuremberg
Friday, April 29 at 8:30 AM
Lawyers Breakfast

I carry in my purse a list of Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary words. I have a fantasy that one day my car will breakdown and I'll be stuck for hours waiting somewhere and have time to memorize these 100 or so hebrew words and the aramaic vocabulary list - not that a congregant is stopping me in hallway and asking the aramaic word for maiden but for my own interest. I loved rabbinical school - but the day to day duties of the rabbinate make it hard to expand the knowledge and I have barely scratched the surface. I wonder if it is the same for lawyers - You went to law school, studied, passed the bar - but are there areas you would have loved to learn more about but have no time because you are busy? The intent of today is for you to take an hour - once a year - and learn - and I would argue this hour and this lesson is the most important - has the most relevance - is the most meaningful to you as lawyers because it is a reminder what law can do to make the world a better place. It is a reminder what law can do to take what is the greatest evil and hold it accountable. What law can do to attempt to set precedents so that never again is not just heard about the Holocaust but about modern day genocides as well. And more than the legal language of these texts - these documents - is the man who enabled it to happen. One man - Robert Jackson - Supreme Court Justice - became a lawyer at a time when one didn't need to go to college let alone law school to practice. And he rose to the Supreme Court and then went to Europe to do the unimaginable and impossible. Try the Nazis.

The only way I can even begin to explain the essence of what Robert Jackson tried to do is with a metaphor from my profession. When a family has a loss, G-d forbid, often the family feels pulled in different directions, experiencing different emotions and having different worries and concerns and heartbreak. Then the rabbi says, "Come sit with me and together tell me about that person and we create an order and a ceremony out of that chaos." Robert Jackson came into a Europe of utter grief and destruction a million times over but he, in the only way he knew how as a lawyer, to create a system, an order, a procedure, a trial out of that chaos. And he was remembered for good. Who he was as a person was tied up in the precedents he created - a moral and ethical man to the nth degree. And so the message of today - Law matters and you as lawyers matter in making a difference -

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the end of the Nuremberg trials and the 50th anniversary of Eichmann's trial in Israel, where Eichmann was tried after he was caught. Deborah Lipstadt, author of a new book on the Eichmann trial, had a friend ask her, "What do you know now that you did not know before you began your work?" What's the bottom line?"

After thinking about the anti-Semitism, which is the foundation stone of denial and the refusal she found the bottom line quite clear. Had the world taken Nazi anti-Semitism more seriously from the outset of the rise of the Third Reich the subsequent tragedy might have been quite different.

As she says, "In the 1930s and 1940s, of course, observers—and the potential victims—could not fathom where Hitler and his cohorts' anti-Semitism might lead.

They could, in retrospect, legitimately claim ignorance. Today we do not have that luxury.” ([Tablet Magazine Online](#), 3/24/2011)

You as lawyers have the wealth of knowledge and the mindset to understand how the unfathomable was tried and brought to justice.

Robert Jackson’s opening statement began with these words “The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated. That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason.”

This attorney, who came from small town origins with no college or law school to become a Supreme Court Justice and then the head of the Nuremberg trials considered his work at Nuremberg a privilege. I hope on this day, you the attorneys here, see that time you have taken to reflect on what this trial means to your life as lawyers, is seen as a privilege too. It is certainly a privilege to have you here.