

## “Like Sheep To The Slaughter”?

Excerpt from interview with Professor Yehuda Bauer

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Interviewer: Amos Goldberg

Q- You have analyzed the metaphor of Jews going “like sheep to the slaughter.” You have said that those who use it are identifying, even unconsciously, with the killers, who related to the victims as animals. How would you refer to the very instances in which the victims applied this term, and others of its ilk, to themselves? And wouldn't you apply the same analysis to their use of this metaphor? Does this mean that they internalized, in a way, the terminology imposed on them by the perpetrators?

B- One has to differentiate very clearly between terms that were used by the victims during the Holocaust itself, and the use of the same terms afterwards. When you refer to the expression “like sheep to the slaughter” (used by Abba Kovner in his famous pamphlet of December 13, 1941 / January 1, 1942), it was a means of causing people to rebel. He meant “Let us not be like sheep, let us not go to slaughter.” But he didn't see himself or the others as sheep. He said that by using that metaphor, he tried to cause a rebellion against the very use of that term. I think that was the purpose of using such metaphors during the Holocaust. When people used them after the Holocaust, it was something quite different, and very objectionable. Jews were not sheep. Jews were Jews, Jews were human beings; they were led not to slaughter, but to being murdered, which is something quite different. Therefore, I don't think that we, today, should use a term that was used during the Holocaust with quite a different connotation.

In the diaries of Chaim Kaplan or Calel Perechodnik, these authors used animalistic terms to describe themselves. These instances show some kind of despair in a sense of inhumanity, or identifying with the metaphor that the

killer put on them. How can we explain this? Doesn't it show that something very central and fundamental broke in their spirits?

The use in some of the Holocaust diaries of metaphors comparing themselves to animals has to be understood from their perspective. Yes, I think it does express a feeling of despair. I think it is a kind of a self-accusation, but it is done because one objects to it. Even when someone doesn't participate in an armed rebellion, or any kind of rebellion, he or she says: "No, I mustn't be like that. I am like that, but I shouldn't be, because I am not an animal. I don't want to accept what the others tell me that I am. I record the fact that they call me that, or that they relate to me like that, but I don't accept it." They used these terms because they rejected the notion, and this is the sub-text of the expressions like the ones that Chaim Kaplan uses in his diary.

**Source: The Multimedia CD 'Eclipse of Humanity', Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2000.**