

As I have explained previously, on Shabbat (Friday sundown to Saturday sundown), in synagogue, when we Jews gather to meet and pray, we read a weekly portion from the *Torah* (the first five books of Moses).

The portion (in Hebrew 'parashah'), which will be read this Shabbat, is called 'Yitro' after its opening words, which mean 'And Jethro heard' and refer to *Shemot* ('Names') or Exodus [18:1-20:23](#).

*Shemot* or Exodus is the second book of the Hebrew Bible. It recounts the exile, slavery and liberation of the Children of Israel in Egypt.

*Yitro* is the Hebrew name of Jethro, the priest of Midian, who was also the father-in-law of Moses, the great Jewish prophet and liberator. This parashah refers to the giving of the Ten Commandments.

It also happens to be the portion that I recited in Hebrew in synagogue to mark my bar mitzvah -- the Jewish ceremony that marks a boy's transition into manhood aged thirteen -- thirty-six years ago.

I recalled that it snowed that day and when the rabbi discussed the Ten Commandments in his sermon, he came to the injunction against adultery and said, 'There is time for that yet'.

On a serious note, though, the parshah refers twice to 'burnt offerings', that is, the sacrifice of an animal wholly consumed by fire. In Hebrew, the word is *olah*, provides the root for the Greek word Holocaust. Some Catholic bibles continue to use the word Holocaust when referring to a burnt offering.

Today, the term Holocaust is used to refer to the systematic murder of six million Jewish men, women and children during the Second World War by the Nazis and their allies for no other reason than they were Jewish.

Last week, on 27 January, was the annual Holocaust Memorial Day, which commemorates the liberation of Auschwitz – the largest death camp built by the Nazis for one simple purpose: to exterminate Jews and others on an industrial scale. We marked the day by hearing a lecture by Gabriel Stein whose family survived the Holocaust by sheer good luck.

Although the events of the Holocaust might be over 76 years old now, we will do well to remember them in today's heated context, when antisemitism and other forms of hatred are so evident all around the globe and especially with debates over immigration and treatment of strangers in our own country.