

**SPEECH FOR THE PRINCE OF WALES:
DINNER TO CELEBRATE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BOARD
OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS,
GUILDHALL, 5TH JULY 2011**

President of the Board of Deputies,
Chief Rabbi,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fifty-five years ago as Sir Winston Churchill concluded a speech here at the Guildhall, he is reputed to have turned to my Mother, who was to speak after him, and provided one of those examples of what happens when the microphone has inadvertently been left on... The entire gathering heard him say: "Poor you, it's your turn now!".

Well, now it is *my* turn, and I cannot tell you how touched and delighted my wife and I have been by the warmth of your welcome this evening, nor by the honour you do me in asking me to speak at this immensely important and significant event to mark the 250th anniversary of the Board of Deputies.

If you trace a time line through a quarter of a millennium you cannot help but feel the weight of history on your shoulders. Few settings can bear that weight more robustly than the Guildhall, itself inextricably linked with the history of our British Jewish community - though not always with happy outcomes. Indeed this very room was the scene - more than 430 years ago - of the trial of Rodrigo Lopes, the Jewish-born doctor of Queen Elizabeth I. History recalls that Lopes was falsely

accused by those who were jealous of his influence at Court. He was tried here in this hall and sentenced to death. The Queen tried to avert his execution, but in vain. She was, though, able to achieve something almost unheard of after a treason trial. She gave the Lopes' family the right to retain their property.

Later reigns were to see Jews welcomed to Britain from many lands: from Spain and Holland, Germany, the Balkans and Romania, from Poland and the Baltic States, from Egypt, Yemen and Morocco, from Iran, Iraq and Bahrain and from South Africa and Zimbabwe. Incidentally, some time ago I met a family of British Jews of Lithuanian origin who told me how in about 1900 their forbears had bought tickets for New York, so were most surprised to be disembarked in Ireland "Surely we can't be in New York?" they said. "No, you bought tickets to New Cork," came the reply. They had been tricked – but many of them ended up here in England. And that incredibly diverse heritage has brought a deep and vibrant contribution from British Jews to every sphere of British life: in the arts, sciences and medicine, in trade and commerce. British Jews play an immensely significant part in local and national government, in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords – where, if I may say so, the Chief Rabbi always provides a wise and steadying voice. The whole of British society has also benefitted from a great deal of Jewish philanthropy, for which so many have cause to be deeply grateful.

If there is anything to regret in all this, it is that the talents and contributions of our Jewish community are not – to my mind, at any rate – sufficiently well known by the public at large. They are certainly not

sufficiently celebrated and that is why my wife and I wanted to come here this evening – to recognize excellence and celebrate it with you.

Of course, the Jewish contribution to our country is nothing new. The first Jewish knight, created by Queen Anne, was Sir Solomon de Medina. It was Sir Solomon who provided the supplies, including the food, that enabled the British Army under the Duke of Marlborough to win the decisive Battle of Blenheim – a vital turning point in the War of Spanish Succession and a swift kick in the shins to Louis XIV's aspirations. The great Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, was baptized as a child, but he always regarded himself proudly as a Jew – and I loved the way he described himself to Queen Victoria as: “The blank page between the Old and the New Testaments!” I also loved his wonderful response to the insulting taunts of a Member of Parliament: “Yes, I am a Jew, but when the ancestors of The Right Honourable Gentleman were living as savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon!”

Less militaristic than Sir Solomon, but no less effective, was Sir Moses Montefiore who was raised to the Baronetcy by my great-great-great grandmother, Queen Victoria. Interestingly, when she was a young girl, and her mother, The Duchess of Kent, used to take her down to Ramsgate, Sir Moses had a special key cut to give her access to his gardens nearby. Of course, you will know better than me, Ladies and Gentlemen, that Sir Moses was one of Vivian Wineman's most distinguished predecessors as President of the Board of Deputies. I can only say that Vivian will need a very great deal of energy if he is to beat Sir Moses' incredible record of thirty-nine years in the post! Of course, history remembers Sir Moses particularly for his daring intercession with

the Tsar of Russia and the Sultan of Turkey to protect Jews in their dominions, not to mention similar exploits in Rome, Morocco and Romania – and seven trips to Jerusalem. He so loved Jerusalem that he adopted it on his family crest and wrote it on all his belongings including his bed! He took a bit of Britain to Jerusalem – a Kentish windmill that still stands there, known as the Montefiore windmill – and a bit of Jerusalem to Britain: he is buried in Jerusalem soil, in Ramsgate, in an exact replica of Rachel's Tomb not far from Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Indeed, his appetite for travel – and by horse-drawn carriage at that! – seems to have been utterly unquenchable. That alone must have nearly killed him; though not as quickly as some may have thought.... He shares with Mark Twain the distinction of having read his own obituary, published a little precipitously by a local editor. Like Twain, his response was pithy and memorable: “Thank God to have been able to hear of the rumour and to read an account of the same with my own eyes, without using spectacles!”

Like Sir Moses, not only do I have some idea of the pleasures – if not the rigours! – of horse-drawn carriages, but I have also managed to learn a little bit at first hand about Jewish communities around the world, about the problems they face, and then trying in a small way to make a bit of a difference for them. In 2002 I was deeply touched by a particular meeting I had with Holocaust survivors in Krakow. You will not need me to recall the long shadows that traverse that particular community, but what struck me – forcibly – was that, despite the passage of time since the Second World War, they still had nowhere to meet socially; to come together as a community to share stories and to pass wisdom between the generations. Well, not for nothing is my motto – “Ich Dien” (“I serve”) – with, in parenthesis, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained!” I decided

immediately to do what I could to encourage the building of a Jewish Community Centre, right in the heart of Krakow next to the Synagogue. I cannot tell you, therefore, how proud my wife and I were when, six years later, we went back to Krakow (with the kind donors I had managed to corner!) to open that Jewish community centre, fixing a Mezuzah to the entrance. And when we met again some of those same survivors. Today 1,000 Jewish and non-Jewish community members use the facilities for their social, educational and religious programmes.

Of course, this would not have been possible without the work of an organization for which I have the highest regard and respect – and, dare I say it, the greatest affection: World Jewish Relief. It is an organization that I have come to know rather well over the years. The work it does for the Jewish community worldwide is worthy of the highest praise. World Jewish Relief has been working its incredible magic since that fateful year, 1933, when it helped those escaping from Nazi persecution to rebuild their lives in Britain.

It was in 1933 that my father, then at school in Germany for a year, helped an older schoolboy who had been identified as Jew by the other boys and had been set upon and had his hair cut off. I shall always be proud of my father's act of compassion. Ten years later, in 1943, when the Greek capital, Athens, was occupied during the Second World War, my father's mother – my grandmother – Princess Alice, saved a Jewish family by taking them into her home and hiding them. For many years afterwards, my grandmother told no-one about what she had done. Not even her family! She was quite a formidable lady and when the Gestapo began to suspect her, she simply pointed out that she was deaf and could not understand their questions! Interestingly at the end of her life she

wanted to be buried in Jerusalem, next to the aunt she adored, The Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia, who had been martyred by the Bolsheviks by being thrown down a Siberian mineshaft. I've never forgotten how when her daughters and others used to say "how on earth are we going to come and visit your grave?", she'd say, "that's alright, there's a very good bus service from Athens."

My grandmother's story – and her courage – were one of the reasons that I wanted to be at the Kindertransport reunion in November 2008, to mark the seventieth anniversary of the British Government's decision to bring those children to Britain. I met 500 of the 10,000 Jewish children brought to Britain in the months before the outbreak of the Second World War. It was, in every sense, a heroic decision by our Government and one which echoes through history as an example of compassion – of, simply, "doing the right thing." As I told those gathered there that afternoon at the Jewish Free School, I have tried my whole life to understand and reflect upon what they had to endure and to try to draw lessons from it.

If I may, Ladies and Gentlemen, I just want to recall and recognize the fact that in two World Wars British Jews made an outstanding contribution to the defence of our values and of our liberty, on land, at sea and in the air. Many thousands were killed in action, on all the War fronts. Jews also volunteered to be parachuted behind enemy lines, and to serve on the most dangerous of missions. I know that my great uncle, Lord Mountbatten, was enormously proud of the Jewish airman, RAF Flight Sergeant Jack Nissenthall, a radar specialist. He knew that he would have to be shot by his own men if he was about to be captured, but he went ashore at Dieppe in 1942 to examine a crucial German radar station on the cliff top.

It is fashionable to say that “modern Britain” is a patchwork of many different faiths and many different communities. That is certainly true, but I have always thought it a little misleading to suggest that it was ever any different! When our country has drawn strength from its diversity it has been literally world-beating. It is only when we have allowed difference to gnaw away at us or when we have tried to extinguish difference, as in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, that we have been weakened at home and abroad. So the importance of “Unity through Diversity” cannot be overstated. We do not all share the same Faith, but we should not forget that we are linked by Faith itself, sustaining and enriching our national life. In the various charitable initiatives I have tried to inspire or champion over the years, I have believed passionately that each faith, with its rich ethical and spiritual base, has a crucial part to play in promoting the harmonious tolerance that is the bedrock of our society. Each faith, of course, draws on a profound belief in the sanctity of human life. I recall your own Jewish exhortation in the Book of Deuteronomy: ‘Choose life!’ I am also reminded of the welcome the Patriarch Abraham gave, so many thousands of years ago, to three strangers, running to meet them, and inviting them to rest at his home and strengthen themselves with his food. Kindness was the way of Abraham; the path, according to your fine tradition, to true spirituality.

Since as long ago as 1784 (and almost certainly earlier), I know that British Jews have been praying in their synagogue services for the well-being of the Royal Family. In that year they prayed for the health and safety of ‘our most gracious Sovereign Lord, King George the Fourth and all the Royal Family.’ Today, my entire family is deeply touched

that a prayer for the Royal Family remains an integral part of the synagogue service.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I can think of no better way of concluding than to recall the words of your Ethics of the Fathers: ‘On three things does the world stand: On justice, truth, and peace.’ As you look forward to the next quarter millennium of the Board of Deputies, let that lesson guide us in all we say and all we do.

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(2216 words, approx 17 minutes)