The Holocaust: assessing responsibility and conscience

Perpetrators: Amon Goeth

The Plaszow concentration camp housed about 2,000 inmates when it opened. At its peak of operations in 1944, a staff of 636 guards oversaw 25,000 permanent inmates, and an additional 150,000 people passed through the camp in its role as a transit camp. Amon Goeth, Kommandant of the camp, personally murdered prisoners on a daily basis. His two dogs, Rolf and Ralf, were trained to tear inmates to death. He shot people from his window of his office if they appeared to be moving too slowly or resting in the yard. He shot to death a Jewish cook because the soup was too hot.

As a survivor I can tell you that we are all traumatized people. Never would I, never, believe that any human being would be capable of such horror, of such atrocities. When we saw him from a distance, everybody was hiding, in latrines, wherever they could hide. I can't tell you how people feared him. —Helen Jonas-Rosenzweig

Poldek Pfefferberg, another Schindlerjude (Schindler Jew), said: "When you saw Goeth, you saw death."

Goeth believed if one member of a work team escaped or committed some infraction, the entire team must be punished. On one occasion he ordered every second member of a work detail should be shot because one of the party had escaped. On another occasion he personally shot every fifth member of a crew because one had not returned to the camp. The main execution site at Plaszów was Hujowa Góra ("Prick Hill"), a large hill that was used for mass killings and executions. Pemper testified that 8,000 to 12,000 people were murdered at Plaszów.

(Source: Wikipedia)

1. Goeth was obviously a disturbed, sadistic individual. How do you think he rose to a position of such authority?

2. The 636 guards of Plaszow were not all sick or sadistic. Why did they help to accomplish these atrocities?