Sue Lawley’s castaway is Rabbi Hugo Gryn. The castaway in Desert Island Discs this week is Rabbi Hugo Gryn. He’ll be talking to Sue Lawley about how his happy and secure childhood in Czechoslovakia was devastated by Nazism and how he survived two years in concentration camps. He’ll also be discussing how his commitment to bettering relations between people of differing faiths is rooted in his experience of persecution during the Second World War.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn was both the leading rabbinic figure of British Reform Judaism for several decades and one of the best-known and highly admired rabbis in British society. The sermons he delivered regularly throughout the entire period of his leadership as Rabbi of the West London Synagogue show that preaching was a significant component of his rabbinic role. Most of the extant texts of Gryn’s sermons are not fully written, but rather detailed outlines on cards. They suggest a communication that reached its final formulation only as the preacher faced his listeners, depending on the delivery for much of its power. Almost all are rooted in the weekly Torah reading, exploring a biblical passage in its own context before applying it to an issue of contemporary significance. Many draw not only from his wide reading but also from his own personal experience, as Holocaust survivor, young rabbi in India, community leader deeply involved in interfaith dialogue. The present article uses the extant texts to recapture something of the impact of the sermons, and concludes with one fully written text given at a public tribute to the memory of Gryn’s teacher, Rabbi Leo Baeck.