

What is Gedanken

The term “Gedanken” features in a lot of inspiration.

Hans Litten was a German lawyer who represented opponents of the Nazi's at important political trials. In May 1931 Litten summoned Hitler to a court case involving two workers stabbed by four Sturmabteilung (sometimes known as Storm Detachment or Brown Shirts) who functioned as the original para-military wing of the Nazi party in Germany. Litten spent three hours with Hitler on the stand trying to counter Hitler's insistence that the Nazi party acted only in legal ways. The experience had a lasting impact on Hitler who ensured that in the Nazi party's ascendancy, Litten was in turned without trial in Spandau prison, moving from concentration camp to camp thereafter, passing through Buchenwald until being finally sent to Dachau in 1937. On February 5th 1938 after years of interrogation and torture and a failed escape attempt Litten was found hanging in the lavatory of his barracks. Until this final gesture, Litten had attempted to stay positive and was liked and respected by his fellow prisoners for his inner strength, courage and intellect. At a

gathering of prisoners allowed by the SS in which the SS guards were in attendance Litten recited the lyrics of “Die Gedanken Sind Frei”, a song that he had learned in his youth that inspired him. One witness indicated that the SS men did not understand the significance of the lyrics.

This conscientious avatar of justice and free thought was relatively unknown until the reunification of East and West Germany where the lawyers association of Berlin adopted the name the Hans Litten Bar Association. Bi-annually a lawyer is given the Hans Litten prize awarded by the German and European Democratic Lawyers Association. In 2011 Litten's story was filmed by the BBC entitled “The man who crossed Hitler”.

The song Gedanken Sind Frei was written originally between 1810 and 1820. The original lyricist and composer is not known.

Litten's message is a simple one. Our thoughts cannot be constrained by the power of others. We must challenge for a free society.