

Archive

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(applause) The story is old, the interpretation not so old. Many legends are told in Talmudic literature about King Solomon's wisdom, riches, and extraordinary gifts. As you know, he has a special ring made for him, a ring endowed with occult powers. When he was melancholy, simply wearing the ring was enough for him to make his sadness vanish. And when he felt overcome with joy, it was enough for him to wear the ring and his sadness returned. A strange legend it is, for it makes one doubt the king's celebrated wisdom. We understand why a man who was supposed to have a thousand wives succumbing [00:01:00] to melancholy may need a ring to vanquish it. But why should a happy man with a thousand wives choose to chase away his happiness? And the answer is, a happy man has everything he needs initially, except hope. In other words, a man who has everything hopes for nothing, and hope is an essential part of the human condition. Both in medicine and psychology it has been established that just as the body cannot live without dreams, the mind or the soul cannot endure without hope.

The French poet Rimbaud understood that he had reached the end when he wrote, "I found I could extinguish all hope from my soul." Poetry of hopelessness can still conjure hope. Hope has its own architecture, its own mysterious trajectory. The whole idea of redemption is rooted [00:02:00] in the principle of anticipation of expectation. What is Messianism if not hope brought to its incandescent climax? It teaches us that God for the believer is the embodiment of hope, but even He is waiting for redemption, which means even the creator of the universe needs hope. For the religious person hope is a divine gift. Born in the most obscure realm of one's being, it blossoms only at the paradoxical moment when its absence is stronger than its presence. Hope against hope means I hope because I have no choice because I'm hopeless. For the non-believer hope represents an affirmation of man's right to impose meaning on creation and his triumph in the name of reason. Despair is human, so is its antidote. The secular person's mind has [00:03:00] power, a power equal to the religious person's soul. In pragmatic terms, hope is part of everyday life. I go to sleep hoping to wake up in the morning in the same bed. (laughter) I go to work hoping to be useful and appreciated. I meet a stranger on the road hoping to make him or her into an ally, a friend. I get married hoping to have children who will improve their world and mine. I begin a book hoping to finish

it, then to publish it (laughter), and then to be understood by the readers, if not by all the critics. On a purely ethical level, a generous and creative relation to the other implies hope in his or her future. Who knows, his or her offspring of tomorrow may bring solace and happiness to society hundreds of years from now. The death of hope is the death of all generous impulses and imaginary situations [00:04:00] in me. It is the death of the inner person in the person. Thus hope emerges as a presence that accompanies and envelopes my challenge and my comfort, my question and its answer, my desire and its fulfillment. The death of hope is for me the end of possibilities, of options, of inquiries. In other words, the death of hope is the death of change, of renewal, of redemption too.

In Ancient Greece tragedies were linked to, if not caused by the notion that the hero's fate had been sealed. Prometheus' punishment was preordained, as was Hector's death. Creon had power, but not hope. Antigone had hope, but not power. In mythology it was always too late for deaths to be vanquished, or the gods to be appeased. Antigone chose death over fear because of her hopelessness. Socrates preferred death to exile for the same reason. Seneca understood that the future of the human empire -- of the Roman Empire was hopeless [00:05:00] when he

realized that the morality of the vanquished was superior to death of the victim. At this point, faithful to our tradition may open our customary parentheses and make some preliminary remarks. Having reduced our annual encounters from four to one doesn't mean that traditions ought to be discarded, it is their nature to survive even if you no longer know why.

At this moment we usually discuss current events, some bring us back to the Bible. Think of what is happening to our nation. It is not a new phenomenon. All the charges leveled against our president we have already read them in scripture. (laughter) About Moses, poor Moses. After God *-kav'yachol*, he is the most tragic figure in the bible. Always criticized either by God, or by his people. He had to defend himself on [00:06:00] terrible accusations. They accused him of corruption, of stealing public funds maybe for campaigning (laughter), or even he was accused of committing adultery. The Talmud tells us that long lines of women would wait to be given the *mayim hameararim* (bitter waters) test. It's a test, according to the Bible, given to those women who have been accused of, you know, of adultery.

Now, there were long lines in the desert. (laughter) All were accused of having slept with Moses. (laughter) Now you tell me, isn't the Torah about the present too, not only about the past?

What was Moses's hope? The saddest and most melancholy person in scriptural history, Moses knew he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. His hope then was not a personal [00:07:00] one, his peoples' future, his peoples' safety and security constituted the texture of his own hope. His hope that the gates of the land of our ancestors would be open to their descendants.

What is our hope? Do we hope that Saddam Hussein will do *tshuva*? That he will sell his biological weapons and give the money to the Y to build another building? (laughter) Do we hope that reason will prevail? Do we hope that hatred will vanish from the Middle East? Do we hope that generosity, and compassion, and understanding will come back to a land that has been sanctified by God and his law? The law that wanted to prove to all of us that all men are equally entitled to dignity and freedom, [00:08:00] and that all Jews are good Jews, all. And no one has the right to say that another is not a good Jew. So, what do we hope? Do we hope that finally one day we will open the newspaper and Monica L. will vanish from them? That's a great hope. At this moment our hope simply is the one that some people are nourishing, anxiously maybe, or boringly waiting outside for the doors to be open, so let the doors be open. (applause) [00:09:00]

Now question of all questions, is there hope in scripture? What are the elements of that hope? Hope is one of the foundations of religion, of all religions. They all are rooted in and motivated by hope, rather than by expectation. But then hope responds not only to psychological and to metaphysical concerns, in philosophy hope represents challenge. Aristotle was the first to make a distinction between simple anticipation and Elpis (ἐλπίς), or true hope. One of Immanuel Kant's four questions men face is "What is my hope?" In religious literature Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise, it was a choice on their part.

[00:10:00] There was anything that they could have done in the garden, they could have found everything except hope. They had to leave the garden to hope to return to it. Noah's name means consolation in hope, there would be life after the floods.

Abraham left his homeland because God has promised him hope in the land of Canaan. The Israelites were deprived of hope while being imprisoned in Egypt, that's why they followed Moses into the desert. The scouts were punished because they deprived the Jews of hope. That is why the day of their return from the land of Canaan is one of the days, the darkest days, in Jewish history. The other one being the day which saw Jacob's children sell their brother into slavery.

Religious writings that appear to carry no hope were either censored or hidden by the sages who composed the canon. Job is available because of the happy end. [00:11:00] The Books of Apocrypha, like Ben Sira, *Baruch* [inaudible], remained outside the canon because they offered no hope. To the reader and the student, to read tales without hope is demoralizing. The books therefore that I have written I must say that in writing them I followed in the footsteps of my ancestors. In all of my novels there must be a way out leading to the positive resolutions. At times it took me years to find the door, only then did I hand my book to the publisher. I missed Kafka's strength. He did go to the end of despair. In *The Trial*, the gatekeeper forbids the hero of the story to enter the law. It is only at the very end, many years later, when the hero is about to die that the [00:12:00] gatekeeper tells him this gate was meant for you alone, and now I'm going to shut it for good. This is one of the most depressing stories in literature.

What about Talmudic literature? Its legends are bursting with hope which is embodied in the character and personality of the Messiah. It is the ultimate hope all creatures will be wise, all curses removed from them. There will be no sin and no punishment, no suffering, and no death. There will be no ignorance, no hate to debase society, God will no longer be a

judge, he will be only a father and a teacher, and Satan will forever remain in chains, a prisoner of his own evil ambitions. However, messianic redemption is to be preceded by apocalyptic eschatology. At that time, says a Mishna, arrogance will grow, as will drunkenness, legal authority will be dominated by apostasy with [00:13:00] no one around to object. The community house will turn into a bordello. The wisdom of scholars and writers will be repudiated. Sin-fearing people will inspire disgust with truth being absent. Old people will stand up in the presence of youngsters. At that time, said the Hasidic masters, summer will be without heat, winter without frost, the wise will have forgotten their wisdom, and the pious their fervor.

Another master expressed a similar idea in different imagery. At that time one will no longer distinguish light from what negates light, twilight from dawn, silence from speech, and speech from its content. A third rabbi said at that time there will no longer be any relation between man and his face, desire and its object, metaphor and its meaning, and people will begin hating themselves rather than their fellow men and women.

[00:14:00] But then at *aḥarit ha-yamim*, at the end of time, humankind will be saved, redeemed. In other words, eschatology itself is endowed with hope to which it is intrinsically linked,

but the *aḥarit ha-yamim* is not the enemy of hope. The enemy of hope is *tohu wa-bohu*, chaos. And we intend to elaborate on it a bit later.

What is missing in today's society as we near the end of a century of unprecedented violence? What is missing is a message that it's not too late, that the train is not running to the abyss, that catastrophe can be averted, that hope is possible, that it has a future. This is especially felt by young people. Last year and this year lecturing in Europe and in our own country, most of the students' questions dealt with this topic. More than anything they wanted from the lecturer a sense of promise, [00:15:00] an orientation of hope. For admitted, there are young men and women everywhere who claim to be part of a despairing X generation. It inherited too many broken taboos, false idols, and corrupt ideals, all theories fell apart. Many victories reduced to dust. Granted, some good things happened in the last five decades. The defeat of Nazism, the fall of Communism, the end of Colonialism in Africa and Asia, the Renaissance of Israel, of course, a Renaissance which is unprecedented in recorded history, the return of a nation, a young nation in its ancestral land. Nelson Mandela's victory over Apartheid, Andrei Sakharov's valiant struggle for human rights.

But racism is still alive, as is anti-Semitism. The idea of a European community is gaining ground. France, and Germany, Poland, and Russia will never again wage war against one another, but there are others who do [00:16:00] wage war even today. Other wars are still being fought, civil wars, ethnic wars, religious wars, ugly assassinations of innocent citizens, revolting slaughters of helpless children and women in Algeria. You read about them week after week, and nothing is being done to stop them. It's butchery. Simple butchery. We read about the villages being destroyed, and corpses mutilated savagely, and nothing is being done. And then you have the bloodbaths in Egypt occasionally. The Bosnian chapter has not been closed, nor that of Kashmir, or Cyprus. The cease-fire in Ireland is fragile at best. And in the Middle East cowardly attacks still prevent peace from being realized. Anti-Semites desecrate cemeteries in Europe and also in this country. Fanaticism is on the rise everywhere. In the world of politics as well as of religion. Will sanity ever prevail? [00:17:00]

No wonder that youngsters often become cynical, showing distrust towards authority. What are they to think of appointed or elected politicians whose indictments for corruption make headlines in Europe? If eternities ago one read about

government in exile, today one could easily read about governments in prison. And so, cynicism gains the ground deserted by hope. Closer to home, take students everywhere who come to the universities in search not only of knowledge, and a career, but also of hope, of reasons to hope. They want to believe that education is a noble enterprise, that communication is possible, that man is not alone, that words and images can come alive, that history is moving forward, that culture is an instrument of progress, that victory without shame is possible, that truth without compromise is attainable.

It's a question, how far [00:18:00] is the psychologist allowed to penetrate the consciousness, the psyche, and the memory of the patient without violating his or her right to privacy? In the field of scientific discovery are there limits, for instance, of genetic experiments, which one may not cross, not even for the sake of hope? In general, how are we to avoid turning one man's hope in another man's despair, and one peoples' happiness in another's distress? Another question, must one reach the bottom of despair to attain a splash of hope? Our perception of despairing people may at times be wrong. Terminal cancer patients can cling to hope with more strength and intensity than their healthy relatives. Can anyone of us measure the magnitude of hope a condemned prisoner experiences

one hour, one minute before his or her execution? [00:19:00]

For them a second has the weight of eternity.

Hope necessarily implies an act of faith, faith in God if one is a believer, that he cares, that he listens, that he remains present in human history. Or faith in humankind, and in the humanity of our fellow human beings. If one is an agnostic, that man can be free and generous, and capable of glorious undertakings. That the other, even if he or she is unworthy, may give life to children whose work may be beneficial to society tomorrow, or a hundred years from now. In other words, a person worthy of faith placed in him by his parents, teachers, and friends. But is faith enough? Is faith possible always? Faith in whom? In God's goodness. More than faith, hope implies a projection in the future. But Paul Valery, the great French poet, already warned [00:20:00] us that the future isn't what it used to be. Perhaps the same could be said of hope, it ain't what it used to be.

Let's analyze one example. The twentieth century gave birth to an immense political endeavor, socialism, which eventually turned into communism, which for many decades shaped history and attitudes towards it. It began as a marvelous social awakening of the masses, issuing a powerful call for compassion, freedom,

brotherhood, and truth. It covered and contained all the good words. It promised to bring bread for the hungry, stability for the uprooted, pride for the humble and dispossessed. In other words, it offered hope to the hopeless. Its appeal to idealistic young intellectuals in the early decades of the century was understandable. Fed up with war, social injustice, misery, bigotry, and in our case, in anti-Semitism, [00:21:00] they saw in its lofty yet concrete program more than a set of solutions to economic problems. They found in it a new sense of history, a new meaning for political ambitions, their dream was metaphysical, its aim was to change the world by improving the lives of its traditional victims, the poor peasants, the hungry workers, the oppressed, the Jews. Many of the communist agitators in the beginning were Jews. Lev Davidovich, Trotsky in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg in Germany were among the best known. There were others, many others.

Some came from the world of the yeshiva, for them communism responded to moral outrage. Having lost patience while waiting for the messiah they decided to implement his promise without him. They lived to regret it. Communism was what? Messianism without God. It didn't work. The communist experience proved to be [00:22:00] a gigantic laboratory in deceit, brutality, cruelty, and mass murder. If communism emerged from a desperate

need for hope, it ended up by betraying it. Question. What made it possible for a movement such as communism, born from collective hunger, for humanity, and for human dignity, to become a vehicle of oppression, imprisonment, and murder? At what point do revolutions begin to devour their children? That hope can be an obstacle to hope, and even to survival, that it could become a source of purulent, a trap laid by evil and death, has become clear to my generation, though in a different way.

How did Francis Bacon put it? "Hope is a good breakfast, but a bad supper." Hope was used and misused by the enemy against our people during the darkest period of its long tormented history. [00:23:00] Many, too many communities were wiped out in Eastern Europe because they had hoped that the enemy would not dare to implement its threats, that a civilized free world would stop him, that human beings would always remain human, that God would keep his pledge and observe the terms of his covenant with his children. With each step irrevocably leading to the final solution, the successive waves of victims would be reassured by the enemy and his experts in mass psychology that the previous one was the last. Berlin's war against the Jews was waged by murderers in uniform, assisted by experts in psychological warfare, who excelled in luring their victims into false

confidence, and their system worked. The Jews too often believed the enemy's propaganda. It was easier to be [00:24:00] comfortably installed in the new situation.

At first it was so much easier to believe that the Germans meant to take only the Jews in Germany because they were assimilated. And later that only the Jews in Poland were threatened because they were not. The same tactic was used with Jews in Greece, Italy, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, everywhere in Occupied Europe. When a ghetto was liquidated, others were told that it was the last in the program, the last quarter, the last fabric, the last factory, the last street, the last transport. It was always said to be the last, and of course, it never was. Those who learned how to be immune to hope fared better. Many German-Jews who refused to trust Hitler's assurances immigrated to new homes in Palestine, or Great Britain, or the United States. Later as the criminal regime of blood and ashes spread to other countries and immigration became more difficult, if not impossible, [00:25:00] youngsters fled to the forest and joined the partisans disregarding the German promises that they risked nothing staying with their families. Those who gave credence to the German promises ended up in Treblinka, Bełżec, Ponar, Majdanek, and Auschwitz. Their hope was dangerous, and indeed terminal, because it was based on delusion and falsehood.

Because it originated with the enemy who used it as a ploy and a mask.

Does this mean that there are well-tested blueprints and rules for hope? For instance, if offered by friends, it is always good. Whereas if it is handed to us by the enemy it is always evil. Listen to a statement that will surely fill your heart with hope and exultation, until you learn the name of its author. I quote, "We will fight to the last man for the freedom of the individual, for the freedom of religion and conscience, for the abolition of slave labor, for social justice, [00:26:00] for the right of advancement in education without regard to origin." Would anyone here guess by whom this statement was written? It was written by Joseph Goebbels. Indeed, words of hope may at times conceal reasons for despair. It depends on their origin. For some people Francis Bacon's warning sounds adequate and for others not. Hope is valued only when it comes from a friend, be he or she far away, but then how is one to wait for the distant friends' intervention when the enemy's sword is so near, and its effects are so immediate, and the harrowing fears for agonizing need absolving.

Hope may at times be a consequence of fear, a remedy to fear, and they are uniquely related. As Spinoza said, "Fear cannot be

without hope, and hope without fear." And Milton put it differently, "So, farewell hope, [00:27:00] and with hope farewell fear." Both were wrong. There can be fear without hope. And the loss of hope does not necessarily imply a newly sworn allegiance to evil. Must the loss of hope lead to the loss of faith? There were times when Jews lost hope in the future, yet maintained almost intact their faith in God, but not in his goodness. Jeremiah and Daniel refused to praise God and his attributes, but read Jeremiah's Lamentations and you will hear with quasi-disbelief his accusatory words to the Almighty Himself, who like an enemy, says Jeremiah, struck down his people. Jeremiah says, "*Haragta v'lo chamalta*" in the *Eicha* (Lamentations) "You have killed without mercy." "*Tavachta v'lo chamalta.*" "You have slaughtered without mercy."

Now, when we say [00:28:00] to God, how do you allow things to happen, we tremble because we are afraid of what we are saying. Jeremiah went further. He said, "You killed." He doesn't merely say that God has allowed the enemy to kill and slaughter Jews, he was more outspoken, more direct. He said, "You, God, have killed and murdered your children." In Talmudic times the disciples of Rabbi Ishmael somewhat more restrained cried out, "*Mi Chamocha Baelim Adoshem*" "Who among the gods can be like you?" "*Al tikra 'elim'*" "Do not say "gods", but '*ilmim*'," which

means "mute", "Who can be as mute as you are, oh God?"

"*She-lo-eh b'elbon b'nafeshoteich*" For he sees the humility of His children and keeps silent."

In Hasidic literature voices of pain and revolt were heard on behalf of Jewish victims of endless tragedies. I particularly of course cherish the great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev [00:29:00] who pleaded with a broken heart the God of Israel, at times threatening him, "If you refuse to hear our prayers, I shall refuse to go on saying them." And also, "I want you to know that if your reign does not bring grace and compassion, *lo teshev al kiseicha b'emet*, your throne will not be a throne of truth." And once before the *Mussaf* service on Yom Kippur, he exclaimed, "Today is a judgement day. David proclaims it in his Psalms, Today all your creatures stand before you so that you may pass sentence, but I, Levi-Yitzhak, son of Sarah-Berditchev, I say, and I proclaim that it is you who will be judged today by those who suffer for you, who die for you, and for the sanctification of your name."

Has the Berditchever tzaddik lost faith? No. He has lost hope. So much so that for a whole year he, the extrovert, the activist, the man who always had a good word, [00:30:00] a word of consolation and encouragement for those who needed it, he

fell into deep melancholy. Other great masters endured similar experiences. They seem to have lost the *elan*, their capacity for joy. They too lost hope. But after a while somehow they succeeded in recapturing it. Reflecting on the destiny of the people of Israel so gloriously and tragically tested by God, filled with so much agony, and oppression, and courage on our part, I often wonder, why haven't we given back the Torah to the Almighty.

The Yiddish poet Yankev Glatshteyn suggested in his poem about the Holocaust, he said, "We received the Torah at Sinai, we gave it back at Majdanek." Why in the course of centuries has there been no gathering of our great spiritual leaders to discuss such a possibility? We discuss everything else. (laughter) Just imagine at the time of the [00:31:00] Crusades, at the Khmelnytsky pogroms, what if those scholars and teachers had come out with a manifesto that would present a logical challenge to their creator, master of the world, master of the universe? God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you have chosen us as the custodians of your Torah, which we tried to study and implement in spite of the hardship and suffering we had to endure. But now we are tired. We are exhausted. We can no longer absorb so much pain, we cannot see so much pain around us, and we cannot continue like this. If you and your eternal wisdom prefer to

have a world without Jews, so be it, have it your way, we shall be the last Jews on earth if that's what you really want. Why didn't they say so?

Actually it happened once. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, at least one community advocated total abstinence and absolute asceticism. The name Perushim or Pharisees was given to them [00:32:00] because *sheparshu minshoteihem* they separated from their wives so as not to have any more children. It was their way of saying to God for us it's enough, without the Temple we can't go on living like husbands and wives. They too had given up hope. But they were admonished by the sages who told them did you stop eating meat because sacrifices are no longer offered in Jerusalem? And wine because the priests no longer use it for their rituals? Will you stop eating bread and drinking water because bread and water were also in the Temple's services? Faced with such rigorous logic the husbands returned to their wives. (laughter)

Since Abraham we are commanded to believe that hope is an essential part of life and faith. Why was the Book of Job accepted in the canon only after *la langue de bois* because it sounded too pessimistic. If at the end really the scale tipped in his favor it was because we learn afterwards that he again

[00:33:00] had children and they were happy and beautiful, and so was he.

Now what do we believe? A tale of hope is told about Rabbi Ishmael and his martyrdom. At one point during the torment he began to weep. And a heavenly voice was then heard saying, "Ishmael, Ishmael, if you shed one more tear I shall restore the entire universe to its primary state of chaos." So Rabbi Ishmael stopped crying. Why did he? Often I wonder why didn't he, the old master, turn to the Almighty and say, "This is the way the world will continue, ruled by violence and fear, torture and death. I don't mind allowing or even forcing you to start all over again from the beginning. Why was he so compassionate all of the sudden? [00:34:00] Compassionate with God or the world? He could have said that. He had all the reasons in the world to lose hope for society and all faith in history, why then did he stop weeping? Because God told him so. Except for the psalm of [Elisha ben] Abuyah, the notorious *Acher*, no sage and no Hasidic master has repudiated the creator of the universe or lost faith in his divine truths.

Still what about their hope? Hope for what, in the name of whom? The response, if there is any, is always to be found in messianic redemption. It is a constant theme in Talmudic

literature. Ultimately the messiah represents mans' existential hope, whether he's a person, or a metaphor, some sources speak more about messianic times than about the messiah himself. He remains a living promise, an eternal hope to be fulfilled and shared. But earlier we mentioned chaos being the enemy of hope. [00:35:00] It is in God's eyes the ultimate punishment. What is chaos? A nebulous situation in which all frontiers vanished, God is there, but what separates him from the creation is chaos. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness, substance and frivolity, the sacred and profane, anticipation and memory, hope and despair, nothing distinguishes them anymore. In other words, chaos is indifference on a cosmic scale. And so, I would say the opposite of hope as of everything else is indifference.

But there came a time centuries later when there was much indifference in the world. In human terms, hope seemed then unattainable, and almost unnatural. Think of our people in the walled-in ghettos. We read about them in personal diaries, and in well-documented chronicles. Marriages were celebrated over there [00:36:00] one day before being deported in cattle cars to death camps, young men and women would swear eternal love to one another. Women gave birth to children, circumcisions were performed, underground schools were open for children to study sciences, mathematics, the bible, Jewish history and literature.

What in the world did they hope to achieve with their diplomas? Did they really think they would help them get into prestigious universities or get careers in the Warsaw ghetto? Or in Bialystok? While the outside world was indifferent to their fate, the ghetto inhabitants paradoxically clinged to hope.

Some may call such hope absurd, but strangely enough it was not false for such is the nature of the human condition. One hour before dying, teachers teach and students learn from them essential lessons about man's fate, and the meaning of [00:37:00] his or her passage on earth. One reads a novel and dies before coming to the denouement. One plants a tree and it's taken away the next day. Such is human destiny that all tales are ultimately interrupted. The last word is not ours, but the one before the last which is ours. Sounds as if there can never be an end to the tale. Again, such is the mystery of man that every significant moment contains its share of immortality. Those who learned this awesome lessons, and they learned it best, are survivors of catastrophes in general, and the *sherit happleita*, the saving remnant, of the Holocaust in particular. Where did they draw the strength, where did they find the courage to start a new life again in Belsen, marry again, have children, and build new homes for them. Read about the men and women who dwelt in DP camps and you will be

astonished. [00:38:00] They had lost everything that's reminded them of their past and they evoke in a desert with Ezekiel among the dead. And yet they build schools and theaters, engage in a variety of culture and financial activities. You could hear them sing Zionist songs on weekdays or Shabbat songs on the Shabbat. Argue about Jewish politics, tell jokes and laugh, and make others laugh, and invent all kinds of crazy projects for a future grounded in hope. In hope above all, in spite of everything.

Hadn't they learned the facts of life yet? Had they forgotten yesterday's despair? How did they manage to overcome their justifiable suspicion and anger so as to trust another person, especially a non-Jew? Having seen their former hopes ridiculed, profaned, and murdered, how did they manage to invent new ones?

[00:39:00] Is it that they had no choice? They had a choice. They could have opted for nihilism and hedonism, they could have said, look, we have paid our dues. Hope is a word, nothing else, and words mean nothing to us anymore. Now all we want is to enjoy wine and laughter, all we seek is pleasure and serenity, that is the true essence of life, and leave us alone. Who would have dared to contradict them? Why didn't they say that? Why did they in fact say something else, just the opposite? Because they realized that having survived tragedy it

was their singular duty to do something with their experiences. So, they invented hope in order to pass it on to others. But how did they manage to achieve it?

I belong to a traumatized generation, and many of us here belong to it as well. A generation for whom it was tempting to renounce hope, too tempting, too inviting. [00:40:00] Unless one feels able to hope that something can be done with one's knowledge, with one's experience, with one's memories, one is crushed by one's feeling unless one realizes that one is not useless in a world from where one was expelled. Strangely and paradoxically enough, those of us who awoke in 1945 and realized that they were alive were carried by a powerful hope that must seem bizarre today. They were convinced 53 years ago that something must now happen to the world that so much pain, so much suffering, so much anguish would make a difference in history, and provoke a change, a mutation, a transformation in the human condition, a transformation in man's image of himself and herself. We were convinced then that the world had learned an essential lesson from its mistakes and aberrations, lessons about the power of evil, and the innumerable dimensions of despair. [00:41:00] Lessons about solitude and silence, hunger and humiliation, lessons about the perils of indifference, and the limits of persecution in times of prejudice, bigotry and

hatred. Some of us have said it many times that if anyone had told us then that we would feel compelled in our lifetime to fight anti-Semitism, we would not have believed it. We thought that anti-Semitism died in the fires of Auschwitz, we were wrong. Jews perished there, their enemies are still alive and active.

If anyone had told us then that in our lifetime there would be vicious, ugly, morally repugnant people who will have the gall to deny our past, and publicly declare on the internet or in books, that our testimony is false, and our victimhood invented, we would have considered such talk as unreasonable and implausible, and rather silly. But I belong to a tradition that considers despair [00:42:00] as a question, not as an answer. There is quest in question, and it keeps us motivated. "No heart is as whole as a broken heart," said Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. Maybe paraphrase it and say that no hope is as powerful as a wounded hope.

In conclusion, a few words about hope and prayer. What is hope? It is a transcendental act which accompanies us in all our endeavors, thus allowing us to go beyond our limits, and project ourselves into an uncertain future where dream and desire have the force of memory. One may say that the human being is

defined by his or her hope, not only by their capacity for hope, but also by their will to impose it on destiny. Where under which sky would man be if he or she would ever forever be deserted by hope? [00:43:00] He would no longer sense the fragrance of dawn or the nocturnal breath coming from an open window. He would be rendered superfluous, a withered branch left behind by the wind. Nothing would be of interest because no goal would await him. Hope being the key to freedom and fulfillment, without it life would be a prison, for hope is a gift that a wounded memory can bestow upon itself.

As for prayer, our liturgy consists of innumerable prayers. There are prayers for every possible situation. There is one for eating bread, and another for eating cake, one for fruits, another for wine, one when you meet a king, and another when you greet a scholar, one when you hear thunder, and one when you see lightning, and still another when you notice a rainbow, one when you are happy, and one when you are not. However there is no prayer for martyrdom. The martyr [00:44:00] may recite the usual credo, *Shema Yisrael*, "Hear, o Israel, God is our God, God is one." Which pious Jews recite three times a day, but there is no special prayer for the martyr as he or she is about to be beheaded or burned at the stake. The reason? *Yeshuat Hashem keheref ayin*—Divine help may arrive at the very last moment and

the prayer already uttered would be wasted. In other words, until the last breath we are commanded to believe that hope is there. And so, we ask isn't hope man's noblest prayer?

We are celebrating this year the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of Israel. Isn't Israel the embodiment of our collective hope? And hasn't it emerged literally while the ashes were still warm in Birkenau? Of course we know our hope is not absolute, nor can it be. Israel is still [00:45:00] threatened from without and within. In spite of the new promises made by Saddam Hussein, Israel mothers still live in fear of his biological weapons. And I remember in 1991, American planes bombed Iraq, and Iraq launched scud missiles on Israel, although Israel was totally uninvolved in that crisis. I also remember and it hurts me, in Jerusalem, I was in Jerusalem and the scuds were falling on Tel Aviv in the old city I say it with sadness, with great, great sadness, I saw Palestinians dancing on the roofs whenever a scud missile would fall on Ramat Gan or Tel Aviv. They were dancing.

But the greater danger, let's say it, is the multi-layered divisions inside our communities. Have you forgotten that whenever our people were subjected to suffering it was accompanied by internal hatred? Isn't such hatred giving

strength to the enemies of hope? [00:46:00] Where are our great teachers and devoted spiritual leaders, our moral guides? Why don't they shout from the rooftops that Jewish hope lies in Jewish solidarity? I believe in it, for I believe in memory, I believe in its redemptive virtues. And here I will tell you a story.

Last year I was in Washington getting some Eisenhower medal, and I was very touched by that because Eisenhower to us meant that the crusader, the man who led the crusade, the noblest of all against fascism, against Hitler, and I liked the idea to be linked by that medal to Eisenhower. And then I began preparing my address. And I was also convinced that I had seen Eisenhower at Buchenwald, and I remember it, I checked it with all my friends who were there, Rabbi Menashe Kleine from Brooklyn, we all remembered Eisenhower was in Buchenwald two days after liberation. And so, it made it even more important to me that Eisenhower I know him. [00:47:00] And I began doing research on Eisenhower in Buchenwald. I turned to my friend Walter Reich who is the latest victim of Arafat. He was the director of the museum who has been fired, scapegoated outrageously, this victim of terrible, terrible injustice. And I asked him to do the research, and he came back and said, "No, we didn't find really anything that he was, he was in Ohrdruf, not in Buchenwald."

So, I felt very bad. I have to say something. So, in my address all the generals were there, Powell and so forth, and the entire Eisenhower family. And in my response I said how sorry I am that actually I was convinced I had seen Eisenhower in Buchenwald, but then I found out he wasn't. But I tried to find the reason why I thought so. The reason was that we believed every soldier was Eisenhower. (laughter) [00:48:00] All right, maybe they were. At the end of the evening David Eisenhower, Eisenhower's -- the president's grandson gave the thank you, and when he finished he said, "And Professor Wiesel, I must tell you something. You were not wrong. Eisenhower was in Buchenwald. Not my grandfather, my father." I felt like embracing him.

These are good stories because they deal not only with memory but with justice as well. But today a great Hassidic master David Tzvi Hirsh of Zidichov says to his friend, Rebbe Meir of Spinka of our generation, he said, "While our Master the Holy Seer of Lublin was alive, we, his disciples, would simply gather around him in a circle, our hands on our friends shoulders and we would ascend into the highest fears. But today we are afraid, today even our dreams are changed." Well, today some of our [00:49:00] dreams often turn into nightmares. Where is

hope? I don't know. Perhaps to some of us there is none, there cannot be, and yet, and yet there must be. We are told that in Pandora's special box at the very bottom, right under all the calamities, you find there is hope. But to gain access to it must one first go through all the calamities? The knowledge that it is there, that it exists somewhere, may be sufficient. Following Albert Camus, we ought to imagine Sisyphus happy. Created in the image of God, who has no image, it is incumbent upon our contemporaries to invoke and create hope where there is none. And do so with words when they suggest longing for compassion; with song, when it is imbued with fervor; and with silence, when all else failed. I will say that my despair is challenged [00:50:00] by the other person's despair. And therefore when my despair is faced with another man's despair, I must break mine for his or her sake.

In other words, only human beings can move me to despair, but only they can help me vanquish it and call it, with great eloquence, compassion and sometimes, with a smile, they will call it hope. Thank you. (applause)

M:

Thanks for listening. For more information [00:51:00] on 92nd Street Y and all of our programs, please visit us on the web at 92Y.org. This program is copyright by 92nd Street Y.

