

Wiesel Archive

Elie Wiesel:

(applause) Well, tonight, as we are about to conclude this year's annual series, we shall talk about solitude. The theme is both urgent and timeless. It is as old as humankind. Solitude, is it good for the soul and bad for the mind? How does one cope with it without risk? Is it a curse or a blessing? In this generation, in this society, people are afraid of solitude just as they are afraid of silence. This is the noisiest world that we have ever known. People keep on talking, sometimes on two telephones as once, (laughter) since we have two ears. And the same, people are afraid of being alone. [00:01:00] And therefore you have so many people in the streets and everywhere.

So how does one seek solitude? And when does one seek to find it as a haven from the sounds and fury of a society obsessed with activity and agitation? Do I want to be alone because I wish to hide from someone? Or is it that in order to know them better, or myself better, I need to be with myself alone? For the prisoner solitude is an added punishment, for the artist a necessary inspiration. Do poets, like mystical visionaries,

need solitude to dream their dreams with words and silence? In the field of political action does the leader who tries hard to please his constituents at one point feel compelled for reasons both personal and pragmatic, reasons that have to do with his public image more than with his inner life, [00:02:00] to leave the people and their immediate concerns and dwell like a solitary scholar in his or her ivory tower?

Tonight we should approach the subject from three viewpoints and on three levels: the solitude of God the creator, the solitude of man or the human being, and the solitude of Israel, Israel the state and Israel the people. Do we deal with the same solitudes? Are these three solitudes part of the same experience? Solitude like silence may become a language. It has its own color, its own appeal, texture, architecture, and mystery. One enters solitude for many reasons. As a child in my little Jewish town, lost in the Carpathian Mountains, I was afraid of solitude.

For me it meant a phase towards rejection and abandonment. At the end of the day, [00:03:00] overcome by apprehension, I would wait for my parents to come home just as I had waited for them to appear as I woke up in the morning. I needed to see them and them to see me, to tell me that another day was born and that I

had my part in it. To be alone meant to be cut off from their lives, excluded from their endeavors. Obscurely I sensed that my chance of growing up was to belong to my family, my friends, my community. The outside world frightened me. Its unknown inhabitants were bearers of threats and perils. The best way to resist them lay in a spirit of togetherness with my own circle of known customs and familiar faces.

But wasn't that a way of running from individual loneliness to collective solitude? The Jew in me was used [00:04:00] to this kind of process. Wasn't Abraham alone when he left his father's home. Wasn't Moses when he fled Egypt? Weren't our forefathers and ancestors throughout the ages when, in a variety of conditions and circumstances they showed obstinacy and determination to believe in God and his laws? Weren't we in the middle ages alone to oppose murder, falsehood, oppression, discrimination, persecution, slavery, and humiliation, humiliation which is the worst form of slavery.

Thus our isolation was voluntary. The first ghettos in Italy were spiritually and personally self-imposed. The walls were invisible. Quite simply, we felt it better to be physically separated from others so as not to be influenced by their religious lifestyle. We were afraid of assimilation.

[00:05:00] Later, voluntary solitude became compulsory isolation. Jews were forbidden to leave their quarters by night. Other measures were taken to limit their freedom and movement and their other freedoms. Bil'aam's prophecy, *Am levadad yishkon*, that these people will be alone, which was meant as a curse but became a blessing, now really became a curse.

What was our safeguard? Our safeguard was our commitment to learning, which became a superb and reliable protection. Our passion for learning was transmitted from generation to generation. It brought together young and old, rich and poor, dreamers and wanderers. When you study you are not alone. So we devoted ourselves to study not only to acquire knowledge but also to meet our forerunners from whom we receive [00:06:00] lessons and memories. Thanks to them we did feel less alone. Isn't this the secret and enchanting power of Talmudic study? Its characters are alive, present, vibrant. They speak to us. And they speak to our preoccupations as though they were our contemporaries, as though our dilemmas concerned them and theirs, us.

I followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Eleazar in their cave. I listen to Rabbi Akiva and his voice resonates

around me and in me. I hear Bruriah discussing with her father Rabbi Haninah ben Teradion issues of halacha. I am touched by the complicity which exists between father and daughter, both of them scholars. And so every page and every tractate in the Talmud is an encounter which becomes a remedy against [00:07:00] loneliness. For this is what makes learning so special, so rewarding. It creates bonds which turn into miracles, and it takes very little. All it takes for us is to be ready for them.

Now, are we ready? Even for those who are ready are still waiting. What does God, God almighty, what does He do in His vast solitude? How does He use His time? Doesn't He have too much time? Isn't it a problem for Him? In general terms, how does He cope with eternity, an eternity that belongs to Him alone? This may sound strange, but these questions have preoccupied sages and disciples in Talmudic literature.

Following a [00:08:00] stormy and angry debate about the purity or impurity of an oven owned by a certain Akhnai a discussion, a debate, a heated debate between Reb Eliezer, son of Hyrcanus, and Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Hananiah, during which the latter refused God the right to intervene in the human interpretation of his laws.

Rabbi Nathan met prophet Elijah in the fields and he asked, what did God do up there when all this was going on right here? And prophet Elijah smiled and said, God smiled. Yes, he smiled saying *nitzchuni banai*, my children have defeated me. God sounded like a father, a proud father, proud of his sons. Well, God is no stranger to his creation. That is the basic principle of all religious precepts and concepts. [00:09:00] God is anything but indifferent to what his creatures do to themselves and to each other. He wishes to be present in the history of man. He listens. He observes. He gets angry. He smiles. He judges. He understands. He forgives.

A story. A high society Roman woman called a *matrona*, asked Rabbi Jose ben Halafta, how many days did your God need to create the world and everything that is in it? Six days, he answered. So, she said, what is he doing now? (laughter) In other words, alone in heaven with nothing to do, doesn't He feel time too long? Isn't He on occasion a bit bored? I'll tell you what keeps Him busy, said Rabbi Jose ben Halafta. He builds ladders. Ladders, she exclaimed. [00:10:00] You mean ladders, scales? Yes, said the sage, ladders. His explanation, I shall paraphrase it.

Life may be compared to many things, but also to a scale, to a ladder. Some climb it and go up, others come down. Is it a reason to hope? It's also a reason to despair. You go up the ladder to the top. You look down, and you are happy. But wait a minute. When you are on the top you realize that you cannot go higher. From now on you must go down. So you go down to the bottom, and of course you are in a gloomy mood. But wait a minute. Look down. Don't you see you cannot go lower than that? From now on you must go higher. Isn't that a reason to be hopeful? Said the sage, that is what God is doing.

[00:11:00] He measures the sadness of men and women but also their joy. And to both he imposes reasonable limits.

In a different version this conversation is preceded by the following one. The matrona asks, what keeps your God busy? And Rabbi Jose son of Halafta answers, He arranges marriages. Which is not an easy occupation. The Talmud says it is as difficult to do as the splitting of the Red Sea. The slightest error may be costly, resulting in angry outbursts and physical abuse. God alone knows who is meant for whom. But then how come that there are so many divorces? They didn't know the story.

Still another version, the question remains the same. Only the answer changes. Again, [00:12:00] what God is doing up there in

heaven? He builds worlds and destroys them. In other words, He builds a world, looks at it, and doesn't find it to His taste, so He discards it and creates a new one. Call it optimism. If our world is still here it must be that God likes it. And we wonder why. Maybe he's not looking at Florida. (laughter) But then God loves to create. Every day we are told God is involved in *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, in reworking his creation anew.

And we say that in all our daily prayers. The meaning of that prayer, every day is the first. Each time a man and a woman decide to love one another, to form a couple, to build a home it is through them that God [00:13:00] creates the world anew. In other words, God is never without a job. He's never idle. We keep Him busy. In a way we are His partners, His associates. He created the world, "*Asher bara Elokim laasot*" says the Bible. It is up to us to shape creation and improve it. Are we God's exclusive preoccupation? Not so.

In our prayers we say *Oseh shalom bimromav*. God makes peace in the heavens. Does it mean that up there too among angels and divine seraphim, peace is a rarity, that they need a supreme judge to force them to live in peace? The prayer continues. *Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu*, He will also make peace that it should rain upon us and upon the entire people of Israel. But then if

God is the great peacemaker, how come that there are so many people in this world [00:14:00] engaged in so many quarrels, conflicts, and massacres? And what does He feel then when He sees them down below? What does He feel when they quarrel, when they kill each other, sometimes in His name?

Does He feel chagrin? Surely. Remorse? Possibly. "*Kol yamav makhovim.*" says the Ecclesiast. All his days are suffering. His days? Whose? Man's? No, God, says a Midrash. And since His days are endless, so is His sorrow infinite. In religious term, this means to illustrate, to divine pathos, God is capable of feeling for and with his creatures when they are in pain. When the Temple was destroyed in Jerusalem and its priests and worshipers massacred, [00:15:00] God wept. When His people were expelled from their homes in Judea, He followed them into exile where hope alone was their home. God is patient.

In antiquity God was social. He needed company. In ancient mythology in Greece and Rome the gods needed company, and they obtained them. They had peers, associates, rivals, playmates. The Olympus was inhabited by many gods who functioned as heads of departments. Each had his or her own area of competence and activity. In hours of idleness they chased women or other creatures. Our grandfather Abraham changed all that. The first

human to recognize and identify God's uniqueness, he articulated the essential principles of monotheism. "God is one" is a simple yet eternal credo of the Jew [00:16:00] throughout the ages.

Judah's stubborn opposition to Babylon, Persia, and Rome was not only political or economical, it was theological. It had theological motivation. We could not worship another god, for it would have meant that God is not unique. And to paraphrase Maimonides, God is not uniquely unique. Therefore God alone is to be always admired, feared, and loved. Is that all? In Midrashic and Hasidic literature God must at times be pitied. Yes, pitied. In opening His eyes to behold the dazzling wonders and disquieting mysteries of creation, man cannot help feeling sorry in the purest sense of the word for the Creator, pity for the Father who suffers for and with His children, pity for the weary Judge [00:17:00] transcended by His own severity, pity for the King whose crown is so often dragged through the dust, whose word is poorly heard, ill understood, ill interpreted, and so frequently violated, pity for the Almighty who is everywhere, always, even in pain, even in suffering, in desperate human beings, all victims of one another and prisoners of their own solitude.

What about the solitude of creation, of creatures, of man and woman? Solitude is human. That much we know. What would man, be he rich or poor, young or old, in his heart of hearts, what would he be were it not for the living appeal sent out towards another to break through his own solitude? If he succeeds too well his total absence of solitude may diminish his potential [00:18:00] creativity. He will live in abstraction but not in reality. Thus the question, may one fight solitude at any price, using any means?

Alone, Adam had no problem, but that was his problem. It is God who said so. "*Lo tov heyot ish levado*" [sic] , it's no good for a man to be alone. So Adam, one morning, discovered a companion by his side. Was Eve now his problem? No. Yes. No.

(laughter) He had problems with himself. Before his solitude weighed on him. Now he must have missed it. Before he didn't know he was alone. Now he learned about it. Henceforth he would evolve in a vicious circle. The less lonely he was, thanks to the presence of another person, the more aware he was of his loneliness.

Conversely, one is never [00:19:00] totally alone. Even if someone who is neither loved nor hated by anyone, even then, doesn't one at times discover a stranger inside one's self? Who

is alone? Only the narcissist. The narcissist is one who lives alone, who loves only one person, himself, and when asked why he doesn't get married he says "I am married--to myself." When I write or utter the words I said to myself, do I know whom I referring to, the one speaking or the one listening? The two forms are modes of myself, the two eyes are separated by a wall which only an absolute and immortal conciseness would be capable of scaling, perhaps of penetrating.

On both sides the self lives alone, forever yearning to come closer to the other. [00:20:00] The solution? There is none. There cannot be for the search for the ultimate identity could go on forever and touch the infinite. That is why a certain Jewish tradition forbids the use of *anochi*, or I. Only God can say *anochi*. God alone remains the same, true to Himself always. God alone is alone. We are not.

Man must not be alone. Man must not allow others to be. By others I mean victims who suffer from loneliness in their poverty, illness, or imprisonment. Nothing is worse for the prisoner than being told by his tormentor that he or she has been forgotten by friends and allies alike. Nothing is more painful for the sick father of hungry children than to realize

that their fate matters little. Their solitude is an indictment against [00:21:00] mine.

Is there a remedy against solitude? Is it love, a social involvement, faith, having children, pupils, partners? And what about friendship? Since my years as a student of philosophy I thought that Plato was Aristotle's teacher. It is only later in scrutinizing their writings that I realized that my perception was only partly correct. Plato is my friend, declared Aristotle, but I am a greater friend of truth. In this short statement what can be found? A question: what is friendship? What is its parameter? Does it have frontiers, either social or intellectual? Can a teacher be a friend to his disciple? If so, what is the part and place of loyalty and truth in that relationship? [00:22:00]

But then, is friendship a relationship and nothing else? Is it a relationship and everything else? Is it then a two-way relationship? Can the disciple become his or her teacher's friend and teacher? In one of Plato's dialogues, "Lysis" on friendship Socrates ends his argument by saying with tongue in cheek, now we do not know what it is. It's like time, of which Augustine said we all know what time is, until you ask.

The most beautiful, intense, and melodious passages in literature, though less numerous, are not always about love but about friendship. From Michel de Montaigne to Shakespeare to Albert Camus to Nikos Kazantzakis to Auden, when they speak of friendship their words soar and sing the glory of humanity. Philosophers too address their attention to friendship. Plato speaks of its three categories. And a violent [00:23:00] and stormy friendship it is, he says, when a man is attracted to someone widely different to himself. And only seldom do we see it reciprocated.

When men are alike, however, they show a calm and mutual affection that lasts a lifetime. But there is a third category compounded of the other two. Cicero wrote a long essay celebrating friendship. He believes that higher friendship exists only three, four times in history. Kant, in a famous lecture on ethics believes that friendship is a combination between self-love and love of humanity. Montaigne recalls his grave beautify with philosophical melancholy. He too believes that true friendship may occur once in 300 years. Why 300? Why not 4- or 500? He didn't say. When asked about his friend at Étienne de La Boétie he says, if pressed to answer why I loved him, all I can say is because it was he, [00:24:00] because it was I.

In the dictionary friendship is a mutual affection between two human beings unrelated to family links or sexual attraction. Does it mean that the two must be strangers? Can brothers be brothers but not friends? Are Cain and Abel a case in point? In scripture, friendship is to be ignored if not rejected by most brothers. Isaac and Ishmael are adversaries. Joseph and his brothers were enemies, oh, were they enemies. As for myself, it is with fervor that I speak about friendship in my books, particularly in my novels. In one of them my hero submits himself to torture to save his friend from arrest. In another the main protagonist Gabriel wonders, and I say, who is a friend?

More than a father, more than a brother, a traveling companion. With him you can achieve what seemed [00:25:00] impossible, even if you lose it later. Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession. Friendship is never anything but sharing. It is to a friend that you communicate wakening of desire, the birth of a vision or a terror, the anguish of seeing the sun disappear or of finding that order and justice are no more. Is the soul immortal, and if so, why are we afraid to die? If God exists, how can we lay claim to freedom since He is its beginning and its end?

What is death? The closing of a parenthesis and nothing more?  
And what about life? In the mouth of a philosopher these  
questions may have a false ring, but asked by friends during  
adolescence they have the power to change. What is a friend?  
Someone who for the first time makes you aware of your  
loneliness and his and helps you [00:26:00] escape so you in  
turn can help him. Thanks to him you may remain silent without  
shame and speak freely without risk. Thanks to him, you are not  
alone.

If I feel so close, so attached to Hasidism and its tradition it  
is because also more than many other religious movements that I  
know it represents on various levels, including the theological,  
a celebration of friendship. Even to define it I may have  
recourse to a Hasidic tale about friendship. And if the Hasidic  
movement wants such rapid victories, if in the eighteenth  
century it succeeded in implanting itself within so few years,  
in so many scattered Jewish communities from the Dnieper to the  
Carpathians, it is because it was a response to and perhaps even  
a cure for solitude. [00:27:00]

A Hasid is never alone. Even when he is alone he has his rabbi,  
his master with him, in him. He has only to recall his rabbi's

Shabbat, his face in that Shabbat to dissipate his solitude. If life weighs on him or her too heavily, if he feels discouraged, depressed, he has only to tear himself away from the daily life of the remote villages and go to the rebbe's court. There he will find himself back among friends, companions, rich and less rich, erudite and less erudite. Together they will sing. Together they will dance. Together they will celebrate Jewish solidarity, faithfulness to God and His creatures.

Together they will affirm their conviction that for better or for worse man has received from heaven the dubious gift of suffering the most implacable of solitudes. And having the means to surmount it, transform it [00:28:00] into hope. To joy, the happiness I felt as a child and adolescent among Hasidim with our master, the Vizhnitzer Rabbi on the evening of a simple Shabbat or on the occasion of a special festival has never been equaled since. And if even now I often feel overcome with longing, it is a longing for those gatherings, that joy, that fullness; no solitude, no suffering could resist it.

And then I even remember, yes, I remember certain Hasidim back in what we so poorly called the kingdom of night. There we experienced the ultimate end of all experiences. There we crossed the limit of anguish and solitude and the struggle

against them. The problem and the tragedy was that we were never alone, and yet always alone. It was a solitude within solitude, naked despair, sadness stripped of all embellishment or language or outward [00:29:00] appearance. That was our world. If you only knew how many and what quality nearly slipped and fell, reduced to the state of victims, fathers and sons, enemies, because of a crust of bread.

Friends and brothers tore each other apart for a spoonful of soup, an instant respite, a thicker jacket. If you only knew how many of the couples were liberal intellectuals, oh yes, intellectuals, and how many of these intellectuals were sadists. That was the way it was. And yet, and yet in those places, even there, even there you found a Hasid here and a Hasid there, and when they met they suffered less. When they met they told a story to each other, the same story that they would repeat from morning to evening, about their past, their rebbe, and then the songs they remembered.

So I deal with these subjects [00:30:00] in my stories about Hasidim. In other words, they obsess me in my writing. As a storyteller I try to turn solitude into an act against solitude. What is writing? I appropriate words which belong to everyone. At that moment I have made them mine. And when I do that they

bear my sign and my seal, and each of them reflects me, either condemns me or remains faithful to me. The bond between me and the words I use become charged with being, and I am alone with them, but I would be more so without them. Sooner or later they become a reason for living and working. Hence their ambivalence: when they sing I rise to heavens, and when they are grey I am lifeless.

Every creator experiences the same feelings of extreme ambition and depression and solitude. However, [00:31:00] when the Hasid tells a story, it's different. The Hasid tells stories of redemption and always asking, whatever he does, whatever he says he would ask, what about the messiah in all this? Well, do we believe in him? We must because when he will come he too not only will tell stories, he will become a story. Now, what about a solitude, the third solitude, solitude of Israel? Today it exists on many levels. Perhaps it always has, and especially in the twentieth century. We had no friends then. One of the saddest pages I have ever written is a decision made by a KGB commissar in my play on Soviet Jewry.

It takes place in the '60s [00:32:00] in Moscow. Nudged by a beadle called Zalman, an old rabbi dares to speak up against the oppression and persecution of his community in Soviet Russia.

And it's the evening of Yom Kippur. And again, nudged by Zalman the madman he bangs his fist on the lectern, and he says, I'll tell you the truth, and he tells the truth. For the first time, for the first time in 60 years, probably, he tells the truth. Everybody's worried. A communist official, a commissar comes to investigate. And nobody understands what will happen now. Nobody knows the future. What punishment was waiting for the old rabbi?

And the whole place actually -- the waiting, the waiting for the end because the first act, will the rabbi speak, and the second act he has spoken, and we know his speech. [00:33:00] And there's a kind of interrogation, investigation. At the end, at the very end, the commissar, cruel as never before, turns to the rabbi, and he says to him, poor hero, poor dreamer. You have lost, and I feel sorry for you. You have fought for nothing. Your offering was not accepted. Worse, it wasn't even noticed. How could you have been so naïve? Did you really, really believe that your gesture would shake the earth?

Mankind has other worries. Were you counting on the intellectuals? They love ideas, not people. The Christians, only eternity interests them, theirs and yours. The Jews, your own brothers, in your imagination you saw them marching in the

streets of [00:34:00] Paris, London, New York, and Jerusalem shouting that you here are not alone. You thought their anger would explode and shatter human conscience. Well, it's too bad. Jews have their own concerns, their own excuses. And who knows, they may even be the same excuses. But tell me, when all over Europe your people were being exterminated, how many Jews took part in how many demonstrations in how many communities to protest, to shout, to weep, yet simply to weep?

Day after day, night after night, hundreds and thousands were disappearing into mass graves or burning to cinders. All this was known to the free world, and yet holidays were celebrated. Charity balls and dinners were organized. People went to concerts, to the theater. Everything went on as if nothing were happening. [00:35:00] And today life goes on. And those who don't suffer refuse to hear about suffering, and particularly about Jewish suffering. That is why I pity you. You were beaten from the start.

You never had a chance. And you knew it. But now you know it even more. You know that you cannot count on anyone, and what's more, that you don't count for anyone. Why should we punish you? As far as we are concerned, as far as the outside world is concerned, you have done nothing. Your dream was the dream of a

madman. Why should we make you into a martyr, turn you into an example? You revolt. That supreme and exalting gesture, which for you was meant to bring together and justify the suppressed agonies and [00:36:00] hopes of an entire lifetime, of an entire generation, perhaps. Well, my sad hero, that revolt quite simply did not take place.

Now, we had no friends in those times. Do we have some now? Where are Israel's friends today? Strange as it may sound, they can be found in religious circles. Whatever problems we may and must have about Christianity's negative towards Jews in the past, the fact is that it has changed. Never have Jewish-Christian relations been as good, as productive, as friendly as they are now. With the exception of some Protestant groups, conversion of Jews is no longer a Christian priority. Rabbis and priests meet regularly to debate ways to prevent [00:37:00] anti-Jewish discrimination and propaganda.

The pope's visit to Jerusalem and Yad Vashem, his visit to the synagogue in Rome, his homilies against anti-Semitism played a role in improving Jewish-Catholic relations. The Vatican apologized for what the Inquisition has done to the Jews in the middle ages, so did the Lutheran church for its founder's virulent anti-Jewish statements. Still, the situation

politically is less encouraging. When it comes to defending Israel few voices are being heard. This is especially true in Europe where the intellectual have always been pro-Palestinian. Now, they're anti-Israeli positions resonate as anti-Semitic.

Well, for a Jew of my generation, Israel represents a miracle that renews itself every day. At times it is difficult for us to relate to it and to dream what it embodies. We are seized by [00:38:00] a strange yet not so strange feeling that personally and ontologically we owe it something. Without Israel would we have had the motivation and the strength to begin our life again and build on ruins? Often I wonder, how did the Jewish people manage to rise up from an oppressive state of mourning three years after the most murderous war in recorded history? It issued a challenge to destiny and proclaimed a new Jewish state on its ancestral soil.

How did it succeed in creating such a dazzling shortcut between the dark tragedy and the glorious victory of national independence? Naturally, in pure technical terms one could say that we owe the establishment of the Jewish state not to the Jewish people at large but to those Jews or fervent Zionists who work there, live there, and fought there. What was in the name of our entire [00:39:00] people and its history that the small

Zionist community led its social, political, and military battle whose aim was national rebirth and sovereignty there where centuries earlier David and Solomon ruled and imposed the will of God.

All of us could have joined them, but we did not. The reasons were varied and often personal. But let's be frank. History called us, and we have not answered its appeal. We stayed in diaspora. Is this why we feel, all of us or most of us, this is what we must feel, morally in Israel's debt. Is our love for Israel fed by feelings of frustration and/or guilt? I remain attached to Israel with all the fibers of my being. Is there another land where the distant past dominates changing events to such a degree, [00:40:00] where names of streets bring you back thousands of years?

In Beersheba you think of Abraham's faith. In Ashkelon you recall Samson's strength. On Mount Carmel you hear Elijah's voice. I remember, will always remember my first visit to Jerusalem. I had the impression it was not the first time. Ever since I returned to Jerusalem with a feeling that it is still the first time. Could the Jews say that of any other city under the sun? When Israel goes through crisis we are concerned, almost physically concerned. Whatever happens there

affects us. Thus we take part in its festivities and victories as well as in its anguish and sadness.

We weep with the mothers who lost their sons in battle. We embrace young orphans and seek ways to comfort them. And when Israel is slandered, as it is now in so many quarters, we feel not only outrage but pain. Israel's wounds are ours, as is Israel's hope. [00:41:00] That is why recent events in Israel touch me so deeply, and all of us, I imagine. We watch young Palestinians on the screen, their faces twisted with hatred, and somehow we know that we too are their target. Their religious fanatics shout death to -- they don't shout death to Israelis. They shout death to the Jews. And many of them say death to the Jews everywhere.

Get them, the Imam says in the mosque, and I'm afraid not of their threats but of their implication. Their hatred is so pervasive, so perverse, so fatalistic that it eliminates all possibility of reconciliation and peace. How did the hostilities begin? In the medias one person alone is blamed, Ariel Sharon. Two days before Rosh Hashanah he went to the Temple Mount, and that provoked the wrath of Palestinians. But what the media failed [00:42:00] to report is that Israel's

foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami had informed the Palestinian authority of the upcoming event and heard no objection.

The press reports mention an entourage of 1,000 or 2,000 soldiers. Nonsense. Later some papers reduced the figure to 200. Even that was too high. Sharon had reinforced security, that was all. But even that was too much for the Palestinian mob, which not that day but next day, next day without Sharon began the attacks on Israelis everywhere. We all saw the picture of young Muhammad, the 12-year-old boy in the arms of his wounded father. I hope that we were all pained. We had to be, and heartbroken. When one sees a child one cannot not be heartbroken, whoever that child is.

But that picture was used and exploited [00:43:00] to hurt Israel. What about the tragic death of Rabbi Hillel Lieberman? It was forgotten. This young father of seven children had come running, dressing in his tallit, to save a Sefer Torah from the ransacked tomb of Joseph, and they killed him. And when his body was handed over to the Israeli army he had a hundred bullets in his body. They killed him a hundred times. Why? Why such savagery? Why such exaltation when the two young army reserves were lynched?

One had just gotten married. The other found out that her husband was killed, and she called him on her cell phone and the murderer answered saying, your husband is dead. I killed him. And you saw it [00:44:00] on television, the murders and their friends and acolytes were dancing around the mutilated bodies. Why? My God, why? All over the world Israel was criticized, even condemned for firing at children. But what should Israel do? I'm sure they tried everything else. Israel, after all, has shown its humanity. Just remember, after the lynching Israel, in reprisal, bombed four buildings, but three hours before the operation Israel informed the Palestinian authorities that we are going to bomb those four buildings. Evacuate the people. And therefore not a single casualty was recorded.

Now, you show me any other nation in the world who will do that, to warn who was then the enemy, [00:45:00] to go out so that no one will be hurt. So what could Israel do? What should Israel do? I wish I knew. I would say it. Should Israel retreat before the storm throwers? Retreat how far? And what about the youngsters who fire machine guns and throw Molotov cocktails while hiding behind the children, and why are the children there in the first place? Why were they used as shields rather than be kept behind in safe places, in school or in garden or at home?

Last week a minister of Arafat's cabinet announced that adolescents below 17 or 18 would not be allowed to take part in violent demonstrations anymore. Well, why so late? All this, of course, gives us a feeling of profound sadness. I have written two texts with anger. Usually I don't do that.

[00:46:00] I like to write in fervor, not with anger. Like to write only with passion but not anger. I have two texts that I wrote. One I wrote now and one earlier. What I wrote now is a statement I made at a demonstration we had in New York, solidarity with Israel. We were some 20- or 30,000 people.

I confess to you that I was melancholy, sad. In a city of three million Jews only 20- or 30,000 came in that moment, it was after the lynching, to say we are with Israel. What I said then I'll repeat now. We have gathered here to affirm our solidarity with Israel. We're outraged by the hypocritical vote on the security council, which did not condemn [00:47:00] Palestinian excessive reactions but condemned Israel's response to them. We stand by Israel whose present struggle was imposed upon her by the intransigence of the chairman of the Palestinian authority. Those of us who reject hatred and fanaticism as options and who consider peace as the noblest of efforts, finally recognize

Yasser Arafat for what he is: ignorant, devious, and unworthy of trust.

We had hoped for a genuine peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians. We had dreams of Israeli and Palestinian children playing together, studying together, laughing together, discovering each other's world. The pain, the agony, the death of any child, Palestinian or Jewish, is a torment to us. But why does Chairman Arafat not protect them but instead uses them as shields for adults throwing stones and worse? [00:48:00] Yes, it is with a heavy heart that we say that our dreams of peace have gone up in the smoke of ransacked synagogues, in the lynching of Israeli prisoners, and of blood-thirsty mobs shouting their vision of a Jerusalem without Jews and a Middle East without Israel.

And I blame the supreme leader of the Palestinians, Yasser Arafat. By rejecting Israel's unprecedented generous territorial concessions he is burying the peace process. In so doing he has betrayed the confidence not only of his negotiating partners but of President Clinton and other Western leaders, just as he has betrayed the highest honor society can bestow upon a person. How can a leader, any leader in Israel now renew discussion with him before all the kidnapped soldiers are

returned to their families? By unleashing mob violence and bloodshed in the streets rather than guiding his [00:49:00] frustrated people towards coexistence he renounced their legitimate aspiration for a future free of suffering and hatred, and I hold him responsible for the murder of Rabbi Hillel Lieberman and the lynching of two young reservists.

All his promises were lies. All his commitments were false. Indeed, many peace activists here and in Israel are now reassessing the Oslo Accords. Under Israeli sovereignty Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike could pray without fear in Jerusalem, our capitol, which is at the center of Jewish history. A Jew may be Jewish far from Jerusalem but not without Jerusalem. Though a Jew may not live in Jerusalem, Jerusalem lives inside him. No other nation's memory is as identified with its memory as ours, no people has been as faithful to its name or has celebrated its past with as much fervor. None of our prayers are as passionate as those that speak of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is a [00:50:00] dream of our dreams, the light that illuminates our hopeless moments. Its legitimacy lies in its sovereignty. To oppose one is to deny the other. Israel will never give up either. I accuse Yasser Arafat of being morally weak, politically shortsighted, and an obstacle to peace. I

accuse him of murdering the hope of an entire generation, his and ours. Why did I say ignorant? I'll tell you why. Because he dared in Camp David, when he spoke to President Clinton and Secretary Albright, dared to say that we Jews have absolutely no right over Jerusalem because even the old city, even Kotel, the wall, nothing.

He said there was never a temple there. Now really, how far can he go? What does he want to prove or to obtain? [00:51:00] Simply to deprive us, to deprive us of our right to our memory. So really the main conflict is about Jerusalem. Why does this city of David provoke such passion among Palestinians? They want it. In fact, they want all of it. Lately we know that. They even say so. They want everything, and therefore the question is, how far can Israel go? Now we know that when Barak came to Camp David Barak was ready to give so much, more than anyone before him.

Never, never had Arafat been able to receive what Barak offered him. He didn't accept it because he chose a path of violence because he believes, apparently, that Islam is [00:52:00] a history also, and for the history of Palestine he says, or he thinks or he wants us to think or to know, for the history of Palestine, independence of Palestine must be obtained not around

a table but on a battlefield. And so, if that is so, where are we going? What will tomorrow bring? What will happen? I wish we knew. I don't. Nobody knows.

And yet the solitude of Israel is bearable as long as we are together. A Jew alone is in danger. I could never imagine a Jew alone. Just as man needs other men to be human, a Jew needs other Jews to be Jewish. A Jew chooses to define himself or herself not in relation to the hate they elicit from strangers [00:53:00] but rather by the faith they inspire in their people. A Jew alone is in peril. His security lies within the community which helps him survive and obtain fulfillment. Community is the key word. It indicates what paths to follow. It opens hidden gates and bestows ancient strength on every day's formula.

A vital, vibrant word, a primary word that cuts through all other words, challenging them, enriching them, community. What would a Jew be without his community? A withered branch, a nameless wanderer buffeted by alien, hostile destinies. Together we represent historical power, a collective consciousness. Alone we must cope with our own weakness. Together we are each other's affirmation. Alone we disappear. To be part of a community, to shape it and strengthen it is the

most urgent, the most vital obligation facing the Jewish individual.

Our sages tell us that in heaven [00:54:00] collective prayers are headed more readily. What is the gravest sin a Jew can commit? To cut himself off from the community of Israel. And what is the severest punishment? To be excluded from the same community. Just as excommunication is the ultimate punishment, adhesion is the supreme reward. It is within his destiny that the Jew must find his fulfillment, and his destiny can flourish only to the extent that it is assumed as a collective destiny.

We come to the end of this year's series, and I don't want to leave with words of despair. Despair is never an option. We have learned that. We have lived so many years. We have endured so many experiences. And we have learned certain things. We have learned the way of overcoming despair.

[00:55:00] We have learned how to begin again. For we know now, those of us who believe that Jewish history has meaning, and we are part of humanity, and humanity itself is wounded when we are wounded. We who believe that whatever happens to one community affects all others, whatever happens to one person, in a way, affects all others.

We who believe therefore that it is not given to us to begin.  
Only God can begin. All we can do is begin again. And that  
goes for everything. We have built on ruins. We have built new  
hope. And now we know one thing, that we must start all over  
again. And we shall. Thank you. (applause) [00:56:00]

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