

Elie Wiesel Archive

PHIL MILLER: (applause) Good evening. Good evening, everyone. Good evening. My name is Phil Miller, and I am the director of the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life here at the 92nd Street Y, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 92nd Street Y tonight for the annual Rosenthal lecture. This evening we are honored to have an incredibly thoughtful panel with us to explore the very simple topic of God. Tonight's program is also part of our second Kallah initiative, a joint venture in Jewish education between the 92nd Street Y and the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America. And as we sit here in Kaufmann Concert Hall at the corner of 92nd and Lexington this evening, thousands of people across the United States and Canada are partaking in this evening also through the magic of technology via satellite. Tonight's program is being broadcast [00:01:00] live to more than 15 Jewish community centers, and we extend a special welcome to all our continental guests this evening, a New York welcome. (applause) I especially would like to give a welcome, warm welcome to 40 teenagers who are gathered this evening at the Jewish community center in New Orleans, Louisiana who we are very happy to have joining us this evening. Good

evening, New Orleans. (applause) Yesterday we celebrated Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel Independence Day and 54 years of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. During this trying time our thoughts are with the people of Israel, and we stand together with them in the fight for peace, freedom, and justice. [00:02:00] Everyone, when you came in this evening, either here to Kaufmann Concert Hall or to wherever you are in JCCs throughout North America, you were given a sheet that has a short prayer on behalf of the State of Israel. And I'd like everyone to please join me now in this prayer. It's in both Hebrew, transliterated, and in the English. And we'll do the Hebrew together and then the English together. *"Avinu shebashamayim, tzur Yisrael vegualo, barekh et medinat Yisrael, reishit tzemichat, geulateinu. Hagein aleyha be'evrat chasdekha uferos aleyha sukkat shelomekha ushelach orrekha va'amitekha lerasheha, sareha, veyoatzeha vetakneim be-atzah tovah milfanekha. Chazeik et yedei meginei eretz kodsheinu vehanchileim Elokeinu yeshuah va-ateret nitzachon te'atreim venatata shalom ba'aretz vesimchat olam leyoshveha. Vinomar: Amein."*[00:02:28 - 00:03:14]. And now in English, "Our Father in heaven, rock and redeemer of the people Israel, bless the State of Israel with its promise of redemption. Shield it with your love. Spread

over it the shelter of your peace. Guide its leaders and advisors with your light and your truth. Help them with your good counsel. Strengthen the hands of those who defend our holy land. Deliver them, crown their efforts with triumph. Bless the land with peace and its inhabitants with lasting joy. And let us say, amen." This evening's program is endowed [00:04:00] by John and Jackie Rosenthal, long time members of our Y family who have shown generosity and graciousness beyond measure. We honor the memory of Mina and Harold Rosenthal this evening. Please welcome Mr. John Rosenthal to our stage. (applause)

JOHN ROSENTHAL: Good evening. I'll be brief. It's my honor to have been asked to introduce Rabbi David Woznica, who is the founder of this program tonight and its predecessors. My wife, who I can't see from here because of the lights, is very concerned about how I could speak on very short notice about David Woznica. [00:05:00] And what I said to her, which I'll say to you, it's not a problem. For those of you who have never been in this auditorium with David Woznica, you're in for a treat, and obviously that is true of the other panelists tonight, both of whom have been here often, one of whom is here every year. We wish the other was too. David Woznica, his title now, which, that I've got to read because I can't remember it

it's so illustrious, is the Executive Vice President of Jewish Affairs for the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles. I know him because he was here at the 92nd Street Y. He was Phil Miller's predecessor as the initial director of the Bronfman Center for Jewish [00:06:00] Life. And as such, he created many of the programs at the 92nd Street Y which have endured to the benefit of the whole Jewish community. Once a year David would call on me because he also has conducted the High Holy Day services here at the 92nd Street Y and so, on Kol Nidre, I have stood before some of you with the role of raising money for the 92nd Street Y. That's not the topic tonight. David is the most articulate, and we've got two other very articulate people with us tonight, the most articulate person I have ever heard on the subject of Judaism. He is always made part of the [00:07:00] High Holy Days an hour where you could ask the rabbi anything you wanted. That has been, to me, the most interesting and important hour of the High Holy Days because of what he said to all of us who attended. With that, I'd like to present Rabbi David Woznica. (applause)

DAVID WOZNICA: I'm not exactly sure what to say after that introduction. To John and Jackie, thank you. Thank you for those beautiful words. The Talmud teaches the

words that come from the heart go into the heart, and indeed those have. And to Rabbi Miller --

F1: Can you turn up the volume?

DAVID WOZNICA: And to Rabbi Miller --

F1: We can't hear back here.

DAVID WOZNICA: They need the volume turned up apparently. Not only thank you to the Rosenthals for the beautiful [00:08:00] remarks but to Rabbi Miller for the introduction of this evening. Ladies and gentlemen, I've had the privilege of being on this stage last year with Professor Elie Wiesel to talk about values and a few weeks after that with Governor Mario Cuomo to talk about values. But I believe that this is the first time in history that both of them will have appeared on stage together, and it's happening here at the 92nd Street Y. Without further ado, please welcome Governor Mario Cuomo, Professor Elie Wiesel. (applause) Let me introduce them formally to you. Governor Cuomo [00:09:00] was the fifty-second governor of the state of New York. He was the longest serving Democrat in the state's modern history. Serving three terms from 1983 to 1994, his 12 years of service were marked by socially progressive legislation and improvements including the country's most extensive drug treatment network, the largest homeless assistance program, and a nationally

recognized plan for AIDS prevention and treatment. *The New York Times* called his tenure one of the most celebrated governorships in history. He had been invited by President Clinton to be nominated as a Supreme Court Justice but declined. Since leaving public office, however, he has returned to the practice of law and is a partner in the international law firm of Willkie Farr and Gallagher.

Please welcome Governor Mario Cuomo. (applause) [00:10:00]

Humanitarian, scholar, author, our teacher, Elie Wiesel has devoted himself to the eradication of hate, the defense of human rights, and the pursuit of peace throughout the world. For 35 years Professor Wiesel has graced our stage here at the 92nd Street Y, inviting us into his world, teaching us, learning with us. A Nobel Peace Prize laureate, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the United States Congressional Gold Medal. Since 1976 he has been the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the humanities at Boston University. His acclaimed publications include *Night, Dawn, A Beggar in Jerusalem,* and *The Forgotten*. Recently he released his two-part [00:11:00] memoir entitled *All Rivers Run to the Sea* and *The Sea is Never Full*. An honor to welcome you along with Governor Cuomo, Professor Elie Wiesel. (applause) My friends, the topic this evening is God, personal thoughts.

And I will endeavor very hard to focus on that particular issue with a couple of, perhaps, diversion as time goes along. But the way I just want to begin the program is, and I think Professor Wiesel, I'll direct this question initially to you and then Governor Cuomo, have your thoughts about God changed over the years?

ELIE WIESEL: They may change tonight. (laughter) I don't think they will. I'm looking at ourselves, and here are three human beings that decide to sit down and talk [00:12:00] about God. Well, it's not new. It happened, actually, before creation, before the world became world. We are taught in the midrash that one day God decided to sit down with his angels and discuss man. (laughs) And they were discussing men. And God said should I or shouldn't I? (laughter) And one angel said what do you need them for? Come on, he's going to lie, to cheat, to kill. Come on, it will be better without him. And the other one said oh no, look, he can repent. He can do good things. So God decided all right, and here we are. You know very well that one doesn't talk about God. Here we quote Kafka who said at best we can talk to God.

[00:13:00] (pause) (laughter)

MARIO CUOMO: You know, I was daunted by the prospect of being here with two Jewish biblical scholars, practiced

apologists for religion and one of them the most articulate man on the planet on the subject of Judaism at least and the other one of the great, great, great world figures, and truly he is that. And I looked for a rationale for why I should be here (laughter) because I'm not Jewish, and I'm not a biblical scholar, and I'm not an exegete, and I'm not an apologist, but I am a Roman Catholic Christian, which means I have a religion that borrowed heavily from Judaism. [00:14:00] And I'm very satisfied with what we borrowed, (laughter) and I felt that if I came and listened closely there might be more good pickings for me. (laughter) More direct answer to your question is the things that have changed since I was younger and thought about God, I think in a way it is easier now for me to believe in the God as I see him, her, it, than when I was young because when I was young, like many other young people, I put a primacy on intellectuality and being able to prove things. And if I couldn't prove it, it wasn't so, which is, of course, the height of [00:15:00] arrogance. As I grew older, I began to understand how small my intellect was, how small I was in a universe billions of years older than we are, and the process reversed. And I began to believe unless I can prove it's not so, it may very well be so. And it becomes easier for you to accept things that you cannot prove



intellectually, especially if they resonate with you, if they're compatible with your impulses and your instincts, if they seem right. And so in that way God has become easier for me. One other thing that has dawned on me, perhaps not too late in life but late in life, and I think I might have mentioned this to you, Rabbi, I was at St. John the Divine Cathedral on Saturday, and I was privileged to [00:16:00] take the pulpit there to address, I don't know, 2,000 Episcopalians on the installation of a new dean. On Monday I was in Rockford, Illinois talking to the Methodists at a substance abuse center. On the day that the president declared war I was at a temple that night in, a Jewish temple, in New Jersey. And interspersed, I have been in various Catholic audiences, and in all four of those places I have made essentially the same coda to a speech, four times. And it was that it seems to me our politics badly needs to learn from our major religions, and that our major religions, starting with Judaism, all share two predicates without which they would not be the religions that they are and with which they are magnificently easy religions to understand. [00:17:00] And the two predicates, starting with the Hebrew are tzedakah and tikkun olam. Tzedakah, righteousness, exquisite intertwining of giving and loving, which requires us,

requires us to think of all as brothers and sisters. And Tikkun olam, what is our mission as brothers and sisters? To lock arms and repair the universe. The Christians borrowed it absolutely whole. The whole law is summed up for us, love one another as you love yourself for the love of me, which is right from the Old Book, for I am God and the truth, and the truth is that I made the world but did not complete it, and it's your job to collaborate in creation. And Islam, as I understand it, says exactly the same thing. And so the Methodists, the Episcopalians, the Jews, and the Catholics all [00:18:00] with these two principles, and it occurs to me that if we could find a way to emphasize that -- because all the other great religions share those predicates pretty nearly. If we could find a way simply to say that over and over to the whole planet it might perhaps reduce just a little bit killing in the name of religion and replace it with understanding in the name of religion.

DAVID WOZNICA: The god that you both worship, that we all worship, I realize is not definable. But are there characteristics of this god? For example, do you believe that God is all powerful? (laughter)

MARIO CUOMO: Well, the god that I believe in is by definition the first force, the *raison d'être*, the reason we exist at all. [00:19:00] It's the purpose of life.

DAVID WOZNICA: Sure.

MARIO CUOMO: There is no life without that god. There would be a void without that god. It is a god that shares everything we have. To the extent that we have intellect it's a god that has intellect. To the extent that we have emotions it's a god that has emotion but has it infinitely. And it is a god with a plan. And the plan is to take this world, which is imperfect, as he has left it to us, and for us over the generations and the millennia to work at repairing it, improving it until it is perfect. That's the god I believe in. And that's the mission for us, to be soldiers in that army working to make a perfect planet.

DAVID WOZNICA: I appreciate the existentialist perspective that, in a sense, without God [00:20:00] life could be meaningless, and therefore we make up a meaning. But I guess let me ask you a little differently, Professor Wiesel, your thoughts. Is God capable of intervening in human events, and does God intervene in human events? We just celebrated Passover, the celebration of the parting of the Red Sea, of God's intervening in human life. Do you

believe that occurred? And do you believe God still intervenes?

ELIE WIESEL: Well, I love the Bible, and the Bible of course is God's intervention. God is, period. The moment you say that, everything else is a commentary. How God is, what he decides to do with us, with our perception of his godliness, his divinity, his action in history is something that it takes years to explore what God is. Now, the question, of course, is [00:21:00] since God is, where is He? Is He also in evil if God is everywhere? The Zohar says "*Let atar panui minei*" [00:21:11]. That means there isn't a single place void of God. That is evil also a kind of vehicle in which God can take a seat in order to drive the world? And if so, what kind of god is it then? In other words, is it possible, therefore, that there can be evil in goodness but also divinity in evil? Now, according to the answers that you give, you can have explanations and understandings about all kinds of religions. That is why religion, which is supposed to be an art, really an art of elevating the human being, elevating him, instead we have seen in history what religion has done. [00:22:00] It brought the human being down to the worst sense of existence. So instead of bringing people together, as the governor said, actually it set them apart. And so is God

useful? Do we need God? Now, as to describe God, you know very well Maimonides says we cannot. And therefore I say Kafka is right. We cannot really. Who are we even to describe God? Who are we to speak of God? We are a speck of dust. We come from dust. We go to dust. And we want to understand God, really? Now, having said that, of course, this is the greatness of the religious answer. True you are dust, but you are destined to greatness because you can question God and things about God and for God. [00:23:00] So here we are, therefore, in Jewish philosophy at its best, which is we may really do whatever we want. We may, provided, from the very beginning you know that somewhere, somewhere your deeds are being inscribed. In other words, somewhere there is an accountant, literally. There is an accountant. Be careful, you remember, the book is open, and the hand is writing. And at the end you must say why did you do what you have done? And I am afraid of that. (laughter)

DAVID WOZNICA: Let's pick up on that. At the end of life the Talmud teaches us that God is going to ask us a series of questions. Governor, the Catholics can use this if they like the idea. (laughter)

MARIO CUOMO: Thank you.

DAVID WOZNICA: There are six questions, I believe, that God is going to ask us. The first four are [00:24:00] were you honest in your business practice? Did you study Torah regularly? Did you attempt for a family? And did you --

ELIE WIESEL: Were you waiting for redemption?

DAVID WOZNICA: Right, did you hope for redemption? Do you remember the last two, Professor?

ELIE WIESEL: Sure. But you know, the first one that you said, I have a different interpretation. It is "*Nasata v'natata b'emunah* [00:24:24], which means have you been honest in your business dealings, and I would rather say have you made *emunah* into a business?

DAVID WOZNICA: Faith.

ELIE WIESEL: Have you taken your faith and turned it to a business, and then I think, well, again, I'm afraid.

DAVID WOZNICA: So I want to flip it around, and I want to give you now the chance, if you had, you should all live *ad me'ah v'esrim* to 120. But if you have your chance to speak to God, what are the questions you would like to ask him?

MARIO CUOMO: What questions would I like to ask God?  
[00:25:00] Why didn't you just make the whole place

perfect, Lord, to begin with, instead of leaving us many millennia to work towards perfection? Or why couldn't you have started the whole thing with perfection and allowed us simply to enjoy perfection?

DAVID WOZNICA: Did we have that option in the garden of Eden?

MARIO CUOMO: If we -- well, he would say that I gave you that option, and you've always had it, and you gave it up through your weakness. And then I would say, but then, God, why did you make me weak? And he would say it's lawyers like you that (laughter; inaudible). (applause) I think one of the questions [00:26:00] I'm surprised that -- I was looking for pieces, and I thought I had one there, but you kind of complicated it with six questions. Why couldn't he ask just one question, which is did you listen to Hillel who, on one foot, said just make sure you don't do anything to anybody you don't want done to you. And didn't he say that that was the whole law, Hillel?

DAVID WOZNICA: That's what Hillel said, but God gets the final word.

MARIO CUOMO: That doesn't count then?

DAVID WOZNICA: Well, given that, what you just said, in other words, why didn't you make it perfect, if you believe God could have made it perfect, are there times

when you're angry with God for that or angry with God for what has happened both at the hands of human beings and suffering that seems to be natural in occurrence? For example, if somebody harms another human being we might ask how could God allow that, or why did God [00:27:00] create human beings with the capacity to do that? And yet, we might ask, why are there diseases that we don't blame human beings for? Does that anger you towards God?

MARIO CUOMO: I think the most difficult truth to deal with is the inability to explain evil in the world, especially evil that is not explicable because of bad choices you've made. But even then you'd get back to my proposition which is, you know, why, God, did you give me the capacity for making bad choices? And the answer really is look, God's plan, which we can't fully understand, and we have to start there. If we try rationalizing everything, then we're going to fail. Because whatever religion you have, it's going to require faith, [00:28:00] some degree of faith. That last piece that you need to bridge from your tiny, meager intellect to an appreciation of a universal force that's so infinitely beyond you that it's foolish even to consider measuring its dimensions and understanding it. So you need to, at one point, have faith. And that faith has to be, usually, something that



isn't totally intolerable to your intellect. So it's not compelled by your intellect, but it's acceptable to your intellect. Nobody, nobody, nobody has ever explained to me the existence of evil in the world, the Holocaust, Auschwitz, a child dies in the crib mysteriously. Why? Why? Why? You ask the question forever. After 9/11 [00:29:00] all the questions about how could it happen, 19 people with carpet cutters? But the big question for religious people is why did you let it happen to innocent people? And the question, after you read the rabbi's book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, and you read Teilhard, and you read all the other philosophers, I think a lot of us conclude, with God's help or without it, that the one thing you can be sure of in this life, and maybe only the one thing, is the value of the breath you can still draw, the value of the life you still have, which brings you back to the Jewish emphasis on the life you have and making the most of it. And then you have two choices. You make the most of it either by treating it as a basket of appetites for food, for drink, for sex, for power, or you make the most of it by trying to improve the universe around you: tikkun olam. And that explains [00:30:00] why he allowed it to be imperfect. If he didn't you wouldn't

be able to have tikkun olam because you wouldn't have anything to repair.

DAVID WOZNICA: You know, it's interesting. The question that you ask theologically could have been asked when Cain kills his brother Abel in the fourth chapter of Genesis. God allowed it to happen. You could have asked the question. While emotionally the death of a greater number of human beings may have a greater impact, intellectually the death of any one innocent human being is the same, forgive the word, but indictment against God. Rabbi Harold Kushner's book, which, actually, it's interesting, and you did -- this isn't to diminish it, the book is actually entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* as opposed to why. And I would say 95 percent of the people who quote the book say 'why' because in truth we want the answer. Rabbi Kushner's insight is how you should react to it. He doesn't actually, in his book, so much describe [00:31:00] why it happens, but he's saying if you believe God could do something about it and doesn't, then how could you love that God? Therefore, he concludes, and I hope I'm speaking for him correctly, that God cannot intervene on behalf of human beings, therefore God will be at your side as you go through this together. But let me just continue with a question. Professor Wiesel, you had

your chance to ask God a series of questions, what might they be?

ELIE WIESEL: I would remain silent probably. I would wait for him. But I would ask him really did I understand you correctly? The main thing, God speaks. A text for me, a sacred text, contains God's voice. And I try, of course, to interpret it. In order to interpret it I must understand it. And I would like to know did I understand you? Did I [00:32:00] hear you well? Or maybe it was all a mistake, which, of course, is the most anguishing of all questions. All the theories that I learned, all the responses that I received, all the avenues I opened, and what if it was a mistake? In other words, and what if I had not lived my life, if I had lived the life of another? Only God can answer me that, not me. So I would rather ask him the philosophical questions we are all asking about evil and good and why this and why that. I would go to the core and say look, your name is truth. Your seal is truth, says the Talmud. "*Chotamo haKadosh Baruch Hu Emet.*" [00:32:45 - 00:32:47]. So I deserve the truth, and only you can tell me what life was mine. Was it mine? Now you know very well if you go into mysticism, into [00:33:00] kabbalah, you can come to a different answer, gilgul, metempsychosis, reincarnation. He would

say don't worry. Actually you lived the life of somebody else. (laughter) But it's not bad. It's good. Because since you lived another life now you have helped that life redeem itself. And wait, they'll become somebody else, and that person will lead your life. And I will be there watching, no doubt. So I would have a very, I think, a very interesting conversation with God.

DAVID WOZNICA: Do you believe that there is a life beyond this?

ELIE WIESEL: It depends when. When I was younger and a *bahur yeshiva*, when I studied in yeshiva, I believed, of course. I believed that there is an afterlife, not only that, in our texts we have scripts. [00:34:00] I know exactly what is happening. I can quote you exactly what happens from the moment a person dies, what happens when the person is in his grave or in her grave, for how long it takes for the first angel to come and ask the first question. By the way, the angel is knocking on the grave. He says what is your name? He doesn't want to make a mistake. He too is afraid of hitting a different grave. What is your name? And then you come before the celestial tribunal. So our texts are so imaginative that they become literary creations. Later on, growing up, sometimes I'm less sure. I don't know. Doesn't mean I don't believe,

but I don't know. But between belief and knowledge there is an abyss. But what would the other be without one or the other? [00:35:00]

DAVID WOZNICA: Governor, your thoughts on the afterlife?

MARIO CUOMO: I believe in an afterlife. I believe in a spiritual afterlife. I can't understand it fully, but I chose to believe it because it is consonant with the basic belief I have in God. I believe in God's plan, and God's plan as it has been revealed to me is to give me an imperfect world and allow me to participate as one of billions and billions in trying to make that place better. And the reward for that is you arrive at perfection, what Teilhard calls the pleroma, the ultimate consummation when there is pure civility, when there is no Middle East, where there is no war, where there is no hate, where there is no greed because you've grown up through the ages, through the eons perhaps, [00:36:00] to perfection. And at that point you enjoy it eternally. That's God's plan spiritually. Now, when I was young that was a real problem for me. But getting back to what I said earlier, because I didn't understand spirituality. Now I'm older and frightened by the possibilities. Now I believe in all sorts of spirits because I am not smart enough to disprove them. And since

I have a God who teaches me that there will be a spirit life forever, then you begin to ask questions in your old years. Well, I wonder when it starts. I wonder if they're here now. I wonder if they're listening. I wonder if that guy that I did a number on a few years ago is around. So yes, I do believe in the afterlife. And if only as an inspiration I'm going to cling to that belief because it gives me significance. It's a place to [00:37:00] finally appreciate my life and to undo the injustices of it. It comes out perfectly in the afterlife. Otherwise I'm left with no explanation for the evil here.

DAVID WOZNICA: You know, I so agree with you, and I think it is such an important issue. I do a bit of lecturing and increasingly am speaking on this topic, a Jewish perspective on the afterlife. And I've often asked large Jewish groups how many of you believe that Judaism affirms an afterlife? And very few Jews believe that Judaism affirms an afterlife. My understanding of the Jewish tradition that there is a passionate affirmation, a --

ELIE WIESEL: Not really, in the Bible they --

DAVID WOZNICA: Not in the Bible but in the Talmud, *olam ha-ba*, the world to come.

ELIE WIESEL: Absolutely, but within the Bible itself

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DAVID WOZNICA: Almost silent, agreed.

ELIE WIESEL: It only comes in rabbinic literature, in the Talmud.

DAVID WOZNICA: Right. Having said that, if there is no afterlife -- first of all, if there is no God there is no afterlife. The physical, corporeal is it. [00:38:00] And that means that Mother Teresa and Charlie Manson have the same fate when they die. And that is almost a joke to me. I want to believe in my heart that somehow the good will be rewarded in the next world and that the evil will be punished while at the same time understanding Judaism's great passion for focusing on this world. There's a sweet text that I read that suggested that if you want to have a taste of the afterlife while living in this world today there are three things that give you a taste of the afterlife. One is sexual relations. One is a sunset. And one is Shabbat. And when I mentioned this to a friend he said that doesn't mean you should go on a Friday night and have sex on the beach. (laughter) Let me ask you a more emotional question then than I even have. Are there times in your life where [00:39:00] you have felt God's presence, Elie?

ELIE WIESEL: I do, all the time. Sometimes with more intensity. But God is present. When you daven, when you pray and you officiate at the *amod*, at the pulpit there, it's written "*Shiviti Adoshem Li'negdi tamid.*" [00:39:24 - 00:39:26]. You must always have God as your presence, which means presence with a capital P it's called, actually. Sometimes it hurts. Surely sometimes he paralyzes me. How can I do certain things if God is present? And then the absence itself becomes present. God may be present in his absence, to me, but God is present, except there's a wall I can create between me and God. I don't want him to see too much, to know too much. But God, I think, since God is, [00:40:00] God is present, naturally. It's like memory. You don't remember all the time. You cannot because you cannot absorb that much. In order to remember, you must forget certain things. And therefore, in order to feel God's presence, you must almost imagine His absence. But as a rule there were times when God was, to me, a danger because it was too much. But usually as a person, as a husband, as a father, as friend, I feel God much more because God is there. It's almost visible. I can see God in their face. And although God should never be seen, but you can see God's countenance in somebody else's face. And therefore the face plays such an



important role in Jewish religion. And the face is in plural all the time. *Panim*, panim means faces. [00:41:00] Because I have my face and the face of God, and therefore it's so sacred the human being is sacred because there is God in that human being. If I kill I kill God.

DAVID WOZNICA: The way I wanted to phrase it to you, as I was thinking when Professor Wiesel was speaking, many of the decisions that you had to make in your professional life could not be made privately. It occurred to me when you were considering a run for president, when you were considering a position on the Supreme Court, Governor, did you ask yourself, did you in a sense try to get God's counsel or feel God's presence when you made those decisions?

MARIO CUOMO: First I went to Matilda. (laughter)

ELIE WIESEL: That's God for you, right.

MARIO CUOMO: Because no matter what God said, unless he shouted it at her -- (laughter) [00:42:00] Your question brings me back to the earlier question about changes in the way you saw God from the time you were young. I am a pre-Vatican Council Two Catholic. Now, there's one out there, I can tell. (laughter) Pre-Vatican Council Two Catholics were essentially Catholics who were taught that if you enjoyed it, it's a sin. And if you enjoyed it a lot, it's

a mortal sin. And the world is a series of moral obstacles designed by God as a kind of test to see if we deserve heaven. And in order to pass this test you have to put down all desires except the desire to give and be good. And so the desire called ambition, the desire for wealth, the desire [00:43:00] for sexual satisfaction, all these things were regarded as sinful. It was a kind of Calvinist approach. And it truly was. In this country, that's the way things were interpreted. Teilhard de Chardin, a great Jesuit who I've mentioned a few times, made an immense contribution and carried us back toward Judaism by writing a book called *The Divine Milieu*, which started with the proposition, a quote from Genesis, "God so loved the world that He made man." And his proposition was to despise the things of the world the way you do, to treat them as negatives, as a test is to insult God. God made the world as a thing of beauty for you to share in, participate in, every part of it. And in a way -- this is not pantheism [00:44:00] -- in a way, this ontologist, this person who concentrated on being, Teilhard, was saying you have to love everything you do. You have to love everything he has done and participate in it as fully as you possibly can, the perspiration, the joy, the fear, all of it. Understand that he created it for your good. And it reminds me a

little bit of the poem *Ithaca*, which I think probably is an atheist poem, the one that Maurice Templeton recited at Jackie's funeral about the trip being all, the journey being all, the way to Ithaca being all. Don't worry about what happens when you get to Ithaca, take the journey. Live the journey. Enjoy the journey. Enjoy the life. And so this makes it a lot easier to live for a person like me, Teilhard. Love [00:45:00] life. Get to be part of it. Take the blows. Get up. Keep going. Take the tragedies. Let me add one very personal story. I lost my brother four weeks ago. Frankie had been in the service twice. He wasn't terribly religious. He was super bright and a very good man who wasn't able to go to college because he had to stay and work, and I was the lucky one in the family. I got all the breaks, and he got none of them. He was married to a beautiful woman, had a child five years old and found the child frozen to death in the backyard. Child had stepped on the ice, fallen through the ice, and froze to death. The doctors said he died from the shock. He was found holding a rope that was on the bulkhead in Copiague. And at the funeral I saw priests crying at the funeral. I never saw that before, you know. And Frankie and I were both smokers in those days, and he was older than I. And at one point he said let's [00:46:00] go outside. His wife

was sedated, I think, Joan, but she had to be. And we went for a walk. And I said, Frankie, how do you handle this? What do you say? Now, I was going to church. I was an altar boy, you know, and I did all that, and I read, and I went to Vincentian school, et cetera, et cetera. Frankie didn't do any of that. He was in the service. Tough guy, worked hard, very bright. He said look, either there's nothing, in which case I have to jump off the bridge. What the heck is the point if nothing makes any sense, or it makes sense in a way I don't understand? Now, I'm going to choose to believe that because I have Joan. I have other children. I have obligations to them, and I have to live my life. So I'm going to choose to believe that because what is the alternative but despair? Now, by whatever route he took, he got to what appears to me to be the perfect religious position. You know, I [00:47:00] believe. I will suspend my dubious approach because I know I'm not smart enough to figure it out. And I will choose to believe that there is a sense here, that there is a sense that will someday be revealed to me. But whether it is or it isn't I'm going to take this journey, and I'm going to do it right. And he won from me an immense dedication, devotion, and admiration that I never lost

because all through my life he's made me feel less than he was as a religious thinker, and he did it so simply.

DAVID WOZNICA: You know, I have to tell you, I have been blessed with a very deep seated faith in God, but I am so angry at God at moments. I want to rise up against God and ask God "how can that happen?" when I walk out of a room, a hospital ward and see children with leukemia. I so admire his [00:48:00] faith. It sounds like his faith at that moment wasn't shaken but reinforced. Mine would be shaken to the core. As a matter of fact, mine is shaken to the core by his son's death. It doesn't have to happen to me. I think one of the things -- let me ask it to both of you. There are a thousand people in this room and thousands watching at this moment who wish they could have a deeper sense of God in their lives, a deeper sense of faith in their lives, and for whatever reason they are struggling. They want to have it. Most of the people who I speak to about God say I wish I could believe more, for whatever reason. Help them. What would you say to them to give them a deeper sense that they could somehow have a deeper sense of faith that they crave?

ELIE WIESEL: David, you spoke of anger. [00:49:00] Is that a response, or is it a question?

DAVID WOZNICA: It's a question. It's a sadness. I love God. I love my parents. There are things which trouble me that I see. It's a question.

ELIE WIESEL: As a question I accept it. As a response, why God does certain things, I don't know. I will never know. All I have is His words, written in what we have, the Torah. And the Torah has more questions than answers, except for the laws, as certain laws cannot be questioned. They're just there. One is not even supposed to explain them. They are there. The theodicy is at the basis of every theology. [00:50:00] In Hebrew we call it "*tzaddik ve-ra lo, rasha vetov lo*" [00:50:02 - 00:50:05], meaning why should a just person be unhappy? And why should a weaker person be happy? I am not worried by that. I am worried when a child dies. An innocent person, an innocent child, which means that the child takes my future, not only his own. That is why the death of a child can provoke such pain, so many doubts, so many questions. Dostoevsky says somewhere that the death of one child recalls God's existence into question. What about a million children? The sum of those futures is baffling. We are deprived of their futures. [00:51:00] I'm not even speaking of their suffering, which is already beyond imagination and beyond comprehension. But what about the

fact that they left without leaving a trace except our own suffering, which is their trace? How can you therefore speak of God to people who suffer so much? If I would be there, I would come close to that person and not speak. I would take his hand or her hand and in silence I would just stay with that person because words would only diminish the possibility of being together.

DAVID WOZNICA: And for the parents who are here who [00:52:00] want very much to instill a sense of God in their children, are there things that you believe that they might do? Let me ask it to you more personally. Was it important to you that your children had a sense of belief in God, and if so, how did you go about trying to instill that?

MARIO CUOMO: Well, I think it is important that my children and everybody have a sense of God. It's hard for me to imagine where it leaves you if you don't. I mean, if you don't believe that there is a rationale to your existence, an ultimate rationale, and I know there are many, many atheists who appear to live full and happy lives --

DAVID WOZNICA: Yes, I think it's important -- we lost the sound here. I think it's important to note. I think we would all agree you can be an atheist and be a saint,

[00:53:00] and you can be a believer in God and not be such a terrific human being. Belief in God alone does not ensure morality. But clearly you think there is a link in terms of meaning. How did you, how did you, what did you tell your children? What did you do to them or teach them to have that sense that was so important to you?

MARIO CUOMO: I think there's no magic to how to teach it. Catholicism particularly is easy to learn. It's difficult to live, but it's easy to learn the rules. There's a book by a rabbi and a priest that I would recommend to everybody. Rabbi, I think it's Marc Gellman -

DAVID WOZNICA: Oh yes.

MARIO CUOMO: -- and Monsignor Thomas Hartman. And I think they wrote the book particularly for Jewish and Christian [00:54:00] children in one household, perhaps. And I forget the exact title, but it is a wonderful book, and I'm sure the theology is good because they were very, very careful about that. And it teaches God beautifully. I mean, for example, if you read the book on the question of evil, as I remember it, they take the matter of evil, and they say think of it in two categories. One is evil that comes as a result of bad choices, pollution, even murder. Somebody makes an evil choice and commits a



murder. Well, all those things that are clearly the product of human choices, that's part of the imperfection of the world, which leads you to tikkun olam. I told you it was imperfect. That's the whole game. I left you a world and gave you a part of it, and don't be impatient with me because in the long run, if you [00:55:00] do your very best, and your very best can be very, very little because you're nothing, you're a little pisher, and this is a huge universe. And in this world don't expect to do big things because it's such a huge problem. But do what you can. That's the rule. And that's my plan for you. And when it's all over, believe me, you will live forever in perfection. Now, that book describes it as either choices or acts of God that are inexplicable. You know, why would God allow you to be struck by lightning, which isn't the product of a choice. And the book says very simply there look, there are some things you can't know about God, period. Now, you can say this is a copout. Yeah, it may be a copout for us to say we choose to believe in these things because they comfort us, but why not? [00:56:00] Why not choose to believe them? Can you prove they are not so? No, of course not. Then you get back to the arrogance of my youth. Yeah, but unless you can prove it is so -- why do I have to prove it is so? You can't prove it's not

so. Why can't I -- do you believe your wife has been faithful to you? Yes. Do you believe your mother and father were married when they had you? Yes. Did you ever see their birth certificate? No. You -- you can call them a name at that point because if they choose not to believe anything that they haven't proven, they can have a very arid existence. So I think it's not difficult to teach. It's difficult to live because you want to know. You want your intellect to be able to handle it, and your intellect can't handle. That's why we call it faith.

DAVID WOZNICA: You know, it's interesting. You remind me of the [00:57:00] quote of the late Rabbi Milton Steinberg, who was a rabbi in New York here for many, many years. And he has, I think I'm quoting this almost verbatim, he acknowledges. He says that the believer in God must account for the existence of evil and suffering. In other words, he acknowledges that challenge, but then he continues. The atheist must account for the existence of everything else. It's an interesting thought. I want to share with you --

MARIO CUOMO: May I tell you one story that is simple and because it makes another point too about faith, that it's not easy. The guy who fell off the 400-foot cliff, sheer-faced cliff, and there's only one limb growing

miraculously out of the stone, and on the way down he grabs it with two hands. And he's hanging on peering down at eternity and looks up and says is there somebody up there who can help me? And a voice comes out of the heavens, [00:58:00] says there is someone here who can help. Oh, good. Help me, please. He says I will help you. But only if you have faith. Oh, I have a deep and abiding faith. Good. You have a deep and abiding faith, remove your hands from the limb. (laughter) Is there anyone else up there who can help me? (laughter)

DAVID WOZNICA: Something that was very -- that I learned from somebody else, which I wanted to share, about faith and children, I have two little boys, and it's very important to me that they feel a sense of God in their lives. And they're young, seven and four. And at night when they go to sleep, and we say the Shema, the Jewish prayer of faith. The first thing I say to them at the end is Joshua, Daniel, God loves you. And Mommy loves you, and Daddy loves you. And I go through all the family and [00:59:00] friends and everything because I want them to know that there is or feel that there is a god emotionally, that Daddy believes. It's interesting that when he was five Joshua turned to me, and he said, "Dad, who is God?" First I said to him, actually, Josh, in my line of work I

should be able to give you a thoughtful response,  
(laughter) but I'm going to give you the one that most  
people would give you: speak to your mother. (laughter)  
Let me ask you both, Professor Wiesel, about prayer.

ELIE WIESEL: We haven't finished yet this  
discussion. I'll tell you, as a student of philosophy I  
always had a problem with medieval philosophy who tried to  
prove God's existence, and in doing so they proved that it  
doesn't [01:00:00] really matter. If you can prove that  
something is wrong, if God exists, it doesn't need proof.  
The rabbinic and Hasidic commentary is for the nonbeliever  
there are no answers. For the believer, there is no need  
for questions. Now, I'll tell you, you asked an important  
question. How can you teach children the existence of God?  
Not through books, surely not through philosophical  
discourse. I still have to find one person who came to the  
conclusion that God exists because the philosopher proved  
to him logically and rationally that God exists. And you  
know how, if your child sees a believer, a true person who  
has God in him or [01:01:00] in her, that child will  
believe in God. There is a painting by Rembrandt of a Jew  
in Amsterdam. I think it was Menasseh Ben Israel, but also  
you can see the face of the Jew, and you know that God's  
presence was on his face. You listen to a beautiful

concerto, a beautiful chamber music, and you know that God exists because of that music and because of the way a person listens to that music. If that child will see a Jew the way I remember Jews I can tell you that child will know, whether believe or not, but he will know that God exists, not through rationalization, which doesn't lead to anything except to more books. (laughter)

DAVID WOZNICA: In other words, if I can say, to touch the soul, to touch the heart, [01:02:00] I have often, we've oftensaid that it wasn't my teacher's words that so changed my life it was their eyes. That's when I would sit across the table. I could probably- I wasn't a particularly good student, remember very little of what they taught me. But somehow it was their passion, often their quiet fire which so touched my own life. Sometimes those are your parents and sometimes other teachers.

ELIE WIESEL: If I could bring our son to see my grandfather, he would know that God exists.

DAVID WOZNICA: Is prayer, for either of you, important, part of your life, and if you pray, why do you pray?

ELIE WIESEL: Oh, to me it is important. I [01:03:00] love prayer. I would like to turn all my books into prayers. And often this is what I do. I write in

order to pray. I believe prayer is a link, a link of fire. And that fire brings you back to the orders of the prayer and all to do to him to whom the prayer is addressed. The prayer is like an offering, and your entire being becomes an offering. That is, I mean, true prayer. But that prayer is not necessarily the prayer that you find in the siddur or in the prayer book. You can compose it yourself. It can be a silent prayer. It can be a musical prayer. It can be an act of charity. A person who has his hands stretched out [01:04:00] and you put something there. And what you have done, you have put a prayer there. So I believe prayer is an absolute in life. You cling to it. In the worst of times in the darkest of years, even when I had my crisis, I never stopped praying.

MARIO CUOMO: I stopped praying for the Yankees to win (laughter) when I figured out that there were other guys praying for the Dodgers, you know.

DAVID WOZNICA: No, that's a profound statement, by the way. No, I'm serious.

MARIO CUOMO: Thank you, Rabbi. (laughter)

ELIE WIESEL: You are not serious, David. Come on.

MARIO CUOMO: No, no, really. [01:05:00] You know, when you're young you pray for things. You pray for results. Let me pass this exam, oh lord. Let the other

guy fail, you know. And after a while you conclude that that's not an appropriate thing to do. I think prayer, to me, is reflecting on your religion, on God, and talking to God and talking about God. And some of them, some of the prayers are pragmatically extremely useful as reviews of your religion. We have, for example, creeds, little credos, and it's very convenient to be able to lift out of your pocket a prayer that essentially reminds you of all the basic truths as you perceive them. The Apostles' Creed. I believe in God, the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. Okay, big idea. And in Jesus Christ his only son our lord, his only son our lord, we believe that. [01:06:00] Who was born of the -- et cetera, et cetera, and it repeats the creed that you are sworn to in your heart. And that's a good thing. The "Our Father," which we all say, the Lord's Prayer, our father who art in heaven, okay. So now you're making an affirmation that there is a god. Hallowed be thy name. We're supposed to reverence him, and so on and so forth. But the notion of praying for results as though God would intervene because you raised your voice, I mean, defies the whole idea of God as I understand it because if he could intervene for you, and then he could intervene anywhere, and you get into this endless cycle of well, why is he doing this? He's not doing it. He's

leaving it to you to do. There's an old, I think it's Ignatius Loyola who said you should pray as though everything depends on God, but you should work as though everything depends on you. [01:07:00]

DAVID WOZNICA: I think that was John Cardinal Spellman, actually.

MARIO CUOMO: No, no, this is my game now. (laughter) It was Spellman reading Ignatius Loyola, believe me.

DAVID WOZNICA: Thank you, sir.

MARIO CUOMO: Rabbi, can I read you very swiftly one of my favorite prayers, next to the ones we're familiar with? "We ask for strength that we might achieve. God made us weak that we might obey. We ask for health that we might do great things. He gave us infirmity that we might do better things. We ask for riches that we might be happy. We were given poverty that we might be wise. We ask for power that we might have the praise of men. We were given weakness that we might feel the need of God. We ask for all the things that we might enjoy life. We were given life that we might enjoy all things. We receive nothing that we asked for and all that we hoped for. And our prayers were [01:08:00] answered. We were most blessed." And that to me is the best prayer I have ever



been able to utter because it reminds us that you don't get precisely what you ask for, but you get when you ask.

ELIE WIESEL: Governor, this is not prayer.

MARIO CUOMO: Pardon me?

ELIE WIESEL: In our tradition, we don't ask for things. Prayer is not asking for things. It means to recognize things as they are. We say to God, you know, when we pray every day it takes us a half hour until we've asked. We start saying God, who you are, who you are, who you are. The greatness of God, the wisdom of God, the goodness of God. And we went on and on, the creator of the world, which means with words you join the mystery of creation. And then all of a sudden, just before the shema, which means "Hear, o Israel," all of a [01:09:00] sudden you say God, you have loved us a great love with charity and compassion and kindness, and then all of a sudden you say give. What do I want God to give me? Wisdom to study thy law. I'm not asking for money. I am not asking for honors. I'm not even asking for health. I am asking for wisdom to study thy law, to learn. That is the prayer. I am sure that your prayers for the Dodgers were heard or something, but I am glad I heard that there is a theology of Dodgers. I didn't know that. (laughter) Not the real prayer is prayer.

DAVID WOZNICA: We have so many questions from all over North America from JCCs, but I need to ask both of you a question about Israel before we get to them because I would be remiss. Professor Wiesel, [01:10:00] I was going to say if you had the ear of Prime Minister Sharon, indeed, you may have had the ear of Prime Minister Sharon, what would you like to say to him?

ELIE WIESEL: It wouldn't be enough because I don't think that he initiated the policy which is his now. It was a response. Look, I belong to those who believed in the Oslo agreement. I believed in it because I wanted it. Rabin was a close friend, and I believed him when he said that we tried peace. I devoted my life as a military man. Time has come to try [01:11:00] peace. Who am I, I'm not even an Israeli, to say no? So I went to Washington, went alone. My wife didn't come with me. I went alone to the ceremony then. It was a great ceremony. (inaudible), you know, he shook hands. It was great. And I was convinced that it's better than war. Anything is better than war. Now it's different. I was in Israel last week. I spoke to many people, young and old, very religious and nonreligious, soldiers and former soldiers. I spoke to many people who are in the peace camp. And they all, all Shimon Peres. Ezer Weizman, who was the dove of all doves,

they all approve of Sharon's policy, why? [01:12:00]

Because he didn't want it. It is the killers who want it. To me, the choice, the moment when these suicide killers began murdering people, innocent people blindly just because they were there in the restaurant on Passover, on Pesach, at the Seder, or at the bat mitzvah ceremony in Jerusalem or in a bus, doing that to whole people, the people are afraid to go into the street. They're afraid to go to a restaurant. They're afraid. How can one live like that? And therefore it became clear to me that scourge must be eliminated. There are limits even in war. That's why we have the Geneva Convention. There are certain things you don't do even in war. Terror is one of [01:13:00] those things that should not be used. But even in terror, there are limits. Suicide killings is that limit. So therefore, Sharon is doing that. I can tell you I've seen the Israelis. They don't like what they are doing. Nobody likes it. Usually you see soldiers that if, especially if they go in tanks they laugh or they jubilate. There is no laughter. There's no jubilation. There is sadness and resolve because it's their lives that they are defending. So if I had Sharon's ear I would say come on, I wish it end, it could end so we could go back to normal life and go back to books and send back the children to

school, send back the soldiers to their families. I wish it. That's what I would say to him. But that means that the other side would hear, that Arafat would hear me saying stop it. [01:14:00] You can't. Stop it. And I would appeal to all the Muslim preachers, all the spiritual leaders of Islam that together they must come out with a statement not halfhearted. It must be a real statement saying stop the suicide killing. Whatever you do.

(applause)

DAVID WOZNICA: Let me take a question that came in both from the Jewish Community Center of New Orleans and a similar question that came in from the JCC of New Haven. It's directed to you, Professor Wiesel, but I think, Governor Cuomo, I'll follow up with something similar. The questioner asks, with all that you have been through, how did you not turn your back on God and religion?

ELIE WIESEL: Oh, I could have really. [01:15:00] But I thought of my father and my grandfather. It would have meant to turn my back on them. I wouldn't do that. But that means it goes very far. Whatever I do I commit them. Whatever I do I commit them, and I commit those who came before them. I think that is the moral conflict that exists but resolved. If I do something wrong I bring shame to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And therefore I better not

do anything that could bring shame to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

DAVID WOZNICA: Governor, this comes from our friends in Vancouver in Canada, the Jewish Community Center.

[01:16:00] We get these via email as the evening has worn on. A questioner asks, religion is the cause of so much hatred between different peoples. Would we be better off without it?

MARIO CUOMO: No, I think not. If the question you asked Professor Wiesel or that was asked of Professor Wiesel about after all you've been through, how can you still accept the existence of God, of course, there has been so much terrible killing and so much imperfection, so much evil in this world from the very beginning of time that if you were to assume that the existence of innocent evil would disabuse you of any god notion, then we'd all be atheists. There would be no god. And where would that leave you? Now, to me personally, and it's a very personal thing, I wouldn't be able [01:17:00] to survive in a life where there was no eternal explanation. I just couldn't handle that because this place isn't lovely enough to keep me involved. If you say that there is no answer to the Holocaust, that that's just the way it is, I have to believe that it all works out in the consummation. So that

would be my answer to that. Now, you asked me something else, and I think I've lost it.

DAVID WOZNICA: Right, the Vancouver Jewish Community Center asking the question of recognizing the conflicts that religion has created in the world, would the world be better off without it?

MARIO CUOMO: Ah, would we be better, and I think the answer is no. And that gets me back to the point I made before. Whether you're talking about now it's Muslim. Now it's Islam and terrorism, et cetera, and the question comes up. In the [01:18:00] least glorious part of the Christian tradition it was the Crusades and the Inquisitions, which in the name of religion, you know, had us killing Jews and Muslims, had Christians killing Jews and Muslims. That's why, and this may sound simplistic, but those two predicates, you know, tikkun olam and tzedakah, why we can't work something out to get leaders of all the religions together and agree that look, these two principles we honor, all of us. Where there are differences in our religions, very serious differences, but there is this immense ground on which we can stand as religious leaders. And all those religions, to the best of my -- would condemn terrorism. Incidentally, I would say to Sharon, if I had the chance, I think you had no choice

but to do what you did. And politically I think, frankly, [01:19:00] tactically you were in a position where you had no leverage at all until you started moving on those terrorists. Arafat either has no control over them, or he has control over them which he does not use. If that's the case, he's complicit, and he's as guilty as they are by President Bush's standard. If he has no control over them, then you ought to get rid of him. So what Sharon has done is given Israel some leverage in doing that. But what I would whisper in his ear is, you know, please, Mr. President, make sure that whatever you do it is pointed eventually toward peace and that you are persuaded that, you know, you are moving in that direction.

DAVID WOZNICA: The Jewish Community Center of Delaware -- I'm sorry. (applause) Starts with a question. Each generation seems to [01:20:00] believe in God less as the years go on. Actually, the question goes on further, but I'm going to stop the question there and ask you if you think that's true? Is this a generation which seems to believe in God less than previous generations?

ELIE WIESEL: I don't think so.

DAVID WOZNICA: I don't either.

ELIE WIESEL: I think there is much religiosity today among the young people. There is a thirst for religiosity,

not for organized religion but for religiosity. I think people today, young people today are so disenchanted with our triumphs of the past century that they look for something else, for something transcendental in their own way. Some go astray, go to the cults or drugs. But even there you find something which goes beyond the drugs and beyond the cults. They want something which is not [01:21:00] tangible. So I know I think today if you know how to speak to young people and what to do with them and for them, I think they would listen. They are ready to listen.

MARIO CUOMO: Yeah, I would agree completely with Professor Wiesel that there is more interest now in this society in what they call spirituality more often. Even as some of them turn away from their formal religions they get deeper into spirituality. Which is to say that once you're past the fight for survival in life, I mean, a lot of us have gone through the fight for survival. You know, Matilda and I married in college, no money, you have five kids, and all you can think about is how do I earn money? How do I pay for the kids? How do I do this? How do I -- you don't worry a lot about philosophy. But when you reach a certain level of options [01:22:00] and more and more people reach that level now because of education and



advance, then you start thinking about philosophy. And what I found in the law firm, for example, a lot of our best young lawyers, after two or three years, and they started \$125,000 a year, after they paid their loans, they would come in and told me, said Gov, you know, I'm leaving, you know. Why? Well, I want to do something more. I want to find some meaning in my life. Spirituality, you go to Barnes and Noble and ask them how many books on spirituality they sell. Look at the bestseller list. And this makes another important point. There is a difference between religion and spirituality and religion and churches. My church is going through a very hard time now because some of its ministers have done very bad things. Historically, we have gone [01:23:00] through times when we had Popes who were mad, Popes who did terrible things. There's a difference between my religion and the people who administer it. And the truth of the religion shouldn't be measured by the frailty of people who are trying to minister it or even practice it. So I would say yes, there's more spirituality now than ever.

DAVID WOZNICA: You know, I am faced with the horrible dilemma of having to end the evening and not wanting to. And we are on a live satellite feed through North America which is going to run out, and here in the east coast it is

10:30 at night, and I know we could go on for a very, very long time. And so --

ELIE WIESEL: There is afterlife. Don't worry.

(laughter) (applause)

MARIO CUOMO: What did you say?

ELIE WIESEL: There is afterlife.

DAVID WOZNICA: I'll tell you how I'd like to end, [01:24:00] I'd like to end with your words. And, Governor, I had no idea that you would be speaking the words that you wrote many years ago. I'm going to paraphrase them. Actually, they're your words. I'm going to skip around a little bit for time's sake. But I'd like to conclude with your words and then something that Professor Wiesel wrote. You wrote, "I think there is an idea that can give you all the direction you need. It began with the Jewish people about 4,000 years ago who described it in two principles, tzedakah and tikkun olam. The Christians borrowed both principles. The first we call charity, the obligation to love one another, and the second teaches us, as it taught the Jews, that God made the world but did not finish it, that he left he left the world to us so that we could side by side and working together collaborate in completing the work of creation by making this world as good as it possibly can be [01:25:00] because God knows how grand the

world is and how small we are. He is not going to expect any miracles from you. All he asks is that you can." And Professor Wiesel, in the first part of your memoirs you were responding to those who might suggest that somehow God is dead. And you write, "But if Nietzsche could cry out to the old man in the forest that God is dead, the Jew in me cannot. I have never renounced my faith in God. I have risen against His justice, protested His silence and sometimes His absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside of it." And later in a profound chapter in your book that you call "God's Suffering: A Commentary" where you with great reverence speak about how God suffers along with people. You write, "A midrash recounts when God sees the suffering of his children scattered among the nations. [01:26:00] He sheds two tears in the ocean. When they fall they make a noise so loud it is heard round the world. It is a legend I enjoy rereading. And I tell myself, perhaps God shed more than two tears during his people's recent tragedy. But men, cowards that they are, refused to hear them. Is that, at last, an answer?" you write? "No, it is a question, yet another question." I have shared the stage with both of you in the past. Professor Wiesel, Governor Cuomo, thank you for honoring us

with your answers, but perhaps equally as important for leaving us with more questions. Good night. (applause)

MARIO CUOMO: Thank you for letting me share  
[01:27:00] this with you.

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