

2008 05 01 Elie Wiesel Israel: New Fears, Old Hopes

92nd Street Y Elie Wiesel Archive

Elie Wiesel:

(applause) Fears and hopes. New and ancient. What is ancient, and what is new? When does one become the other? Is it only a matter of time, and history? The future isn't what it used to be, said a French poet, Paul Valéry. Of course, we could say that it never was. But does it also apply to fear, and hope? Do they age, as we all do? Do they die? Do they change? Tonight, we shall speak about both: fear and hope. And naturally, today being Yom HaShoah, almost one week before Yom Ha'Atzmaut, we know [00:01:00] that fear symbolizes Auschwitz. And hope represents Israel. We shall speak about both. But what about fear first? Adam was first afraid of darkness. He was worried light will never return. Cain was afraid of God's rejection. And Abraham was afraid of failing his last trial. What are we, their descendants, afraid of? Individual fear, collective fear -- are they the same? Is it easier to be afraid when one is not alone? Is fear part of human nature? Is it what links the child to his grandparents? Is it the same fear? Is the fear of the beggar the same as that [00:02:00] of the prince? Fear of crowds, or agoraphobia; or of heights,

acrophobia. Or solitude. Fear of illness and death. Fear of the other. Fear of one's self.

So, what is fear? Where is it to be found? How is one to be conquered? And what about faith, as related to fear? Is it its antidote? Its remedy? Are they all compatible? Can one have both at the same time? So of course we shall talk of fear, and what its nature: physical, mental, spiritual, metaphysical fear. Fear of God, versus love of God. *Yirat haShem*, as opposed to *Ahavat haShem*. To push our [00:03:00] quest further, why not imagine fear for God? May I use this occasion again to repeat something I learned from our teacher Shaul Lieberman, *zichrono livracha*. Once he asked me, "Who's the most tragic character in scripture?" I suggested Abraham -- the akedah. No. Aaron, the loss of his two sons. No. Moses, and his solitude. No. I gave up. And he said, "It is God. The most tragic figure in the Bible is God. God looks down at what his creatures have done to his creation, and G-d grows melancholy. How can one not feel sorry for Him, and therefore how can not worry for Him?"

What are the new fears? One of them is that old ones may be forgotten. And the old hope -- what is it? Is it [00:04:00] that Jewish history is as old as its hope? In the beginning, Abraham was alone, and his solitude is at the origin of our own.

But his faith prevailed, his hope, as did that of Moses, and Jeremiah, Rabbi Akiva, and the Besht, and the Gaon of Vilna. When every Jewish child studied a page of Talmud, he embodied its hope, which suggests our eternal thirst for knowledge and beauty. So therefore, admit it: fear is as ancient as humankind itself. It is inherent in human nature. To be human is also to dwell in uncertainty, and the fear of uncertainty. The first, always the first fear, is the child's fear, the baby's fear, of being abandoned by his or her parents.

Can one [00:05:00] avoid fear? It has big eyes, says Cervantes. In other words, it devours whomever it touches. But on the other hand, if one is to believe in the Prophet Jeremiah's conviction, whoever runs away from fear will end up in a pit. "*Ashrei atam mefached tamid*," says Psalms. Happy is he who always worries. So I am a worrier. (laughter) And so whatever frightened Isaiah or Jeremiah in their visions or dreams, their fear was, since they were prophets, that their fears would become reality. David was so concerned that his various sins will not be forgiven that he turned, therefore, fear into a kind of second nature. He was always afraid. Now really, [00:06:00] that sounds, in David's words -- do they tell the truth? Must one be paranoiac to be happy? But then is it possible that without fear, happiness would be in, or at least a part of

danger? It would lead to it. Are we teaching our little children to fear fire, height, and crossing the street without looking to the right or to the left?

Life is by definition transitory, as is everything else in it. In Jewish liturgy, it is compared -- life is compared to withering branch, a cloud in the sky, a fleeting dream. Why isn't it concerned with its duration? Even during happy moments, aren't we afraid that they wouldn't last, as they rarely do? Fear of pain, and punishment, of loss and solitude; fear of power and [00:07:00] poverty, illness and abandonment, social rejection and moral or spiritual decrepitude.

Individuals, groups, nations, all have known these fears. Do they belong to the past alone? The past is in the present. We know that. Haven't we learned, even here in this hall of study, that the Akedah, the binding of Isaac, the drama that occurred on Mount Moriah 4,000 years ago, is still being acted out? That parents still live in anguish over the fate of their sons and daughters in Israel, whose sons have been kidnapped, and who knows what their fate is.

Both the Talmud and Herodotus the Greek declare that in peacetime, children bury their parents, whereas in war, parents bury their children, which is against nature. And so, somehow,

Abraham is still walking accompanied [00:08:00] by Isaac to Mount Moriah. Thus, must we be reminded of what we recite every Passover evening -- namely, that all of us were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. That we all stood at Sinai when God spoke to all of us, individually and collectively, using the singular tense, ordering us not to kill any other human being. Whenever I read a description of that scene, unprecedented in its mixture of both what is imminent and transcendental in the universe and above, I shiver. The Talmud insists on the extraordinary silence enveloping creation. Then, at Sinai, the winds were not blowing; the birds stopped chirping, and the beasts howling. Never before [00:09:00] and never since had silence had that pure and powerful quality of penetrating both human conscience and language. It became a language. And people at that moment, transfixed in mystical ecstasy, maybe, must have been afraid of death. And in fact, Talmudic sages believe that at Sinai, when God spoke, their souls left them. That they died, but miraculously, they were all resurrected. Now, did they remember their own death? Do we? I happen to belong to a generation that is qualified to answer this question, yes. In very recent history, some of us over there, in accursed places of ultimate misfortune and total malediction, where [00:10:00] death wore the mask of the Almighty, people died more than once.

Have we learned anything from that experience? We have. We have learned to trust the enemy. To trust his threats more than the friend's false promises. We have learned that when our people is in danger, our own existence is and must be affected, wherever we are -- and whoever we are. We have learned that like despair, fear can and must be vanquished. Has the world learned? Will it ever learn? That is also, though on a different level, an urgent question. We shall speak about it tonight: the Shoah and Israel. The bridge between them. Are they unavoidably incompatible? [00:11:00] When and how will one yield to the other? Can one's memory absorb both with the same breath? Naturally, we shall study in depth anything available to us in books, or in our own conscience. Fear and hope are part of our lives.

And at this point, of course, may I be allowed, as always, to make some parenthetical remarks. One, an apology. My second lecture this year had to be postponed. It never happened, since my very first appearance on this stage, some I think almost 40 years ago. And I remember the topic of the first lecture: Job. A kind of rehabilitation. I couldn't understand his resignation. I would have preferred [00:12:00] his rebellion. I think I found a good and plausible theory with what is the answer to tonight. Tonight's question about the postponement.

I had to go to Jerusalem, to a conference related to the sixtieth anniversary of Israel. What can I do? When Israel calls, I feel the Jew I am must respond: Hineni. There I am. And so, we postponed it to the May 28<sup>th</sup>. Another apology: when usually this calendar, my coming to the Y is prepared a year in advance, and we May 1st, the first one, I thought, of course, the topic will be only Israel, the sixtieth anniversary. And then all of a sudden realized that it's also Yom HaShoah. And I felt it's impossible not also to speak about the most cruel tragedy that our people has endured. [00:13:00] And so, I'll speak about both. The relationship, if it exists, between one and the other.

But all that will be done later. For the moment, we must think of those who so impatiently is there waiting outside, to open the doors. (laughter) Everybody in? Yes, no? Question: would there have been what we call so poorly a Holocaust, with Israel already in existence? Had there been Israel in 1938 [inaudible], would there have been Auschwitz? No. No doubt about that. [00:14:00] For a simple reason. Israel would have mobilized all her energies to save Jews, and bring them home. No doubt -- and this is, I speak to in Israel, to people who have power, in the military, or in public life -- there is no doubt. The question that we have now, for instance, which I ask

every president I meet since 30 years. I ask, why didn't the Allies bomb the railroads going there? No one had the answer. The Israelis, they tell me, "What do you mean? We would have done it. Naturally." But, let us take the same question, push it to its limits. Would there have been an Israel without the tragedy that preceded it? [00:15:00] And the answer again is, no. Not then. Of course, we are all convinced; we believe in that fate. We know, in our prayers, in our own subconscious, we know that -- that we-- one day, we would have a renaissance of Israel. But then, in 1948? No, had there been no Holocaust.

Remember, in those times -- I remember it, from reading our history books -- at that time it was very difficult to obtain a two-third majority in the General Assembly. And the majority was a very slim one. And yet, many nations' leaders felt guilty -- rightly so, by the way. So because of their guilt feelings, that they voted for the Jewish state. Without it, they wouldn't have. Furthermore, had [00:16:00] the vote taken place six months later, I am not sure we would have gotten a majority. The last time the United States and Russia voted together was that vote.

So, what then is the link between these two events? And my belief, it is only chronological. It's a disturbing and quasi-

mystical connection. But are they intertwined? The question, of course, is philosophically important. Do we need tragedy to obtain in history a triumph over our destiny? [00:17:00]

General Gabi Ashkenazi, who was a commander-in-chief of the Israeli army, was yesterday in Warsaw, and he declared, "The answer to the Shoah is Israel." And I understand the meaning of the words. And yet, I remain hesitant. Because I somehow prefer not to link organically these two events. For me, though utterly contradictory in nature, both Jerusalem and Auschwitz represent historically astonishing mysteries, unfathomable in their approach, and conceptually unexplainable. Did it have to take such an incommensurate catastrophe to obtain at such price the renaissance of a Jewish sovereign state, after 2,000 [00:18:00] years of exile? Was one God's will, and the others not?

Faith in God naturally implies fear of God and love of God. But are essential -- both are essential to a believer. And both go inextricably together. Love without fear leads to sentimentality; fear without love, to morbidity. Sometimes in Scripture, they are separate. When the angel interrupts the binding of Isaac, or the Akedah, he says, "Now I know that you fear God, for you have not spared your son from me." "Thou shall love God, your God, with all your heart and soul," is a

biblical command. Yet in our daily prayer, when for the first time we ask something of heaven, we say, "Our merciful Father, have mercy on us, and give in our [00:19:00] heart understanding to understand, to listen and learn and teach, and to observe Your laws with love. And let our heart love You and fear You."

Now, my good friends, fear is one term that dominated European Jews in German-occupied Europe. It permeated their most intimate thoughts; their silent endeavors; their conscious or subconscious ambitions. It penetrated their very beings. In other words, the Jew was afraid, being Jewish. Where was salvation possible? In Medieval times, the answer was practical and immediate: forced conversion. Which meant, stop being Jewish, and [00:20:00] you are entitled to live. Not so during the cruelest of our tragedies. Then, conversions were of no help. Hitler declared that he alone would decide who is or isn't Jewish. In fact, that was one of the very few disagreements that existed between Berlin and the Vatican, they were the converted Jews. The Vatican wanted to save and protect those converted Jews, but not the Jews. And Germany said, "Oh no -- a converted Jew is still Jewish." And therefore, in the Warsaw ghetto, for instance, there was a church for converted Jews. And they were the unhappiest people, if one can say so, in the ghetto. (laughter) They weren't [00:21:00] even Jewish!

(laughter) So fear of pogroms, fear during pogroms, fear of the ghetto, fear in the ghetto. Fear of the known, and fear of the unknown; fear for children, and for grandparents; fear of familiar anti-Semites, and fear of pseudo-original ones. For the Jew, creation itself was ruled by fear then.

Fear of hope? Yes. Of hope, too. Of a hope that is facile, comfortable, and false. Rumors, endless rumors, would circulate inside the walls and the barbed wires. Hitler died, his armies defeated. Red Cross busses will arrive soon, tomorrow -- no, today -- I remember them. In a few hours, they will be here, and they will carry us to freedom and to life. [00:22:00]

Somebody should write a doctoral dissertation on the unimaginable rumors that were spread inside what we call occasionally the Kingdom of Night. All war rooted in an unfathomable need of hope; and all ended in the bottomless darkness fear, because hope was a tool in the hands of the enemy. They would always say -- in Germany, they said, "Oh, we only hate and will punish the Polish Jews, because they are so Jewish." In Poland, they would say, "Oh, we are only against the Germans, because they are -- the German Jews, they are too assimilated." And each time they would say, "Not here -- there." And then they said, "Not there -- there." Always

there: the next city, the next street, the next house. So hope  
[00:23:00] was dangerous.

For survivors, their fear, which is mine, is fear of having  
spoken without being heard. "Will the world ever learn?", is  
the topic I chose when addressing the United Nations General  
Assembly some time ago. And the obvious answer is, no. The  
world will not learn, because the world has not learned. Had it  
learned, can you imagine the reaction of good people to Libya's  
ambassador at the Security Council, comparing Israel's military  
operations to what Germans have done to Jews during the  
Holocaust? We must say that most Western delegations left the  
room when he spoke. But he's still there -- the Ambassador of  
Libya! Can you imagine, [00:24:00] the Attorney General of  
Charleston compared actions by the United States Chamber of  
Commerce to tactics used by Hitler!

As a child, I remember studying an ancient Talmudic legend that  
tells of young priests -- we call them *pirchei kehuna*. In  
Jerusalem, 2,000 years ago, or 2,500 years ago, when they  
climbed to the roof of the Temple in flames, throwing its keys  
onto the heavens, saying, "Master of the Universe, since we are  
unable to save Thy dwellings, take back these keys!" And the  
fiery hand appeared, and took them. I wondered, will they ever

be returned? And if so, to whom? Now we know, they were returned -- to our brothers and sisters in Israel. And [00:25:00] they are worthy of them. And to all those, even in diaspora, who love Israel, and study whatever we have in our texts, the beauty, the quest for learning, for understanding. So call it a need for exaltation or fantasy. All that we do today when we celebrate, a little bit in advance, perhaps, the sixtieth anniversary of Israel, it is because we feel that maybe we can be at least with those, together with those who have the keys to the Temple, which Israel is.

But 60 years after the establishment of the State of Israel, a self-examination seems in order. For the Jew of my generation, Israel represents a miracle that [00:26:00] renews itself every day. At times, it is difficult for us to relate to it, and to the dream it embodies. We are seized by a strange yet not-so-strange feeling, that personally, and ontologically, we owe Israel something. Without Israel, would we have had the motivation and the strength to begin our life again, and build on ruins? No. Often I wonder, how did the Jewish people 60 years ago manage to rise up so soon from an oppressive state of mourning? Three years -- three short years -- after the most murderous Jewish catastrophe in recorded history, our people issued the challenge to destiny itself, and proclaimed a new

[00:27:00] Jewish sovereign state on its ancestral soil,  
creating a phenomenon which became a problem and a challenge.  
So little geography, and so much history, in one place. How did  
it succeed in creating, in such a dazzling shortcut between  
Auschwitz and the glorious victory of national independence?  
It's against logic!

Naturally, from a legal viewpoint, one credits the United  
Nations with this event. Yes; but one thing is clear. Without  
our longing for redemption, whether you are believers or not, it  
wouldn't have happened. Story is, it's I think apocryphical,  
because it's [00:28:00] something, I'm not sure it happened that  
way, that Napoleon, retreating from Russia, entered a village.  
Was empty, but he knew there were many Jews there; he couldn't  
find them. Finally, they showed him where they are. They were  
in a synagogue, sitting on the floor with candles in their  
hands, and weeping. And he said, "Why are you weeping?" And  
they said, "because they destroyed our Temple." And he thought  
that they meant the Temple. He said, "Who did it? I'll punish  
them." They said, "Majesty, Sire, our Temple that was destroyed  
by the Romans 2,000 years ago." And he couldn't understand. "A  
temple was destroyed 2,000 years ago, and you weep now?"  
  
(laughter)

For Zionists among us, [00:29:00] it is clear that we owe the Jewish land and its people, we owe our history, the fervent and imaginative endeavors all over the world. All the writers and activists who have done something so that that nation should be reborn. The heroic underground operations of Zionist movements in Palestine, the Hagganah and the Palmach, the Irgun, the Stern Group -- they played their roles in obtaining statehood for our people. And they performed the miracle of creating a new nation in an old land. Is that all? I beg to differ. I prefer to believe that we owe the establishment of the Jewish state also to the Jewish people at large, who in their prayers and their dreams kept Jewish memory and hope alive. Granted, the disciples [00:30:00] of the Baal Shem Tov made Aliya in the seventeenth century, and followed -- they were followed by young Zionists, who left their families and friends to go to Eretz Yisrael, to work there, build there, live there, and fight there. But it was in the name of our entire people, its faith and its history, that the old-fashioned Hasidim and the modern Zionists accomplished the miraculous rebirth of political life in Israel.

The recent past, and what is distant centuries, when David and Solomon ruled there, and imposed the will of God. As a student of history, I loved reading the scriptures of Eretz Yisrael in

the Middle Ages. There was never a time when the land was empty of Jews. I read Nachmanides, the Ramban. His letter to his family in Spain. I read Rabbi Nachman's dramatic journey to the Holy Land, and understand [00:31:00] why the descendants of prophets, sages, and merchants were meant to leave a legacy that became contemporary Israel. All of us could have joined them, but we did not. And the reasons were varied, and often personal. And let's state it frankly: history called us, and we have not answered its appeal. Those of us who are here, actually chose to stay here.

Is this why we feel -- or must feel -- morally in Israel's debt? Yes. Is our love for Israel fed by feelings of frustration, 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? Where names of streets bring you back thousands of [00:32:00] years? And they give me palpitations! In BeerSheva, you think of Abraham's faith; in Ashkelon, you recall Samson's strength; on Mount Carmel, you hear Elijah's voice. I remember, I will always remember, my first visit to Jerusalem. I had the impression that was not the first time; that I had been there many times before. And, ever since I returned to Jerusalem now, I have the feeling that each

time it is the first time. Could the Jews say that of any other city under the sun?

And so when Israel goes through crisis -- and there are so many, and so multiple -- we are concerned, almost physically involved. Whatever happens there must affect us. Thus, we take part in its festivities and victories, as well as in its anguish and sadness. We [00:33:00] weep with the mothers who lost their sons in battle. That's the least we can do. 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 we feel the sharpness of the insult. We are insulted. Israel's wounds are ours, as is Israel's hope. That is why recent events in Israel touch us so deeply -- because they all carry the weight of the past. We watch young Palestinians on the screen, occasionally their faces twisted, in Gaza. Hatred on their face. And somehow, we know that we, too, are their target. Their religious fanatics don't shout, "Death to Israel." They shout, [00:34:00] "Death to the Jews."

And of course, their hatred is so pervasive, so perverse, so fatalistic, that I wonder about reconciliation and peace as a possibility. A recent poll shows that 90 percent of Israeli youth believe that another Holocaust is not only possible, but

also probable. Again, is that -- again, collective paranoia? Think about it. Is it totally unfounded? Is it crazy? Israel with its army? With its air force? With its [00:35:00] military genius? But should Iran's president, the infamous -- ridiculously infamous -- Ahmadinejad, prevail, and obtain what he wants so desperately? Nuclear power; nuclear weapons. Wouldn't Israel be in existential peril? He himself is frank enough, arrogant enough to say so. With his weapons he said more than once, the Jewish state will be wiped off the map. Now how can we not appeal to our collective memory and ask it for advice? Whom do we [00:36:00] turn to in the world? Hasn't Hitler openly expressed his intent, his decision, his resolve, to annihilate the entire Jewish people? And no one took his words seriously?

Well, we must take Ahmadinejad's words seriously. But, while we are on the subject, let's open a page in history which deals with the Muslim role in the Holocaust. It is there. But for so-called political correctness reasons, few people are ready to delve in its implications. What is the accepted narrative of anti-Israeli propaganda? You hear it in the fanatics' speeches, [00:37:00] in Islam, and read it in the writings of those who are on their side. It has recently been repeated and appeased, and appeared in the British daily, the Guardian. Signed by a

long list of academics and intellectuals, many of them Jewish. They insist on the leitmotif that they will not celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Israel with those who celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Israel. They won't. Why? They say, among others, all the things that we hear from our enemies. "The Zionists have taken from Arabs their lands, and the Arabs had nothing to do with the plight of Jews in Europe under Hitler." For them, it's clearly an historical [00:38:00] injustice -- why should Arab Muslims pay for the crimes committed by the Poles, the Germans, and so forth. This is their narrative. Poor Arabs. Poor Muslims. They're nothing to do with what the Jews went through in Europe. And when you read it, on one level, it makes -- it makes some sense, yes? It's true, the Arabs -- they forget. Yes, people forget that there were at least two fully equipped Muslim SS divisions fighting for Himmler and Hitler, hoping to bring them final victory. They forget that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, came to Berlin in the middle of the war. They forget that he was received by Hitler. They forget that he [00:39:00] had many conversations with Himmler, on politics and strategy with regard to the Jewish problem! They forget that he was given the honor of an SS parade -- there are pictures of that! They forget that he got the privilege, quote unquote, "of visiting Auschwitz with Himmler." And they, in their hatred of

Israel, dare to claim that Muslim -- that Muslims or Arabs have nothing to do with the Holocaust?

But then the same Ahmadinejad is also known for his repeated statements that there was no Holocaust. That it is a lie, invented by Israel to justify its existence. The -- lately, the Syrian television [00:40:00] had a program, saying, actually, that Israel, yes, committed its own Holocaust, in order to get sympathy from the world. So, Ahmadinejad is the number one Holocaust denier in the world today. And some students of the Middle East wonder, why is he so obsessed with such denial? Is it because he knows that in spite of the anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic rhetoric here and there, civilized and intelligent men and woman of all social and ethnic origins do feel empathy with Jewish causes? And there, he, Ahmadinejad, wants to undermine it, by calling us liars? In my view, the explanation is perhaps more [00:41:00] complex and profound. He rejects the Holocaust of the past, because he wants a Holocaust in the future. In other words, he says, "There was no Holocaust, but there will be one." And he, Ahmadinejad, will be the one to bring it upon the people of Israel. To put it even more bluntly, he wants to enter Islam's history as the first and only Muslim who will succeed where so many of his predecessors failed; namely, to attain the ultimate destruction of the only

people of antiquity to have survived antiquity: the people of Israel.

Friends of mine and I have for some time been waging an international campaign against him, with all the fervor we can must. [00:42:00] Because of his verbal excesses and dangerous hate plans, we believe, and I repeat it, he should be declared persona non grata, meaning unwanted and undesired, wherever communities of decent and peace-loving men and women strive to move mankind towards true hope, true harmony, reconciliation, and redemption. He must be considered an outcast. He should not be invited or accepted anywhere, in any group, in any community, to any conference. Let him stay locked in his own palace; in his own perilous, stupid hallucinations. And so long as he is president of his nation, Iran itself should be expelled from the international community, whose leaders must once and for all abide by a simple decision: whatever happens, is Iran must never [00:43:00] become nuclear.

Well, you see, in spite of everything, there is a disturbing connection between the catastrophe that befell our people then, and to the celebration of Israel's sixtieth anniversary. The enemy remains the enemy, but we shall never give in to the depression or resignation because of the enemy; because of his

obstinate machinations against us. Throughout the 60 years of its existence, Israel had often faced a human dilemma, when enduring suffering: to allow pain to dominate its collective mood, or to resist it with renewed vigor and ancient memories. My wife and I were in Jerusalem many times when there were suicide terrorists there. In [00:44:00] Jerusalem. A few -- almost a few steps away. And of course, the entire country is shaken when that happens. Literally -- the entire country, from the Prime Minister down. To any merchant. To any taxi driver. But two hours later, when everything is cleaned, cleared up, somehow, the entire country has regained its normalcy. How do they do that? Because this situation is not new in our history. Again, remember from the past, the distant past. Under Hadrian, the emperor, and his cruel decrees, Jews were forbidden to study and teach Torah. [00:45:00] But they did. Their passion for learning made them risk their lives, and often they paid with their lives! Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Chaninah ben Teradion, so many of them became martyrs of the faith, because they believed that the voice of Torah must never stop. But Jews were also forbidden not only to live in Jerusalem, which the Romans renamed Aelia Capitolina, but even to come near it, except one day a year: Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of Av. Why? Because on that day, Jews, as you heard, the story of Napoleon, mourn over the destruction of the Temple. The destruction of Jerusalem.

So Hadrian decided that day, they may come and see Jerusalem.  
Why? To make them [00:46:00] weep harder.

What we learn, never to allow the enemy to govern our lives, our habits, and not even our mood. We decide when to weep and when to sing, and when to laugh, and when to rejoice, and when to mourn. When to commemorate. And when to celebrate. We decide. Not the enemy. Because we have learned in our history that the past remains in the present, but the present should not be what the past has been. And so episodes make events, and events make -- create history. But isn't Israel's living, [00:47:00] a proof that history transcends them all? And that's Israel's destiny. But the future, how long will essential questions about permanent peace with Israel's neighbor remain open and oscillating? I don't know. What is clear and certain to me is that that day will come, for it must come. Simply because we have learned from history, also -- some wars end because both sides are tired. And I believe in this case, also, both sides are tired. And there will be peace one day, I don't know when, but there will be. If Israel could make peace, and what an astonishingly exemplary peace it is, with Germany, who will dare to say that reconciliation with Palestinians is improbable, or impossible? For the [00:48:00] Jew that I am who loves Israel, there is one certainty: just as it has surprised the world so

often with its military victories and scientific achievements, and its economic development, it will surprise us with its ability to invent new ways to end long periods of fear, and violence, and replace them with genuine trust and hope.

Now, I have never felt happy with my writings on the Holocaust. Quite the contrary. To use words -- any words -- on that Event with a capital E, brings pain more than satisfaction. But, I've said it earlier meeting the *dor chadash* among you, I do feel good about my work on behalf of Soviet Jewry. Many people in America especially, boast today [00:49:00] having been militants in the field, but the real heroes were really a group of young activists in Israel. Meir Rosenne, who some of you may remember; Izso Rager in New York; Ephraim Tari Paris; and David Bartov, now in Jerusalem. These were young people then, when nobody really cared. And we were small in numbers, and we tried. I remember, I would -- we would go from -- and also Heschel, Abraham Joshua Heschel -- we would go from convention to convention, from group to group. We couldn't move the American Jewish leadership! Because they didn't believe us. When I came back from Russia, and I wrote my stories, it was Simchat Torah in Moscow. They didn't believe us, that there were Jews -- hundreds and thousands of young Jews in Russia --

who risked their security to affirm and celebrate [00:50:00]  
their allegiance to Jewishness and the Jewish people.

Jewish renaissance in communist Russia was to many people -- but to me, surely -- a great human and Jewish victory, which makes us proud, just as the re-emergence of Israel. And the role and task of Jews in diaspora is to be worthy of that pride, by offering those who need us, our total support. Now, let's be honest. Even if I do not agree at times, occasionally, with every move, every statement, every decision of every Israeli leader, I want my attachment to Israel to be profound, and all-encompassing. Sixty years after its creation, or re-creation, [00:51:000] I admire Israel for its achievement. But I admire Israel for being. The Jew in me loves Israel, when Israel suffers and when it is triumphant, when it is distressed, and when it is jubilant. I love Israel for its memory, and for its hope. Without that love, my love for anything else would be diminished. Thanks to it, all my endeavors in every field are enriched. Is there a name for my *ahavat Yisrael*? For my love for Israel? Yes, it is. Gratitude. I believe in gratitude. To be Jewish is to be grateful. The first prayer for a religious Jew when he gets up in the morning is to say *modeh ani lefanekha*. Prayer of Gratitude. [00:52:00] Often I tell what my grandfather, he had a farm. And he told -- one day, morning,

he showed me the rooster, and the rooster, before say kukuriku, turns his head like this, backwards. He said, "You see what the rooster does when you feed -- when you feed him? He looks up to the sky, and says, 'thank you'." So we say thank you.

Of course, again, for the sake of transparency, I must speak also about the Palestinians. Occasionally, with good or bad intentions, I am asked why I, a defender of human rights wherever I can, from Darfur to Tibet and elsewhere, why I neglect Palestinian suffering. And they suffer. And I'm not referring to the Jewish academics who hate Israel. Their hatred disqualifies [00:53:00] them as participants in an honest discussion of ideas and principles. I'm referring to our colleagues, allies, and friends who love Israel, and the Jewish people, and really -- and want to help bring this agonizing conflict to an end. What to do, really? What can we do? So really, it's something that has pained me, and preoccupied me for years. Some almost -- 1975 -- more 30 years ago, I published a letter to a young Palestinian, in which I said that I understand his plight, and even his anger. Yes, I said to him, it is humiliating not to belong to an organized society, not to be able to go home. It is demoralizing not to be free in one's movements, or one's choices. Yes, it is depressing, [00:54:00] degrading, to live on the margins of and in the gray

zones of history. To be an instrument shaken by current affairs; to always personify the eternal stranger, who arouses pity and charity when one wants to know security and justice. In re-reading this text, I realized how 30-odd years later, it has not lost its urgency. To say that the Jew in me, or the Jew that I am, remains insensitive to Palestinians' pain and fear is wrong, and unfair! All I have learned from our sages is that the Almighty cares about his creatures -- all his creatures! Remember the episode of the crossing of the Red Sea. The angels in heaven wished to sing God's praise for having saved the Israelites, and he rebuked them! "*Ma'aseh yadai tovim ba-yam,*" he says. "My handiwork," meaning my creatures, "are drowning in the sea; [00:55:00] and all that is on your mind is to sing?" Granted, we are not angels, of course, but that means that we must not be insensitive. If a child is hurt anywhere, I don't think that I am supposed to look for his I.D. in his pockets. I must help.

I do not believe, however, that my concern for Palestinians ought to be at the expense of my love for Israel. Thus, this is what I said to the young Palestinian, some 30 years ago: "The Jew that I am understands your commitment to your peoples' cause, but please understand my attachment to mine. I do not ask you, so you don't ask me, to be objective; for both of us,

it would be against our nature." And, I simply say to him, "Look, [00:56:00] I will not condone such violence, which is the violence of the terrorist." And today would say, I would never condone that there is anything good in suicide terrorism. It's murder. The murder of children, of innocent children. They don't attack; they are merely attacked. Children. Families.

Somebody mentioned earlier on *dor chadash* about Carter. Carter came to see us, and we had a long discussion. And I told him -- for a half hour, this whole meeting lasted long an hour and a half -- I told him, simply, that his book against Israel, the omissions and so forth, one thing I said, "What about terrorists? The suicide terrorists in Israel?" That once, at one -- we were when it happened, we were in Jerusalem -- [00:57:00] three, three generations, were killed in the same explosion: grandparents, parents, and children. That I will not accept. Let the Palestinians give up on terrorism, and I'm convinced that things will change for the better very fast.

So, what do we know? We know that the suicide killers -- young boys and girls -- are trained to practice the cult of death, murdering men, women, and children. And what do people expect Israel to do? Nothing. Both Hamas and Hezbollah repeatedly declare their goal to destroy Israel. And should Israel wait

until they try [00:58:00] again and again? Does it mean that we must hate the Palestinians and the Muslims in general? No -- I'm against hatred, wherever its presence is felt. And again, the Jew in me wants to be able to love Jerusalem without being accused of hating Arab children -- I don't. Hatred is contagious. It destroys the hater, as well as his target. And those who invoke God in their hatred make him into a God of hatred. Those who kill in his name make God into an accomplice to murder. And a murderer.

So, what I believe, therefore, everything is possible, provided it's the end of terrorism. I will therefore just tell you one more story, to see how it goes; [00:59:00] things go together. The ultimate fear. I remember it clearly now, as I did years and eternities ago. The fear of the first night. There, far away, the first shock, of plunging into an unreal universe. The shouts, the tears, the disbelief. The breakdown of all that matters in life. The discovery of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of men, women, and children of all ages, all professions, arriving from all the horizons in Europe, speaking all tongues and carrying an infinite diversity of memories. All forming endless processions, walking toward gigantic red flames. And then, I remember, the whispers that came to us, [01:00:00] from older inmates' cells. "How old are you?" I said, 15. He

said, "No, you are old -- 18. How old is your father?" My father said 46. "No," he said, "twenties, something." Because, he said, "they're all going to die." And I then had a strange feeling. That I was witnessing the end of Jewish history. Because the adolescent *yeshiva bocher* that I was, a yeshiva student that I was, again remembered the Akedah -- the binding of Isaac. Isaac being led to the altar to become a burnt offering. I felt that would be the sum total. The last -- the last chapter, the last words, the last word of Jewish history! From the Akedah on Mount Moriah to Auschwitz. [01:01:00]

But then, that memory was not replaced, but followed by another memory. Jerusalem during the Six Day War. I was there. And I see myself running to the Old City. The entire city ran to the Jewish quarter in the Old City -- the entire country was running! Rabbis and their students, officers and soldiers, believers and non-believers, tailors and cobblers, artists and dreamers, Talmudic scholars and mystical visionaries: all were running to the wall. To the wall. Just to pray, just to sing, just to weep for those who had not been so lucky and remained behind. I realized then the painful yet exulting intensity that the enemy was defeated. [01:02:00] Jewish history did not end in Auschwitz. Jewish history has found the secret, not of beginning, but of beginning again, and again, and again. And

therefore, its soul continued to reverberate in the depth of its depths, where Jerusalem is waiting still for all of us. Thank you. (applause)

END OF VIDEO FILE