

92nd Street Y Elie Wiesel Archive

(applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: Thank you, Samantha. My God, I'm busy here. Lot of gigs. Welcome to the Bronfman Center for the 92nd Street Y. This is truly a historic night. Many of you may have already realized that tonight is auspiciously also the anniversary of Kristallnacht. Ooh, that's right. And perhaps it is appropriate that we would gather today on this anniversary for a reunion and a reminder that throughout the Cold War three million Jews were stuck on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. They were prevented from practicing their Judaism. They were deprived of a spiritual and cultural existence. The synagogues had been closed. They were prevented from reading Hebrew, and worst of all, they were denied the [00:01:00] right, as citizens of any country, to leave, to emigrate to wherever they wished to go, certainly Israel or the United States. The Soviets refused these rights to Jewish Russians. And so a thousand of them opposed Soviet Oppression by signing up and seeking exit visas to leave. Of course the Soviet Union refused, and they then became known as refuseniks. The most famous refusenik in the

world is joining us tonight. We all know him for many reasons. We're going to meet him in this very profound and powerful night. Natan Sharansky is familiar to you now as not only the head of the Jewish agency but he's a former deputy prime minister of Israel, a longtime member of the Israeli Knesset, but there was a time when this man was the face of the movement. [00:02:00] And please welcome and join me in welcoming Natan Sharansky. (applause) This is heroes' night, actually, at the 92nd Street Y. Yes, Natan, you are a hero. As we know, the Soviet Jews finally were able to leave. It took a great deal of heroic effort by many people. There were political dissidents certainly in the Soviet Union, but there were also very keen and cagey political American operators in the United States, not in the White House, per se, but certainly in the United Senate. We'll be talking about one of them today, Senator Scoop Jackson. Many may not remember. (applause) Yes. The United States Senate put pressure on the Soviet Union with the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, [00:03:00] which essentially tied arms control and trade to a much more favorable emigration policy for Soviet Jews. Soviet Union wanted wheat. We had it. And the cost of doing business was to provide more exit visas. Senator Scoop Jackson's chief lieutenant, a man who we now know and remember as

having been a political advisor to President George W. Bush and President Reagan, but back in this time Richard Perle was the chief political operator, operative, chief legislative assistant for Scoop Jackson. And through his tireless efforts rallied support on capitol hill. By far the most important man in capitol hill for with great energy and passion, a true righteous man, the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was completely [00:04:00] -- his participation was pivotal. And so please welcome Richard Perle.

(applause) Now, American Jewry during this period finally found its voice. It developed its own political muscle. It didn't even know it had it. And so we all of a sudden had agitators and protestors and demonstrators and persons of conscience, and then there were people who simply provided a moral voice. And this gentleman to my right -- who is this gentleman to my right? How did you get here? Do you have any connection to the 92nd Street Y? Elie Wiesel, shortly after having written *Night*, which is the book everyone remembers him for, but he's written 40 books, the other 39 are worth a look too. (laughter) I've read them, I know. It's not just a pitch. [00:05:00] In 1965 he traveled to Moscow, and he came back inspired to write a book. The book was *The Jews of Silence*. It's a profoundly important book. We're going to talk to Elie tonight about

what he remembers in 1965, what did he see, why did he go? But he brought back a monument, a real testament to Soviet Jewry and a real call to action. So let us welcome Nobelist Elie Wiesel. (applause) Now -- thank you. Excuse me. We have a really good excuse for a reunion. It's not just Kristallnacht. Last year this book was published by Gal Beckerman, who's joining us today, *When They Come For Us We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*. It's a great read. It reads like an espionage thriller. I actually reviewed [00:06:00] it for the *LA Times*. I liked it. (laughter) And I said, what the hell? Let's have a show. And so I invited Gal and brought some heroes on stage with him. Gal is presently the opinion editor for the *Forward*. And let's welcome Gal Beckerman. (applause) Well, Gal, let's start with you, since you're the youngest.

GAL BECKERMAN: Sure. (laughter) You're like the non-hero on stage.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Yes, you're not a hero, but you are like a *putchke* on stage. You know, you're the young one. Why this story? What was compelling about this story? Why is it such a fascinating, compelling story that drove you to write such a book that frankly hasn't been written before, correct?

GAL BECKERMAN: Right. Well, first of all, before I answer the question, I just, I want to say thank you to all of you for being here. It's -- you're all writers of books, so you understand that the process of writing a book is often this walk down a very [00:07:00] long, dark tunnel. And it was an evening like this that I fantasized about, you know, that I really imagined could be at the end of that. So, and thank you Thane for preserving and making this happen. (applause) It's really, it's an honor. Well, the significance of the Soviet Jewry movement, I think, is that there's two levels to it. At one level this is, I think, after the Holocaust and the birth of Israel, one of the most important Jewish stories of the twentieth century because it's an incredible redemption story. For those people who survived the Holocaust and went to Israel, they had the great Zionist project to kind of channel their energy. But for American Jews and Soviet Jews, the two largest Jewish groups in the diaspora, I think the war left them with deep wounds, with deep scars. American Jews had this very kind of [00:08:00] -- the psychological, you know, feeling that they could have done more. By the '60s it was a really strong sense that maybe there was a passivity to the community, that the Jewish part of their American Jewish identity had begun to kind of feel hollow.

I think this movement kind of gave them that back. And it also, it helped them to build their political mass. So that helped them to overcome that scar. Soviet Jews were left with a very physical scar, a scar that ran along the length of the Iron Curtain. They were cut off from the rest of the Jewish world. By the 1960s it was three generations since the Bolshevik revolutions, since there had been any outlet for Jewish culture, let alone religion. So the redemption story there is a physical redemption story. So at a Jewish level it fascinated me, and then there's a kind of universal, global, almost diplomatic level, which I had been fascinated by the question of how human rights became a part of our [00:09:00] foreign policy. And you have to look to this movement to understand that, to understand how the ideals, American ideal of human rights became more than just rhetoric but became, especially in the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, linked to our foreign policy. A piece of legislation for the first time in history pointed to the universal declaration of human rights and said this is our compass. So I think for both those reasons, you know, I think this is an extremely important movement.

THANE ROSENBAUM: The 92nd Street Y, as you know, is on the cutting edge of all technology. So we're going to

show you some photos. (laughter) John, our friend John Kelly's going to be helping us out here tonight. John, let's take a look at the first one. Natan Sharansky, you were on my parent's coffee table for years. We never got rid of that. (laughter) That was the July 1978 [00:10:00] cover of *Time* magazine. Only a few short months before that you had been imprisoned. You had been sentenced to prison for 13 years. Your brother purportedly shouted out in the courtroom that the world is with you. Did you think that the world is with you? Did you -- by the way, first of all, did you know that you eventually were -- did you know that you were on the cover of *Time* magazine?

NATAN SHARANSKY: No, I didn't know that I was on the cover. (laughter)

THANE ROSENBAUM: They didn't deliver to you.

NATAN SHARANSKY: And I don't think that that was the most important thing for me to know. (laughter) I knew very little, but I felt a lot. And I felt that we are in the middle of a historical struggle, that all the people of Israel and all the Jews are with me. Well, you said [00:11:00] it was a few months after. It was 16 months after I was arrested. In all the 16 months KGB was -- well, they were not putting a light in my eyes as here,

(laughter) but they were doing -- all the rest they were doing to convince me that --

THANE ROSENBAUM: We should have been more sensitive about that. (laughter)

NATAN SHARANSKY: Yeah, yeah. All the rest they were really doing to convince me that I am abandoned, that the Jews of the world are afraid to mention my name because the moment they understand that it's all about espionage that's the end. And I knew that's all nonsense. I knew it's lies. Because of my years of struggle I knew how strongly the Jews are to go down with us. And as a result I felt that every day that I'm saying no to KGB it's another day of our victory. So that was important for me. That's why [00:12:00] when my brother shouted what he shouted it was like approval of what I'm doing. I didn't know, but I didn't know practically anything of what was happening.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Outside?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Outside, yeah.

THANE ROSENBAUM: How did you think it was going to end up? You sat in prison for nine years. What did you think was going to happen? Did you think you'd be released before 13 years?

NATAN SHARANSKY: I thought many times how I will be released, but it always was in my dreams and always then you wake up, and you go back to your punishing cell to your interrogation. So on a very early stage I understood that if my aim will be to be released I'll be broken, and that will be the end of the struggle. So very early you have to understand that your aim should not be to be released. Your aim -- your dream is to be released. But your aim should be to remain free person in prison. As long as they cannot [00:13:00] break you, that is already victory for you and for your people. Of course I hoped that one day I will be released, and I dreamt about it.

THANE ROSENBAUM: John, let's take a look at another photo. Either -- if any of you have comments about any of the people we're looking at, this is of course Andrei Sakharov and Yelena Bonner, who, Sakharov, as you know, was the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb. He himself, like Elie Wiesel, had won a Nobel Peace Prize and was the world's most famous dissident, surely, before Natan. John, let's take another photo. I love this picture. This is Natan Sharansky, of course, in the middle. And here are -- it's a group portrait of some refuseniks.

GAL BECKERMAN: Not just some.

THANE ROSENBAUM: The, the refu-- the main --

GAL BECKERMAN: This is the A-Team over here.

THANE ROSENBAUM: This is the A-Team, right.

(laughter) And you're smiling. Do you remember this day?

NATAN SHARANSKY: No. [00:14:00] (laughter) But I remember that we were smiling. I remember that this -- to discover that you can be free person even in the Soviet Union, and that it can be very deeply connected to the historic struggle of your people was a very good feeling. That's why we all smiled.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Great. John, let's look again. One more. Oh, I love this. This is refuseniks' celebration in Ovrashki Forest. You wouldn't know. It looked like a bunch of New York hippies. (laughter) And let's take a look at another photo. This is refuseniks protesting in Leningrad. And --

GAL BECKERMAN: This is at the very end.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Yeah, Gal, this is significant because, in fact, they're not actually getting arrested here.

GAL BECKERMAN: Right, exactly.

THANE ROSENBAUM: This is toward the end, and they're actually going to continue to be protesting and will not -- I don't know if that's the KGB, but they'll get to stay there. [00:15:00] John, let's take a look at

another picture. Let's move on to the next frames. Yeah. Yeah, not that one. Here we go. So here -- and we'll get Richard Perle to comment in a moment, here you see a picture of Scoop Jackson, of course, who we all applauded a moment ago, patron saint of Soviet Jewry. And he's flanked -- let me see. Gal, you can help me. This is Dymshits is on the right.

GAL BECKERMAN: On our left.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And Kuznetsov is --

GAL BECKERMAN: Kuznetsov is wearing the glasses, the horn-rimmed glasses.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Oh, (inaudible), right, and Dymshits is on the left.

GAL BECKERMAN: Right.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And these are what, two of the 16?

GAL BECKERMAN: Yeah, these are two of -- these are the two leaders, really, of an extraordinary episode in this book. You ask why I wanted to write this book. It was because of -- I mean, partly at least because of incredibly dramatic stories like the Leningrad hijacking that these guys led.

THANE ROSENBAUM: So these 16 people attempted to hijack a plane in Leningrad.

GAL BECKERMAN: They attempted in 1970 to hijack a plane. The KGB was onto them from the [00:16:00] beginning. They arrested them on the tarmac and put on a big show trial. The Soviets thought this was their opportunity to unmask Zionism as just hooliganism, as the Soviets like to call it. And they sent in these two men. Dymshits was actually a pilot. He was going to actually pilot the plane. He sentenced them to death. And there was such a world outcry that eventually after about a week and a half the Soviets commuted the death sentence, and the really, the fastest legal time the Soviets have ever done.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And they eventually wound up in the United States.

GAL BECKERMAN: Yes, later, in the '70s. They still served long prison terms, yeah.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Now, Richard, what -- you knew this man. He was your mentor. What was special about him? He was not Jewish. He was a senator of a state that probably had very few Jews. What was it about this issue that galvanized him? Was this purely an act of principle? Was there any self-interest in this? Was he truly [00:17:00] a patron saint?

RICHARD PERLE: Scoop all his life was an opponent of totalitarianism in all its forms. He used to say that

he found amazing obscure ordinances when he was a prosecutor in Snohomish County, Washington State, that permitted him to run the brown shirts out of town, the fascists. And so it would be natural that he would align himself with people fighting for freedom. That for him was the most important thing. In its Jewish manifestation it was deeply reinforced by his experience at the end of World War II when as a congressman he was present at the liberation of Buchenwald. [00:18:00] And from that moment, for the rest of his life, he did what he could, first to help the Jews of the world achieve a Jewish state, he was one of the early supporters, and then to do what he could to free them. But it was not just Jews that he was interested in. Scoop got involved with all kinds of freedom movements. There was a steady stream of people through his office. He was a truly great man.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Now, clearly the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was surely not in the spirit of what President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger wanted in their understanding of detente. They had a vision of quiet diplomacy in the way that the United States should handle certainly arms control and in no way [00:19:00] should the United States aggravate the Cold War. They should seek to deescalate the Cold War. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment is

nothing other than to inflame the Cold War. Can you just tell us a little about what the strategy was here? You were surely going against the American foreign policy of the Nixon administration.

RICHARD PERLE: Yes. Well, Scoop didn't accept the concept underlying détente. He did not believe that if the United States were to extend itself, engage in a variety of negotiations affecting not only military systems, but we tried to draw the Soviets into cooperative programs in space and energy and medicine and the like. He never accepted the view that this would somehow transform this fundamentally, quintessentially totalitarian state into something else. And [00:20:00] he used to say if you want to see why we should be concerned about what the Soviet Union in a position to do so would do to us, look at what they do to their own citizens. That was the rule he applied, not only to the Soviet Union but generally. And so he couldn't imagine a fundamental change on the part of the Soviet Union.

THANE ROSENBAUM: John, let's take a look at another photo. Oh, Richard, now we see a different president and a vice president. Those are not cardboard cutouts.

(laughter)

GAL BECKERMAN: They really look it.

THANE ROSENBAUM: This is in fact the Oval Office. We wouldn't do that to you. This is the 92nd Street Y, for God sakes. In the center of course is Avital Sharansky, Natan's wife, who we will mention in a moment. (applause) And the gentleman to her left is Mendelevitch, who actually was [00:21:00] in prison at the same time. He was released before you, but he shared not a cell but close to you. Richard, can you just tell us, obviously President Reagan and his secretary of state George Shultz had a foreign policy that which much more consistent, right, with the Jackson amendment and a much more of a deeper concern with human rights as opposed to the realpolitik of détente.

RICHARD PERLE: Yes, that's quite right. Reagan, unlike all the presidents who preceded him, did not believe that the task of the American president was to find the best arrangement with the Soviet Union. He thought the best way was to eliminate the Soviet Union, principally by political means. And those speeches that some of you will recall about the evil empire and the ash heap of history and so forth, those speeches were intended to resonate with the people of the Soviet Union who knew very well that their government was illegitimate. [00:22:00] So it was political warfare. But look at that picture, I hope you'll let me tell you a short story because it involves Avital,

who's here tonight, and it involves George Shultz, Ronald Reagan's secretary of state. This took place in Geneva at a summit meeting. I was there as the defense department representative accompanying the State Department delegation headed by the secretary of state, George Shultz. And Avital, who managed to go everywhere that there was a possibility of rallying support for Natan, had gone to Geneva, and she wanted to hold a press conference, a briefing about Natan's situation. And she couldn't find a room in which to do it. So the American delegation at this summit was in the Hilton or the Intercontinental in Geneva. And the [00:23:00] America delegation had a room, and as part of the delegation I knew that. So I said to Avital, well, why don't you use our room? And she started to pass out circulars indicating there would be a press conference in this room at this time. And the next morning the delegation had an early morning meeting, and someone from the State Department said, he said, "Mr. Secretary, you won't believe this, but Avital Sharansky has expropriated a State Department meeting room and plans to hold a press conference, and this will ruin the summit." And two or three other people in the meeting piped up with the same sentiment. And George Shultz listened to this, and then he said -- his wife's name was Obie. He said, you know, I

like to think that if I were in jail, Obie would find a room [00:24:00] to speak for me. (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: Wow. That's a great anecdote. And that's not even in the book, Gal. (laughter)

GAL BECKERMAN: It's not.

THANE ROSENBAUM: There's one great anecdote. We'll just have to do a next edition, put the Richard Perle anecdote. Hey, John, let's see and take a look at another photo. And Elie, I want you to pay special attention to this one. Let's skip over that and go on to -- ah yes. So this is the Arkhipova synagogue in Moscow. And a very curious thing happened each year in Moscow, although the expression of religion was completely forbidden for Jews and others, certainly for Jews, and the Russian Jews, Soviet Jews were, you know, spiritually and culturally annihilated, they had no connection to Judaism, and yet every year at Simchat Torah [00:25:00] tens of thousands of them would come outside this shul, and they would dance spontaneously. In 1965 Elie Wiesel went there to find out what was the situation with Soviet Jewry, to find out how bad it was. And so Elie, why did you go? What were you looking for? What did you find?

ELIE WIESEL: When I went in '65 I went to see the Jews suffering, living in fear. And then I went to Kiev

and Leningrad and so forth, and Moscow. But the real discovery was Simchat Torah. That was the first time that anyone came with a report to the world say, hey, hey, hey, the Russian Jews want to be Jewish, [00:26:00] and they know how. They were dancing in the streets, singing, and I wrote about it. The most important thing I wrote in that time was not really the fear, the anguish, the oppression; it was the liberation. Thousands and thousands of youngsters came from all over town. And on Simchat Torah outside the synagogue they were dancing and singing in Yiddish, a few even in Hebrew. And that was my message, actually. They deserve our admiration and not only our solidarity. That's why I went.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Now, did they have a Torah?

ELIE WIESEL: Of course.

THANE ROSENBAUM: So I mean, they had the Torahs. Did they know what they were doing? Was there a rabbi?

ELIE WIESEL: There were rabbis. First of all, the old rabbi, Levin, chief rabbi of Moscow. I wrote actually a play about him. Poor man, frightened, [00:27:00] demoralized, but he was a rabbi. But then there were many, many, many youngsters who studied Hebrew, which we don't, I think, applaud enough what the State of Israel has done. They sent *shlichim*, messengers, teachers actually, and they

taught young Russian Jews Hebrew. I used to meet them in the cemeteries. It was safer. I taught them. I taught them Hebrew songs. I taught them Jewish history. I as a teacher was never more proud than when I did that, here and there, in every place. I went to the cemetery, arranged simply for me to meet them and teach them.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Can't help but note that in 1965 was only a mere 20 years after the liberation of Auschwitz. Clearly both in *The Jews of Silence* and in your [00:28:00] work on behalf of Soviet Jewry you drew a parallel path. You connected the atrocity of the Holocaust and saw -- you saw connections and that as Gal said a moment ago, the Soviet Jewry moment experience movement was redemptive in that way.

ELIE WIESEL: I don't compare. I compare nothing to what happened during the war. For me, what we so poorly call the Holocaust was a unique event. Never before and therefore as we say, never again.

THANE ROSENBAUM: No, no, forgive me. I don't mean that parallel, but I mean the experience of the world's silence, the world's passivity, the world's inaction, how easy it is to forget. You have been a man of conscience and a man of memory, and obviously the idea of bearing witness to what was happening in the Soviet Union was

clearly something that was on your mind and was in that book. [00:29:00]

ELIE WIESEL: Oh, it is. It's not only that. Actually here, at the Y, when I came back from there I came to the Y, was my first encounter with the Y. And I gave a report about Soviet Jewry.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And this was before the book came out?

ELIE WIESEL: Before the book came out. And this is what I wrote. "For me it's the beginning. I said their eyes, I must tell you about their eyes. I must begin with that. For their eyes precede all else, and everything is comprehended within them. The rest can wait. If it only confirmed what you already know, but their eyes. Their eyes flamed with a kind of irreducible truth which burns and is not consumed. Shamed into silence before them, you can [00:30:00] only bow your head and accept their judgment. Your only wish now is to see the world as they do. A grown man, a man of wisdom and experience, you are suddenly impotent and terribly impoverished. Those eyes remind you of your childhood, your orphan state, cause you to lose all faith in the power of language. Those eyes negate the value of words. They dispose of the need for speech." That was the beginning, and I read this here from

this stage at that time. And since then many, many years have passed. I will always remember the beginning.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And we're hearing it again.

(applause) The book is many ways a call to action for the American public [00:31:00] and the world public to speak on behalf of Soviet Jewry. And many Americans rose to that challenge. Let's -- John, let's take another look at some photos. So this is Yaakov Birnbaum, right, Gal, who (applause) very much deserves an applause. He was the founder of the SSSJ, the Students to Save Soviet Jewry, which was a group of liberal and secular and religious students, young people, very much called to social activism of its time, very same people who were seeing the SDS in Berkeley and anti-war movement, there was -- the SSSJ was a peaceful, nonviolent movement growing and strong and young. Let's take a look at another photo. Ah yes. This is, of course, the hippie rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, [00:32:00] still with a shul on West 79th Street, who many people may not remember "Am Yisrael Chai" was written as an anthem for Soviet Jewry. And the SSSJ, these gatherings, these solidarity marches were highly -- very well attended. Yaakov Birnbaum had organized them with the students. And you know, it's hard to imagine this time. This is, you know, this is pre-Woodstock, of course. But it does have -

- well, put it this way, think Occupy Wall Street with lots more people and less marijuana (laughter) and you have what this looks like, and this is Carlebach. Let's take a look at another photo. This is Meir Kahane, who I think had just posted bail and was coming out after being convicted of another crime of disorderly conduct, and he's surrounded by his followers from the Jewish Defense [00:33:00] League, which, for those of you who don't remember, was sort of the Jewish answer to Black Power, Black and Jewish pride and Jewish power. And they were decidedly violent and not interested in peaceful demonstrations. Let's take a look at another one. And yes, and that's the example of it. These are Jewish boys, ladies and gentlemen. (laughter) They do not have yeshiva books. They have pipe bombs and baseball bats, and they looked serious. Let's talk about this, all of this for a moment. These are very -- these are different groups. One idea that comes out of the Beckerman book is that the Jewish mainstream establishment believed in Jewish respectability, in being quiet, quiet diplomacy, [00:34:00] and these groups, Jewish Defense League surely to a much more larger extent, believed in noise. Richard, in Gal's book there's a great anecdote of you tossing an American Jewish committee official out of

your office. Do you remember this story? You just tossed him out.

RICHARD PERLE: Well, there was, in fact, an American Jewish bureaucrat tossed out of the office, but I didn't do the tossing. The tossing was done by a diminutive five-foot woman, wonderful woman named Dorothy Fosdick, who was the daughter of Harry Emerson Fosdick, who'd been a pacifist in World War II. And this particular official was complaining about our efforts on behalf of the Soviet Jews because we were a little loud and aggressive. And he was particularly [00:35:00] critical of me, and Dorothy was like a surrogate mother. She said, you won't talk to Richard that way, and she ushered him out of the office. He was stunned. He was stunned. He was an iconic figure in the Jewish community at the time, but that didn't matter to Dorothy. But there was tension between -- certainly between the activists who were out in the streets demonstrating and the establishment Jewish leaders.

THANE ROSENBAUM: So you know, Gal speaks about, writes about this extensively. It's essentially Nahum Goldmann in the World Jewish Congress represented the mainstream Jewish establishment and Lou Rosenblum was part of the grassroots, another photo that we don't have, certainly deserves recognition, Lou Rosenblum who

(applause) organized the grassroots around the country and very much opposed [00:36:00] to the efforts of mainstream Jewish establishment. Let's talk about Kahane, a polarizing figure. I mean, Elie, this is a rabbi, for God sakes, a rabbi who, you know, teaches karate and a rabbi who teaches pipe bombs. You -- you're a Nobel Peace Prize winner. And yet this was one of the strategies that was used. And let me just say, not an effective strategy. I mean, it just so happens that when the JDL was at its most violent, when they were harassing Soviet diplomats who were walking around the street, when they upstaged the Bolshoi ballet by, I think, throwing mice onto the stage.

(laughter) You got to love that one. (applause) The Soviet Union [00:37:00] actually gave out more exit visas in response to the violence. I mean, is this troubling for you, that statics? I mean, how did you feel about Kahane? And I'm going to ask all of you because he was so polarizing, and yet everyone has an opinion.

ELIE WIESEL: Saying -- we belonged to a tradition that prohibits me from saying anything bad about someone who is dead. (laughter) (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: That is a very diplomatic, Nobelist worthy reply. (laughter) Natan, he eventually was in Israel.

NATAN SHARANSKY: I am not a diplomat, so I can tell you straight (laughter) that in the beginning, in the very beginning of the struggle. [Even Grade?] started fighting like students struggle for Soviet Jewry [00:38:00] before we started. And we loved him. We loved the fact there is somebody who's bringing our problem to the center of the attention. In fact, for us it was like continuation of the book of Elie, *Jews of Silence*, that American Jews should not be Jews of silence, and here is their voice. And the fact that there was even song, which made in the underground, Jewish underground, something like we had enough, the best violence in the world. Now we need hooligans. That was -- so that was the motive. Let's start fighting. I have to say that in the '72, I don't remember exactly, but at some moment we felt, some of us, and I was among them, that now it becomes a big, that Kahane becomes a more problem than this. In the beginning it was [00:39:00] one of the most important allies, but then when there was shooting in the Soviet embassy, when there was burning of these agency's office, which was organizing traveling, and the secretary, I don't remember her name --

THANE ROSENBAUM: A woman died.

NATAN SHARANSKY: A woman died, except from moral issue, but all our power in the Soviet Union was the power of word, that again this tyranny, we put the word, we are not violent, but our word has a lot of power. The fact that our allies are using violence, which can bring to the death of the people, was undermining our cause. Remember then I was among those few who wrote our first letter calling to Reb Kahane to stop this type of activity. And we were condemned among our own because they said look, we don't have so many allies, and you should not do [00:40:00] (inaudible). But we really felt it becomes a problem. So when I came to Israel many years after this, Rav Kahane tried to build bridges saying that our struggle is his struggle. I had publicly to say that, no, it's not our struggle, and when you -- suppose Kahane was very upset because really I have to say that he was one of the first, and he was very important, but all his activity from the late '70s and up to -- I think was much more damaging than helping.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Gal, your book sets up what I would call a symphony of disparate groups all working to do the same thing with different methods. And of course this is one of those situations where the old adage, you know, two Jews, three opinions doesn't really work because this

was a situation where all Jews were united when it came to Soviet Jewry. [00:41:00] They may have had different methods.

GAL BECKERMAN: Strategies, yeah, yea.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Strategies. Just in your mind, anyone more important than the other, or was it really a choreography that worked in concert and that it all worked together? And the reason I'm asking is want to ask the other gentlemen on the stage, if nothing had happened, if there was no SSSJ, there was no JDL, there was no Richard Perle and Scoop Jackson, if nothing had happened, would the Soviet Union have collapsed on its own and the Soviet Jews would have eventually been free? I mean, if you read the book it seems unthinkable. It seems like it was only because of these efforts of protest. If there had been no *Jews of Silence*, if there had been none of this, would have Communism have just come to an end?

GAL BECKERMAN: Those are a lot of questions. I mean, to separate them out for a minute, I [00:42:00] refuse to say that one person did more than anybody else. It was mostly --

THANE ROSENBAUM: Well, we know that these three are the most important.

GAL BECKERMAN: Exactly, mostly because every single event that I've given around the book there is inevitably somebody who raises their hand at the end during the question and answer and says, I looked in your index, and I didn't see my Uncle Murray who started the Long Island Committee of Soviet Jewry, and he was the one who got them out. Always. No, it was an orchestra, and Kahane played his part as well. He got Soviet Jewry on the front page more than anybody else had up to that point. He created a situation that I think, or a strategy that might have even just been a precept to the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which is to create, to make this a problem, to make this a problem between the super powers, a problem that needed to be resolved. And so, and maybe that leads to answer the second part of your question of whether this movement had a part [00:43:00] in actually getting Jews out and not a small part, I think, in kind of chipping away at the Soviet Union. Yes, because this issue was about immigration. It was about letting people out. It was about people's free choice to live wherever they want, to choose not to live in a totalitarian regime. And for 25, 30 years these activists just pounded and pounded and pounded and pounded until the Soviets understood that this was the concession that they had to make. I mean, by the period of Reagan

every meeting that he has with Gorbachev he starts off with a list of names of people that he demands are -- you know, need to get out before we get to talking about arms control or any of the other things that the Soviets wanted. So by that point it was nearly a conditioning project. The Soviets had been conditioned to understand, because the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and all the activism, that this was the issue, this was the issue that mattered to Americans.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Richard, do you agree with this, the Cold War comes to an end in part because of the efforts on behalf of [00:44:00] Soviet Jewry?

RICHARD PERLE: I think the movement focused on the complete absence of human rights in the Soviet Union. It's hard to imagine, but the Soviet Union had its apologists. It had intellectuals who argued that they had solved the problem of universal healthcare and they had brought about a more decent distribution of income, and they had an economy that was growing faster than ours. And now we forget that there was real controversy about the Soviet Union and especially in the period when the Nixon administration was promoting the idea of a détente. And there was a real argument that the Soviet Union was evolving and could be encouraged to evolve even further. But before you get to the end, I think it's important to

note that tens of thousands of people [00:45:00] got out before the Soviet Union collapsed. And so it isn't as if we had to await the collapse. And just a footnote to some of this history, in Reagan's first meeting with Gorbachev, Gorbachev, he of course raised the Sharansky question, and Gorbachev said Sharansky's a spy. And he was advised to look into it further, and never really -- I mean, there was a trade, a ridiculous trade because you had an innocent man on one side and an agent on the other, so even as late as early Gorbachev there was real anger about the problems inflicted on the Soviet image in the world by these obstreperous Jews.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Natan, we saw a photo earlier of your wife [00:46:00] Avital. You were a prisoner of conscience, of course, but the story of your imprisonment is also a love story. You marry Avital the day before she emigrates to Israel. You don't see her again for well over a decade. If you don't mind, I'd like to read what you said in Israel when -- just a piece of what you said. You said about Avital, you said, "You know, I dreamed many times while in prison of arriving in our land and there my Avital would be waiting for me. But in my dreams whenever we began to embrace I would wake up in my cell." And you were finally rejoined, but throughout that entire time --

and Richard reminds us, did you know that you had married a woman who would be such a ferocious global ambassador all over the world, an advocate not only to release [00:47:00] her husband but on behalf of Soviet Jewry? Did you get a sense of this when you knew her?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, when we were separated it was a very shy, very quiet, very naïve girl who hardly spoke a word except in Russian. And when I met her 12 years after that she was one of the most experienced leaders of political struggles who opened the doors of every leader in the world. So no, I didn't know.

(applause) I did not know that it will happen at that moment, but I did feel how strong she is, how devoted she is. I did know already before I went to prison [00:48:00] how Israel, meeting with Israel empowered her, inspired her, made her feel very strongly that we are living in the times of miracles and that no doubt another miracle will happen, will come. So with all her faith and inner strength I would sure that everything what KGB's telling me is lies. And of course the world will never forget my case simply because Avital will not permit the world to forget my case. (applause)

ELIE WIESEL: Let me tell you who Avital is. No one has ever given me so much trouble as she has. (laughter)

Ask Marion, my wife. (inaudible) she would wake me up at 4:00 in the morning, and she knew more about my calendar than I did. [00:49:00] You are going to see next week, she said, (inaudible) speak about that. You are going to Paris. You'll see the president, speak about that. I didn't even know I was going there, (laughter) but she knew. So Avital really is someone very, very special. (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: We're sitting with Elie Wiesel, and we can't help but be reminded that he's always reminding us that, you know, Auschwitz is always with him. This is not something one walks away from. It shaped his worldview, it shaped his life, his career, his message. Can we say the same thing, Natan, about your imprisonment in the Soviet Union? Can we at least say that it has shaped your worldview and there's a part of you that's still there in some painful way? [00:50:00]

NATAN SHARANSKY: Look, I was lucky that struggle for me didn't start from imprisonment. Because there were a few years during which first of all you discover your identity. Second, you discover how powerful is Jewish solidarity. You reconnect yourself to all this. So my life in prison was like continuation of the struggle, which continues every day. And of course it was very tough life,

of course, and I wouldn't compare it with Auschwitz, of course, but they were using many methods to try to destroy your spirit. And from this point, yes, you learn how to feel that every day that you lived through the principles is another day of victory. You have to live with constant feeling that victory is not something at the end of your life, [00:51:00] that this feeling of struggle which happens every moment and victory or failure every moment. That's something what you learn in prison, this moral clarity, which is very difficult to reach and to understand when you're not in prison.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Let me ask you gentlemen this one question. I think at least all of you might have some response to this, but Gal and certainly Richard might. I was born in New York, but I was raised in Miami during the Cold War. Ninety miles south of Key West is Cuba, a satellite of the Soviet Union. Castro, by the way, who is still essentially in power, all these years the Soviet Union has collapsed, Cuba is still with us, still a communist country, it's like the energizer bunny country, Castro in [00:52:00] 1960 says to the Jews, go, go to Miami Beach, become rich. And they did. (laughter) We call them Jewbans. And they came, and they reinvented their lives. They built an entire world for themselves. Castro said you

don't want to be here, I don't want you here. Why didn't the Soviet Union do this? Why didn't they just say we're buying ourselves a headache? Richard, give us the advice inside the Oval Office. You were an advisor to two American presidents. Explain the mind of the Soviet Union in this issue.

RICHARD PERLE: Well, I think a succession of Soviet leaders believed that if they exceeded to the demands that the Jews of Russia should be permitted to leave, that the whole system would unravel, that it would fall apart. First of all, they knew that behind the Jews there were an awful lot of other people who wanted to leave who were not so fortunate as to [00:53:00] have co-religionists staying up late at night organizing demonstrations. And it was an extraordinary thing. In communities all over the United States, housewives, lawyers, physicians, people in every walk of life extended themselves to do what they could in support of the Jews of the Soviet Union. People wore names on their wrist. And there were names, names like Sharansky. And if you ask me what was the single more important thing, it was the effort the Soviet Jews made to free themselves. Outside in the diaspora you could help, but they did it. And they inspired those who worked hard to help them outside. The Soviets understood that once

they [00:54:00] opened the gates somebody would have to stay to turn off the lights. (applause)

NATAN SHARANSKY: Because of your question to Richard, it reminded me. My first conversation with President Reagan exactly on this topic. I came. I thanked him for all his effort. I thanked him for his great speech on evil empire, which reached us in prison and which showed us that finally there is a leader who understands Soviet Union. But then he told me an anecdote. President Reagan says to Bush and to Shultz who are there, look, I heard such an anecdote. And he tells me old anecdote that Brezhnev and Kosygin, who were number one and number two in the Soviet Union, are sitting together and discussing, maybe we will open the gates of the Soviet Union to all these Jews. While we are suffering from all this pressure, let them go. And then Kosygin says to Brezhnev, no, if you'll do it only two of us will remain. Everyone will leave. And then [00:55:00] Brezhnev says no, speak for yourself. (laughter) So I have to say that Reagan says the story, and he laughs, and Bush laughs, and Shultz laughs. Everybody laughs, and I'm a little bit saddened. Why? Because that's an old joke which I heard 25 years ago. So you came to White House, and that's what you hear? (laughter) But then Reagan says to his colleagues, you

understand that's the joke which Soviet people say themselves. That's what they think. Then I understand, my God, here is a politician who understands that he does have to listen to what Soviets say, that Soviet people don't want to leave and so on. He asks CIA to tell him what jokes Soviet people say. And from this he understands much better the situation. (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: I also thought one of you would say there would be an extraordinary brain drain.

RICHARD PERLE: Yeah.

GAL BECKERMAN: That was an issue. [00:56:00]

THANE ROSENBAUM: Right, that is an issue. I mean, 100,000 of the Jews that -- Soviet Jews who went to Israel, 100,000 engineers, 23,000 doctors.

ELIE WIESEL: Violinists.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And violinists. (laughter) Elie Wiesel told us --

NATAN SHARANSKY: And chess players. And chess players.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Right. And chess players. What would the Soviet Union be without the Jews? Which just begs this one question. There's still 1.5 million Jews in Russia. What do we know about them? Do they come to dance

at the synagogue on Simchat Torah? Do they learn Hebrew?
What happened to them now that they are free?

NATAN SHARANSKY: First of all, I am glad to hear
this figure 1.5 million because our official figure is --

ELIE WIESEL: Too much, no, no.

NATAN SHARANSKY: Eight hundred fifty thousand.
Well, some Chabad rabbis says that there are 3 million. I
always hope that Chabad is closer to God so they know
better. (laughter) But now as official Jewish bureau I
have to rely on official statistics, [00:57:00] it's
approximately 850,000. And this time they can live as the
Jews, or they can leave. We can help them to build Jewish
communities. They are coming on Jewish -- they are
dancing. There is full Jewish life. What is good in the
last year at least, statistic shows that young Jews from
St. Petersburg and Moscow start leaving for Israel in much
bigger figures. (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: All right. Now, I'm about to read
something, and I'm saying if you have a heart condition I'm
going to ask you to leave now. Henry Kissinger a year ago,
roughly a year ago, when the Nixon library had released
another series of tapes from the Oval office -- it's
interesting, in Gal Beckerman's book the scene itself is
described, you just didn't know what happened after.

GAL BECKERMAN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Golda Meir comes to visit Nixon and Kissinger in the Oval Office. She makes a number of requests. [00:58:00]

GAL BECKERMAN: Could have been. It's March of 1973, and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment is really picking up steam. And Nixon and Kissinger actually are trying to get Golda to pull the American Jewish community off of this issue. And Golda throws up her hands and says I can't tell American Jews what to do. If they care about this, they care about this.

THANE ROSENBAUM: So Golda Meir leaves the office.

GAL BECKERMAN: Which is a convenient thing for her to say, also, because she --

RICHARD PERLE: Can I just add one.

GAL BECKERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD PERLE: Because it was such a charming moment. Golda Meir listened to the president of the United States explaining why it was in Israel's interest that American Jews scaled back their effort on behalf of Soviet Jews, and he laid it all out. He had an argument. And she listened to him, and when he was finished she said, Mr. President, you want me to tell this to the Jews? (laughter)

THANE ROSENBAUM: So Golda Meir leaves the Oval Office. The tape recorder is on. [00:59:00] And this is the conversation between his secretary of state, Kissinger, and the president of the United States, Nixon. It begins with Kissinger. I'm not doing it with a German accent. I'm just doing it. (laughter) "The emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union is not an objective of American foreign policy," Kissinger said. "And if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union it is not an American concern, maybe a humanitarian concern."

ELIE WIESEL: Maybe.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Yeah, maybe.

GAL BECKERMAN: I like the maybe, yeah.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Maybe. Maybe. And of course the president of United States says, "I know," Nixon responded. "We can't blow up the world because of it."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sarkozy Obama.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Elie, a reaction when you heard this a year ago? He actually -- [01:00:00] he didn't have to make a reference to concentration camps. He could have simply said it's not in our -- in the world of realpolitik it's not in our best interest. He doesn't have to add the concentration camps, the death camps. By the way, Kissinger's still alive. (laughter) (applause) You know, I

am a law professor. I want to remind the Nobelist that rule is going to work this time. (laughter)

ELIE WIESEL: All I can tell you is we had very good relations with him for many, many, many, many years. But I haven't spoken to him since. Since I have read it to this point. (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: Richard, did this tape surprise you?

RICHARD PERLE: Yes, it did. It did. I can well imagine Kissinger arguing the [01:01:00] realpolitik, that we don't have the leverage. This is an inappropriate use of our influence. But the way he chose to express it was truly shocking.

ELIE WIESEL: A Jewish refugee. Hey, a Jewish refugee, son of refugees, no sense of Jewish history? I don't understand it. And he's an intelligent person, learned, cultured. I don't know what happened. What happened to him? I don't know.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Well, you know, this does play into all the premises of the court Jew, the person so close to power he says exactly what the king or the president wants to hear. He knows how to play the game. He knows how he got into the White House, and he knows what to say. He says the very thing that maybe Nixon couldn't say even

on tape even in the Oval Office. Gal, you know, the
[01:02:00] book speaks about how often Nixon and Kissinger
try to coopt the Jewish community, to sweet talk them, to
tell them they were partners in the process of détente, to
tell them that all of these efforts, whether they Wiesel or
SSSJ or the JDL, were undermining foreign relations, making
the world less safe. Is this an old story? I mean, Elie,
I know that you know during the Holocaust there was, you
know, Rabbi Stephen Wise. There were people who had the
ear of Roosevelt but didn't say what they needed to say.
Do you think this is a familiar pattern? The Jewish
establishment essentially capitulates to staying
influential, and in order to stay influential you don't
rock the boat.

ELIE WIESEL: I don't like to generalize, to say the
Jewish establishment. It is composed of so many,
[01:03:00] a variety of people, all kinds of backgrounds,
but somehow nonetheless, the names that you mentioned, a
few others, were not, were not what they should have been:
spokesmen for our people. I'll give you an example, you
know. When I spoke to Reagan, was -- when I told him that
I came to -- I belong to a tradition that commands me to
speak truth to power, that was the Bitburg, you know why I
did it? I didn't know. Where did I take the courage to

speaking like that to a president in the White House who was going to honor me? I remember coming back. I was there in the plane together with Marion. All of a sudden I remembered. Actually, I wanted to show the leaders of our people that you can speak truth to power as Jews in the White House. That was why. (applause) [01:04:00]

THANE ROSENBAUM: John, let's take a look at our last photo. There we go. So this is 1987. It's in color. This is the march on Washington, 250,000 in support of Soviet Jewry. Gal's book points out that the early 1980s was a disaster for exit visas, only trickling out at that point, right, Gal?

GAL BECKERMAN: Yeah, mm-hmm.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And here in 1987, Elie you spoke here.

ELIE WIESEL: Sure. Look, I'll tell you, I published an op-ed piece a few months earlier in the *New York Times* saying look, why not do what others have done and march in Washington? And that slowly -- then Natan came and it worked. We spoke earlier about a reaction of the Jews in America. During what we call [01:05:00] the *Churban*, the destruction, they were not up to the standard during those times. They were afraid. And that was true about the Jewish movement as well. It was very, very hard to move

the Jewish community. I remember together with Abraham Joshua Heschel, the two of us were going from place to place, we organized demonstrations. Do you know who came to our demonstrations? Children, students, but not the parents. The parents would bring them to a demonstration and leave. Nobody wanted to hear about it. I remember the first time I spoke about it to a huge general assembly of the Jewish Federations in Kansas City. I think it was in '69 or '70. And that's when I gave them a piece of my mind. What are you doing? [01:06:00] You are here. The entire evening the word Soviet Jewry wasn't even mentioned. I was the last speaker. The entire evening was Motzei Shabbat, and there were, I think usually they have 3- 4,000 people from all over America. It wasn't even mentioned. And because I gave them a very strong criticism then on the spot they organized the first delegations to Russia, the first. They were embarrassed. I remember you mentioned this book. At the end of my book what do I say? "I believe with all my soul that despite the suffering, despite the hardship and the fear the Jews of Russia will withstand the pressure and emerge victorious. But whether or not we shall ever be worthy of their trust, whether or not we shall overcome [01:07:00] the pressures we have ourselves created I cannot say. I returned from the Soviet

Union disheartened and depressed. But what torments me most is not the Jews of silence I met in Russia but the silence of the Jews I live among today." (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: Richard, when you look at this photo, you were working that point for the Reagan administration, does this make you think in 1977, Natan, you're already out, you're in Israel, is this the end? Did we think --

GAL BECKERMAN: When you look at this --

RICHARD PERLE: This was Natan's demonstration.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Right.

ELIE WIESEL: And mine.

RICHARD PERLE: And yours. (laughter) Absolutely.

THANE ROSENBAUM: But did we think --

RICHARD PERLE: And it was organized over the opposition of people who should have been contributing to it. And it was [01:08:00] extraordinary how successful it was given the absence of support that should have been forthcoming, although, if I recall correctly, Natan, once people failed to dissuade the Elie Wiesels and the Natan Sharanskys from attempting the demonstration, then they got on board when it was -- well, the people were leading, they were going to follow. So this demonstration would not have

happened except for a couple of people, and they're right here. And it really was the end.

THANE ROSENBAUM: And everyone there thought this was the end, or is it only people in the White House who thought this might be it?

RICHARD PERLE: Well, of course, the White was not at all unhappy about this. And which made it different from some other demonstrations where administrations were very unhappy.

GAL BECKERMAN: Which is why it was actually a very -- it had to be organized [01:09:00] very carefully because it wasn't a demonstration against Reagan's policy necessarily and not even necessarily against Gorbachev because he was within the battles that were happening in the Kremlin at that moment he was kind of, you know, more of a reformer than the communist hardliners. So the demonstration actually took place a day before his visit. And I think Natan, actually you wanted -- you asked for 400,000 people, so it must have been a letdown for you.

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, I think this demonstration is really symbolized in many ways how the struggle was developing, that you need activists who irritate establishment, but then you need establishment who will mobilized and who will put all this effort. And through

that Elie Wiesel spoke about the need of victimization, that when I came it was my first visit to New York, and I saw that this figure, that we are speaking about hundreds of thousands of Jews who still want to come was not really caught. [01:10:00] People were speaking about 2,000 refuseniks, 25 prisoners of Zion. So I said when Gorbachev will come first time let's 400,000 American Jews go to Washington. I said 400,000 simply in order it will be understood that we are speaking about big figures. I said for every Jew in Soviet Union who wants to come, let's 400,000 come. And then the reaction of establishment was, in many ways, fear. They said you're speaking about these big figures. There is no way to bring hundreds of thousands of American Jews to Washington in winter. The special said maximum 20,000. You cannot bring more. But the second big fear was that everybody loves Gorbachev, finally these is détente, real détente. And we will irritate American government, American demonstration, President Reagan against Jews. For Jews, their cause is much more important [01:11:00] than chance for peace. And then I decided -- I couldn't say anything about it after all I'm not an American Jew. So I said I decided I'll have to ask Reagan whether he will be upset or not upset. And there was a pretext that Avital and I never met Reagan.

Together we -- separate and so on we want to say him thank you, and we met President Reagan, and he was already very old, and he was already very old. It was the end of his term, and he was confusing dates. But he looked at us as a very proud grandfather, that he sees the results of his work. And he says that, you know, I just -- then Mr. and Mrs. Shevardnadze, he says to us -- (laughter) I just spoke with foreign minister Sharansky, and I told him that you should better let Soviet Jews go because we will not make compromise with this. And he's -- and people are in the room. We are really very confused [01:12:00] that he made this mistake. My God, if I wasn't Russian I also would confuse Sharansky, Shevardnadze. (laughter) So I try. I pretend I didn't notice, and I go straight. I say, Mr. President, soon you will see not only foreign minister but president himself, Secretary of Communist Party himself. So I wanted to know that Jewish community and Jewish activists want to organize big demonstration, and I hope you understand that it's not against -- and then trying to use the words because I don't want to ask permission. Because what he -- if he'll say no, I'm going to have it anyway. But also the other hand, I do want to say to the others that it's okay. So I start choosing words, and his admiral says, what? You think that I am

interested -- that somebody can think that I'm interested in being friends with Soviets [01:13:00] while they're keeping their people in prison? You do everything what you have. Don't have any hesitations, and I'll do my part. So then I went out and said look, Reagan is for our demonstration. What is our concern? (applause)

THANE ROSENBAUM: All right, let's take a few questions from our audience here and our audience watching from satellite in others cities around United States and Canada, and then we'll say goodnight. This is for Natan. Do you relate to Gilad Shalit, and how are prisoners of war in today's world treated differently, and what are the diplomatic implications for Israel and the Middle East in the treatment of prisoners?

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well look, first of all, we are very happy that Gilad was released. (applause) [01:14:00] That's [welcome?]. As to the more difficult question, what about exchanging Gilad Shalit for 1,000 terrorists, it's much more complicated. I can only say that when I was in the government, in the precious government and such deal of this type was discussed I voted against, and Ariel Sharon called me and said that as the one who was in prison, you have to vote for this. And I said, as the one who was in prison I understand why I have to vote against. So that's

big debate in Israeli society. Now, as to treatment of our prisons, I can say that Gilad Shalit is not a typical example because he was captured in order to be exchanged. So they treated him well. Our prisoners of war or (inaudible) -- well, even in his case it was violation of all international laws of [01:15:00] keeping prisoners because he wasn't for the nation. Red Cross nobody could see him. But in normal case our prisoners are tortured, mutilated, are raped, all types of violations. And from this point it's always it's a reminder what a different world is, Israel and our neighbors. And the fact that the free world is ignoring this principal difference is a big disgrace.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Alright, this is a question (applause) -- this is a question from Orlando, Florida, which is not a big place for Cuban Jews, but it is Florida. Do you think that the Six-Day War began the resurgence of pride for Jewish Americans and therefore laid the groundwork for support of the struggle for Soviet Jewry? I mean, we know, Gal, this comes up in your book frequently, that the Six-Day War played a role, and maybe we'll get you [01:16:00] and maybe Richard to speak to that.

GAL BECKERMAN: Yeah, it played an extraordinary role. I mean, it was -- we talked earlier about kind of

redemptive moments. This was, you know, here was not that many years from the Holocaust, and here was this extraordinary victory that made Jews feel connected to Israel, many of them for the first time. But, you know, it also was maybe even a bigger impact on Soviet Jews. And in the Soviet Union, remember, there was something a little subversive about the feeling of pride that Soviet Jews felt because who were the allies of Israel's enemies in the Six-Day War? They were the Soviets. So that extraordinary moment that we remember of the Israeli air force destroying the Egyptian air force in a morning, those were Soviet planes. So if you're a Soviet Jew living in the Soviet Union it forces you immediately to confront the paradox of your existence as somebody's who's Jewish and is kind of connected to this Jewish state but is also a Soviet [01:17:00] citizen. So for many people it prompted them to really have a crisis of conscience. I mean, not many, you know, proportionally, you know, the people who kind of would become activists, a lot of them this was a big, big moment for them.

THANE ROSENBAUM: Richard? Did the Six-Day War provide a complete change in attitude of American Jews? Did it ennoble them? Did it enable them? Did it make them feel stronger and less apologetic?

RICHARD PERLE: I think the word pride was appropriately used. And you had in those days the narrative, which has now changed in a very unfortunate way, was little Israel surrounded by much larger powers determined to destroy little Israel. Now it's high-tech Israel still surrounded by countries that want to destroy it. But I think the big impact was in the Soviet Union. And I've heard -- I've discussed this with Natan, so maybe you should say something about that. [01:18:00]

NATAN SHARANSKY: Well, that was the turning point. And I have to say not simply pride. It's much more complicated. We were -- well, I and many in my generation were absolutely assimilated Soviet Jews. We knew nothing about our Jewishness except of anti-Semitism. So to be Jew is like to have a disease with which you have to survive somehow. (laughter) There was nothing good in it. And then there was Six-Day War and big humiliation for Soviet Union. And so a big anti-Israel campaign, which also turns into anti-Semitic campaign and anti-Semitic jokes about Jews suddenly are not about Jews who are cowards and parasites but about Jews who are hooligans who are beating their neighbors. And so you understand suddenly, whether you want or not, but for all these people who hate you and who love you, you're connected to Israel. And it was after

Six-Day War when suddenly became so clear that they look at eyes through the eyes of what's happening in Israel. And then they want to understand what it means. [01:19:00] And then we start the underground to learn and then discover, you know, history with our Jewish people and discover Israel. And that's how you have a chance to fight. So it has a huge impact. Without the Six-Day War, I don't know if it would start.

ELIE WIESEL: It happened. It changed everybody. Jews changed. Assimilated Jews stopped being assimilated. Even those who were anti-something in Judaism, somehow there was such an awakening. I remember it because I wrote about it afterwards, a book called *A Beggar in Jerusalem*. My God, it had metaphysical dimensions. It wasn't simply a military operation. Something metaphysical, especially because of Jerusalem. I remember I went to Israel the moment it began. And I was already -- I knew already, Marion, and it wasn't easy, but she accepted I should leave. [01:20:00] My God, I went to the old city right away. I ran to the wall. It was a week after the wall was liberated. From morning to evening I stood there with my lips simply whispering prayers. And I wrote about it. It was, for me, it was one of the greatest events in my life. God knows I had enough great, not so great events as well

in my life. But this was extraordinary. You had the feeling that from all the corners of exile, from the deepest corners of exile, Jews all of a sudden rose and came there to be there and to be together. So I can tell you all the people in the world, Jews changed.

THANE ROSENBAUM: It's so wonderful that we're ending here with invoking the word and the name and the place, metaphysically and actually of Jerusalem. We all know [01:21:00] the end of the Pesach Seder, the Haggadah says next year in Jerusalem. And at the end of Yom Kippur we say next year in Jerusalem. And to the efforts of these three courageous and heroic men and so many countless others and the gratitude of this young writer, who gave us an opportunity to bring us all together, next year it's possible the option to always say for Russian Jews next year in Jerusalem has been made possible. Thank you.

(applause)

NATAN SHARANSKY: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

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