2014 11 20 Elie Wiesel "To Life!" A Celebration of 180 Jewish Lectures at 92Y 92nd Street Y Elie Wiesel Archive

Elie Wiesel (recording):

Thus, the act of writing is for me often nothing more than the secret of conscious desire to carve words on a tombstone. To the memory of a tomb forever vanished; of childhood, exiled; and of all those whom I loved, and who before I could tell them that I loved them, went away.

M1:

Ladies and gentlemen, Hillary Rodham Clinton. (applause)

Hillary Clinton:

Thank you! Hello! (applause) [00:01:00] (applause) Thank you all so much. (applause) I was in the neighborhood. (laughter) Hope you don't mind that I dropped in unannounced, but I just couldn't miss the chance to join you in celebrating this occasion, and this remarkable man, who has been on this stage 180 times. (applause) And the calculation is that he has spent a half a year on the stage. I am honored to count Elie and Marion as dear friends and mentors, and delighted that this extraordinary venue [00:02:00] has given him the chance to provoke, to teach, to help us all become more of the human

beings that we could and should be. Elie has a remarkable capacity, as you all know, for acting as the conscience of a world that too often seems to have lost or misplaced its own. What you just heard is an excerpt from his very first lecture here in 1967. Ever since, his series on Jewish thought has covered everything from his own experiences, to the teachings of Talmudic mystics and masters. [00:03:00] They have simply been unforgettable. And there's no accident about that, because he is a wonderful teacher and a gifted storyteller.

Elie often tells a parable about being lost in a forest. One of many Elie parables. And for days and nights, a man wanders around, and finds it simply impossible to escape. Then finally he sees a figure in the distance, and rejoicing, he exclaims, "Thank God you're here! Now how do we get out?" And the other man replies, "I have no idea. I'm lost as well. But don't go that way -- I've tried it already." That's important to remember, because Elie often reminds us of the ways we [00:04:00] should not go. We have tried that already. He's been like a sage, warning us from danger, offering wisdom amid confusion, and refusing to let any of us forget.

I've often thought in the times I've been privileged to spend with Elie and Marion that his understanding of the power and

uses of memory is not just looking backward, but recognizing how essential it is to continue moving forward. Giving voice to the voiceless; lifting up and sharing the stories of those who cannot do so on their own. Reminding us, sometimes uncomfortably, that in every corner of our world, there are still people waiting for justice. And teaching us so significantly [00:05:00] that hate is not the opposite of love -- indifference is. At every opportunity, including an unforgettable speech at the White House, when I was privileged to be first lady, he has explained that the one silver lining in human suffering is that it can and -- if we let it -- should motivate us to overcome that indifference. He's made such a difference in my life, and in the life of my husband. He's been an advisor; he's been a critic; he's been a prodder, and a nag (laughter) -- but in ways that were of great credit to him.

In the work that we do today at the Clinton Foundation, we are often reminded [00:06:00] about his call to action and service. But we're also quickly aware that there is much more to be done. More truths to tell; more lives to change. And so, my friend, thank you for being a light in the darkness. Thank you for those 180 lectures. Thank you for being you. We are so grateful to celebrate your life tonight. Thank you all. (applause)

Matthew Bronfman:

Thank you, Secretary Clinton, for joining us for this very special evening, and this very meaningful event. It is a great honor to us here at [00:07:00] the Y that you are here tonight. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Matthew Bronfman, and I have the privilege on behalf of the 92nd Street Y to welcome all of you to tonight's event. First, I would like to thank Cheryl and Michael Minikes, for underwriting tonight's event. We are most grateful for their support. (applause) We are very grateful for your support, and we welcome you and your guests. Tonight, we are celebrating a life. An extraordinary life. And we have a wonderful event planned. Music has always been a part of Elie Wiesel's life. In fact, on this stage, four years ago, he performed a concert, singing the songs of his childhood. And I'm pleased to introduce tonight the Young People's Chorus of New York City, who will be singing "Ba-Shana ha-Ba'ah" -- or in English, "In the Year to Come." [00:08:00] (applause)

[00:08:07 - 00:10:59] (Young People's Chorus of New York City singing in Hebrew)

(applause) [00:11:00]

[00:11:20 - 00:11:36] (pause)

Matthew Bronfman:

(applause) That was really beautiful; thank you. I want to take a moment to tell Elie, on behalf of the 92nd Street Y, how much you mean to all of us. Elie, I hope you know that already. For [00:12:00] nearly half a century, you have delighted, challenged, and engaged our community. A hundred and eighty nights. A hundred and eighty nights you have devoted to us, discussing seminal issues of our community, of our lives, bringing to life Jewish culture and heritage. You have been the heart and the soul and the moral conscience of this institution. Elie, you might be slight in stature, but you are a giant of humanity. (applause) You are a witness to the worst, yet a paradigm of the best that humanity has to offer. You have transformed this space into a sacred space. You have transformed this space into a sacred space by your generous spirit and by your words. Elie, your words have been your sword. They've been your canvas. You have used your words to teach us about [00:13:00] pain, and suffering, and about recovery. About despair, and about hope. About humanity's capacity for evil, but also about the possibility of courage and resistance, and about the capacity of sacrifice for a higher good. Ultimately, you have taught us about renewal, about joy,

and about life. And tonight, we celebrate you. We celebrate life. Elie, tonight is our night to thank you, and to thank Marion. Marion, we can never repay you for all you have done for our community. You have been a blessing to us. To Elie. Elie, you have spoken and written so eloquently about gratitude that I cannot stand here and hope to match it. But I know the feeling of gratitude when I feel it in my heart. We all do. And tonight, all of our hearts are full. We thank you. Our program tonight is truly a special one, and we have some wonderful speakers, but first, I am [00:14:00] pleased to introduce Elie's great friend, and an extraordinary musician, Pinchas Zuckerman. (applause) (music playing) [00:14:46 - 00:24:03] (applause)

Erik Kandel:

Good evening! My colleagues and I -- my name is Eric Kandel -- my colleagues and I (applause) have a rather simple task this evening. [00:25:00] We celebrate Elie Wiesel. The reason that task is simple for me is that Elie Wiesel is the most remarkable person I've ever met. Let me put this claim into perspective for you. From the period May 1944 to April 1945, when Elie was 17 years old, he was first imprisoned in a concentration camp at Auschwitz, where he lost his mother and younger sister, and then at Buchenwald, where he saw his father beaten and sent to a

crematorium. These unspeakable horrors have tormented him the rest of his life. As he writes in his classic book, *Night*: "Never shall I forget these things, even if I'm condemned to live as long as God himself. Never."

These unforgettable experiences at an early age would have destroyed most human beings. They did not destroy Elie Wiesel. He was never bitter; never cynical. He brought to his life [00:26:00] an enormous, positive reservoir of inner strength, and has used that strength to overcome his horrendous experiences in an extraordinary, productive manner. In particular, Elie has used his experience and his inner strength to become the single most powerful teacher of the Holocaust. What, then, has Elie taught us? Of the several lessons Elie has conveyed to us, one is particularly fundamental. Good can triumph over evil.

Guided by this philosophy, Elie's leadership has helped Jewish life and its traditions to overcome evil and to survive, and to do so successfully in a novel, bipartite world. One Jewish life has re-emerged in a new Jewish state of Israel, and the other is Jewish life has continued in the world outside of Israel. Now, Elie himself had a choice. He could have gone anywhere in the world. He's a great friend of Israel, and he's often there.

[00:27:00] I've been told that as recently as 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered Elie the opportunity to be the Kadima candidate for President of Israel. Elie did not accept even this great honor, because from the very beginning, he decided to live in the world at large, in the Jewish community outside Israel. Here, he used his position to provide a moral conscience for the world by emphasizing two further_Elie Wiesel lessons. One, never forget, and two, never again. Given these two themes, why did Elie choose to live outside of Israel, first in France, and then in the United States?

I would guess that Elie must have sensed that the two principles -- never forget and never again -- did not require repeated stating in Israel. In fact, you could argue that one of the many reasons Israel was created as an independent state in 1948 was because much of the world recognized those two [00:28:00] principles. But Elie realized that the world's memory is short-lived, and that after 1948, the existence of a state of Israel only reminded the Israelis of the Holocaust, and not the rest of the world. To be effective as a Jewish spokesman for the Holocaust, Elie knew he was needed in the world at large. It was, after all, to the world outside of Israel that Elie was referring when he wrote, "The world at large knew what was happening in the concentration camps, but it did nothing." It

was in a world at large that Elie could demonstrate by his very being that Jewish life and its traditions have survived. Moreover, they have survived not in one, but in two distinctive forms: Jewish life in Israel, and in Jewish life outside of Israel. Elie now assumed the leadership role of the Jewish life outside of Israel, and demonstrated in America, for example, that one could be at once a free-standing, proud Jew, [00:29:00] and a fine American, and that as an American Jew, one can both support and, when necessary, criticize one's brothers and sisters in Israel.

In addition, Elie used his podium outside of Israel to remind the rest of the world what happened in Auschwitz, Buna, Buchenwald, and Gleiwitz. And, in a typically Jewish manner -- a manner that values all life equally, be it Jewish or not -- Elie pointed out that violent destruction of groups other than the Jews was occuring all over the world, and the motto "never forget, never again" applied equally to all people. Together with his marvelous partner and wife Marion, Elie Wiesel has carried his humanitarian mission forward, and formed the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity, that has spoken out for justice all over the world. For the plight of the Soviet and Ethiopian Jews; for the victims of apartheid in South Africa; for Argentina's disappearing people; [00:30:00] for the Bosnian

victims of genocide; for the Kurds; and for the Nicaraguan Miskito Indians.

Elie Wiesel's enormous inner strength, his extraordinary intellect, and his messianic vision and leadership have not gone unnoticed. In 1958, he published the first of his 57 books. That first book, *Night,* a memoir of his experience in the concentration camp that I referred to earlier, has sold more over 6 million copies, has been translated into 30 languages. This book first defined Elie Wiesel. As a result, when Jimmy Carter established a President's Commission on the Holocaust in 1978, it was only natural for President Carter to appoint Elie Wiesel as chairman of the commission. In 1980, Elie was appointed the founding chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, a council established by a unanimous vote of Congress, and charged with planning for and building the United States Holocaust Museum. This [00:31:00] museum, now visited by 2 million people per year, was designed to inspire citizens and leaders worldwide to confront hatred and prevent genocide. It has fully succeeded in doing so. In 1986, Elie was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for being a messenger to mankind, a human being dedicated to practical work in the cause of peace. In accepting the Nobel Prize, Elie swore never to be silent whenever human beings endured suffering and humiliation. He

ended his Noble Prize acceptance remarks by saying, "Our lives no longer belong to us alone. They belong to those who need us desperately."

To amplify his message, Elie has interacted with and influenced and sensitized world leaders to the moral issues that confront us. And he's not limited himself to the leaders. In his many public lectures, he's used his moral power to draw the attention of the world to [00:32:00] those most in need of help. So in honoring Elie Wiesel, we honor the best in humankind. A king of a human being; a melech Yisra'el -- a king of Israel -- in the world at large, including the 92nd Street YMHA New York City. Note that we here are celebrating not one lecture by Elie at the Y, not 18 lectures, but 180 lectures. Eighteen is a special number for Jews. In Hebrew, it spells out the word chai. The word for life. By having given 180 lectures, Elie has given us life times ten. Ten times chai. So for all of these remarkable accomplishments, and for your very being, we are all in your debt. We therefore raise two imaginary glasses: one to you, Melech Yisra'el in the world at large, and the other to Am Yisra'el Chai, [00:33:00] the life of the Jewish people that you've helped so powerfully. We thank you for the contributions to have succeeded as to triumph over evil, and for your contribution to the persecuted people everywhere. Elie, I want

to end my comments on a personal note and thank you for the wonderful friendship that I feel privileged to have shared with you. Thank you very much. (applause)

Gary Rosenblatt:

Good evening. I'm Gary Rosenblatt, editor and publisher of the Jewish Week, and I'm deeply honored to be part of this tribute to Elie Wiesel. Ever since I entered the field of Jewish journalism more than 40 years ago, Elie has been a mentor, teacher, advocate, and friend, and I [00:34:00] salute the 92nd Street Y for planning and sponsoring this lovely evening. Let me begin by sharing one of my favorite encounters with Elie. This was in 1986 or 1987, soon after he was named the Nobel Peace laureate. I was editor of the Baltimore Jewish Times at the time, and Elie was writing a column for us six times a year. I'm not sure how I persuaded him to take the assignment. It surely wasn't for the big bucks. Maybe it was because he always had a soft spot for Jewish journalism and Jewish journalists, remembering how he started out in the field, freelancing for French, Hebrew, and Yiddish publications. In any event, Elie was gracious as always about writing for us. "How can I say no to you, Gary?" he would say. But the process was not so simple. He would write his column in French and send it to me by fax. I would then send it on to a local translator. [00:35:00] She in

turn would translate the piece and send it back to me. I would send it on to Elie, he would make a few corrections in English and send it back to me. (laughter) And then we would publish it. Maybe it was for the best that he wasn't a daily reporter. (laughter)

Well, Elie was coming to Baltimore for a major event, and he held a press conference downtown. When I arrived a few minutes late, he was at the mic, taking questions from at least a dozen reporters: TV, radio, the Baltimore Sun, and more, all crowded around him. In the middle of one of his responses, he looked up and he saw me as I was approaching from the back of the room, and he stopped and said, "Oh, Gary, I'm sorry I'm late with my column." (laughter) He said, "Is it alright if I get it to you tomorrow?" (laughter) Of course, my fellow members of the press had all turned around to see who the hell Professor Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, was [00:36:00] addressing this poignant entreaty to. I only wish I had a photograph of that moment. I was tempted to say in my best tough newspaper-guy voice, "Well, okay Professor, you can get it to me late this time, but don't ever let it happen again." (laughter) But of course, I answered, "Tomorrow would be great," and it was.

Elie Wiesel is an author, teacher, and humanitarian par excellence -- which, by the way, is the extent of my French. (laughter) But one of the important lessons I learned from him was about integrity -- as a journalist, and as a mensch. He led by example. In his 1995 memoir, All Rivers Run to the Sea, he recalled a major decision of conscience he had to make that would impact on his future. It happened when he was offered work as a translator at a world Jewish conference [00:37:00] -- a World Jewish Congress conference in Geneva. The meeting was charged with emotion leading up to Israel's negotiations with Germany over reparations in 1952. Elie was a low-paid journalist for Yedioth Ahronoth, the Israeli daily at the time. But he was enticed by the pay. Two hundred dollars a day as a translator, versus the 50 dollars a month he was making with Yedioth. So he took the translating job. During a heated discussion at a closed session over whether Israel would be violating its moral values by taking money from Germany, the famous World Jewish Congress leader Nachum Goldman asserted that it was more important for Israel to receive financial compensation than to commemorate the Nazi victims by reciting the Kaddish. "Now I had a big problem," Elie wrote [00:38:00] in his memoir. As an interpreter, I was sworn to secrecy, but as a journalist, did I have the right not to report to the Israeli and Jewish public the outrageous words I had just heard?

Though he stood to lose good pay and have his reporting challenged, perhaps putting his professional future at risk, he felt he had no choice but to resign his temporary translator assignment and publish what had transpired. It was, after all, the truth. His scoop became an international sensation, though Nachum Goldman denied the statement attributed to him, insisting it was fantasy. Somehow the two men remained cordial, and years later, when they were together, Goldman laughed about the incident, and advised his friend to, quote, "Write your novels, tell your Chasidic tales, but don't ever get involved in politics. [00:39:00] It's not for you." (laughter)

Elie chose to do it all, though. He wrote dozens of novels; explored the world of Hasidism and Jewish text, and was often among the first to address the plight of those in need, from the Jews of Russia to victims of genocide in Africa. And he has always spoken up, even to presidents of the United States, for the sacred memory of the 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis, and for the present and future of Israel and the Jewish people. Over the course of his remarkable career, Elie has become the consummate reporter. As a novelist and as a journalist, his beat is the Jewish world -- past, present, and future. He tells the story of our people with a unique blend of honesty and compassion. And the world reads, and listens. Hopefully, it

takes his message to heart. Remember [00:40:00] the past to ensure the future. Recall the dark of night, and bless the dawn. I am honored and humbled to join with everyone here tonight, and with people of good will everywhere, in applauding the gentle spirit and firm conviction of the man behind the legend; the voice and conscience of a generation. L'chaim, Elie and Marion Wiesel. To life. Thank you. (applause)

Joe Lieberman:

Good evening. Thank you. (applause) I'm Joe Lieberman, and I used to work in Washington. (laughter) But now Hadassah and I have followed the migratory pattern of grandparents, and we live in New York, because this is where our [00:41:00] grandchildren are. (laughter) It is a great honor to be here, and to join in this tribute to Elie Wiesel. And a particular acknowledgement and thank you for 180 lectures here at the 92nd Street Y. Just think of the number of words that Elie spoke in 180 lectures. It impresses even a person like me, who for 24 years enjoyed a senator's right to filibuster. (laughter) But let me say, l'havdil, or to make a ha-mavdil, between Elie and the Senate, that I'm sure his words were much better spoken and more substantial than the ones that I heard during your average filibuster. (laughter) Tonight, I want to thank Elie, and I want to pay tribute to him [00:42:00] by talking about words.

The power of words. Because Elie's life has been about words. The power of words to inform and inspire us. Somebody once asked Winston Churchill how he thought history would treat him. And Churchill said, "I am confident history will treat me very well, because I intend to write it." (laughter)

So that was clever and funny, but there's a point there, which is that our understanding of history, of the past -- and therefore, our ability to learn from it -- are determined by who tells the stories, and how they are told. [00:43:00] And this is the place where Elie has made an enormous contribution to history and to humanity. Elie himself once wrote, "Write only if you cannot live without writing. Write only what you can write."

For 10 years after the Holocaust, Elie did not write of it. Could not write of it. And then, it seemed, in his own words, that Elie could not live without writing of it. The words poured out of him, from within the darkness of death and life that he had experienced and survived during the Shoah. His words have become the most widely [00:44:00] read personal history of the Holocaust, bringing people beyond the broad history into the unbelievable suffering that individual people experienced in the Shoah. His words, more than any other, I

believe, have shaped and will continue to shape humanity's understanding of the terrible evil that happened in the Holocaust.

When one is asked to honor Elie, you reach for words, but the truth is that no one's words are better than his. In his classic book Night, for instance, he wrote these words, about eight words. And I quote. "Men to the left, women to the right." [00:45:00] Eight words, spoken quietly, indifferently, without emotion. Eight short, simple words. For a part of a second, Elie writes, "I glimpsed my mother and my sisters moving away to the right. Tzipora held mother's hand. I watched them disappear in the distance. My mother was stroking my sister's fair hair. And I did not know that in that place, at that moment, I was parting from my mother and my sister Tzipora forever."

Later, in the camps, more words came out of Elie that I think speak to all of us at one time or another [00:46:00] in our lives. He wrote, "And in spite of myself, a prayer rose in my heart, to that God in whom I no longer believed. 'My God, Lord of the Universe, give me strength.'"

In 1986, as has been said, the Nobel Committee awarded Elie the Nobel Prize, and in doing so, called him a messenger to mankind. But who sent him out as a messenger? Who was he a messenger to mankind for? Clearly, for the millions who were killed, and could not themselves speak or write the words that Elie Wiesel has written. I think a part of Elie's greatness -- which has [00:47:00] been referred to already, but I want to speak of briefly -- is that he is not just a man who in the terms that I described shaped history and the world's understanding of this dark chapter in history. He has helped to make history, by bringing the history and lessons of the Shoah into action in the present. And in doing so, I think he's pointed the way to a better future. Remember the famous words of Santayana, that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Elie wrote, "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. Silence encourages the tormentor. Never the tormented." He has [00:48:00] truly kept that pledge never to remain silent in the face of suffering. Again, his words, I think, are the most effective words applying the lessons of the Holocaust to the torments of history that have followed it. His "never again" has, of course, been about his beloved Jewish people, but it has never for Elie Wiesel been only about the Jewish people. He has spoken out and fought for and argued with those in power on

behalf of those who are suffering in South Africa, and Bosnia, and Rwanda, and Kosovo and Darfur, and countless other places around the world. And in doing so, he has set a powerful example and inspiration [00:49:00] for the rest of us. For all the elegant, eloquent, inspiring words you have written, Elie, and spoken here at the 92nd Street Y and really throughout the world, we are obliged in turn to say two simple, heartfelt words to you tonight: thank you. And thank you. (applause)

Jeff Greenfield:

My name is Jeff Greenfield, and I went to law school with Joe Lieberman, and I always wondered, whatever happened to him? (laughter) As a hard-bitten journalist, of course, it's my job, even on a night like this, to tell you the unvarnished truth, to probe for the real Elie Wiesel, the Elie Wiesel you don't know. [00:50:00] So here's the first thing you need to know about that Elie Wiesel. He's a very funny man. He has a spectacular sense of humor. The light in his eyes when he hears a well-told story, a good joke, is something to behold. And it's something that when you consider his background -- where he came from, what he has seen, what he has endured -- it's always a shock to people. I've read comments from his students, and people who get to lectures, and they say, "Why, he's really funny! He has a sense of humor!" But if you think about it, what better

triumph is there over all that he has endured and seen and fought than to retain the love of life, and the love of a good story? He once observed that he was invited to speak at a celebration in Berlin to a large outdoor crowd, and he found that he was speaking from the same balcony at which Adolf Hitler had given one of his last speeches, [00:51:00] which, Elie Wiesel said, proved to him that God has a sense of humor. (laughter)

So I've looked to try to explain the real Elie Wiesel, and I suppose at a distinguished gathering like this, I should have consulted great philosophers; perhaps the Talmud; the Mishna no less. I chose a different path. I looked at his horoscope. (laughter) Listen to what it said in a detailed account of Elie's astrological life. "In situations where other people would prefer the security and tranquility of a life devoid of risk, you choose challenges, even though there is some degree of uncertainty and latent conflict. You don't pay much attention to life's limitations. You may be unrealistic. You do not hesitate to fully express your intentions and ambitions. You may show an excessive idealism. Nonetheless, your energy is attractive, and your infectious enthusiasm can overcome many a hurdle. As we all know, faith [00:52:00] can move mountains. It's difficult to stand up to you, because your determination is

very strong and your will inflexible." Not so bad a summary of Elie Wiesel. (laughter) It explains, by the way, as one who has participated in many events with him, why Nobel laureates, journalists, distinguished men and women will travel from one end of the world to the other to participate, for instance, in a conversation among Israelis and Arabs, environmentalists, planners, to see whether two or three days of conversation can produce great results. Do they? Not always. But the intention -- the constant willingness to try -- is to me a hallmark of what Elie Wiesel brings to the world stage.

There's one more point that I think is worth making about when I think of the [00:53:00] real Elie Wiesel. And that is he has proved that the myth of Sisyphus needs revision. Some of you know this myth, that Sisyphus, mythological king of Corinth, was for his many sins condemned to push a boulder up to the top of a hill, only to see it crash down to the bottom over and over again. For some -- for Albert Camus, for instance -- this expresses something about mankind's determination in the face of endless defeat. But Elie Wiesel has re-written the myth of Sisyphus, because sometimes, when he helps push a stone to the top of the hill, it stays there. Sometimes -- Lord knows, not nearly enough, but sometimes -- genocide ends, and a dictator falls, and a repressive system of government is replaced by

something better. And always -- always -- there is this legion all over the world, [00:54:00] not defined by race, by gender, by creed, or anything else, united in that common notion that Camus once described. He said once, "We cannot -- we may not be able to make this a world where children are no longer tortured. But we can make it a world in which fewer children are tortured. And if you don't do this, who will?" Elie Wiesel does; Elie Wiesel did; Elie Wiesel will. And that is what we celebrate tonight. Not a saint, but a man. A very good man. Thank you. (applause)

Benjamin Netanyahu:

(inaudible) honoring Elie Wiesel. He's a great writer. He's a great human being. And he's a great spokesman for human conscience. I first met Elie before I met Elie. [00:55:00] My late brother, Yoni, submitted an application to Harvard University, and he had to list the books that made an impression on him. And right there, very close to the top of the list, was one of the books by Elie, which I read, and I understood the impact of his message. It's a compelling one. Elie witnessed the worst horrors of history in the Holocaust. He not only survived it, but he went on to make sure that the world never forgets this horror. And Elie's message is two-fold. The first is that there's evil in the world, and that we ignore it at our

own peril. And I think he has spoken out time and time again against the resumption of evil, the renewal of evil, the changing face of evil. But the second part of Elie's message is that there is hope. There is hope because the human spirit is capable of overcoming [00:56:00] this evil. Is capable of amassing the forces of good inside it to fight the forces of bad. This dual message is important. I think it's actually vital for the security, survival, and future of the world. It is timeless, and it is one of the things that has made Elie such a compelling voice in the world community and in the history that we are living through. I have one hope as I wish Elie the best wishes for continual writing, creativity, activity. To you, and to your wife Marion, from all your friends and admirers around the world, it is that more people listen to you, Elie, at these times. We need you. Congratulations, Elie.

Michael Oren:

Elie. Elie, mori u-rabbi. [00:57:00] Yedidi. I'm delighted to take part in this evening honoring you. Forty years lecturing at the 92nd Street Y. It was a little bit more than 40 years ago where I heard you for the first time lecturing at my Y in West Orange, New Jersey. I was about 15, 16 years old at the time, and back then, growing up as an American Jew in a suburban community, nobody really talked about the Holocaust. It was

something we whispered about behind closed doors. And there you were suddenly on the stage, talking about Sighet, talking about Buchenwald -- openly. And it had a profound, profound impact on me. And not just on me, but on my entire generation of young American Jews. Suddenly, you gave us the courage, the inspiration, the strength to talk about the Holocaust openly; [00:58:00] to confront it; confront America's role in not preventing it; and in discussing ways that we can assure, truly, never again. That discussion, that night -- I can close my eyes, Elie, I can see it right now. I see you on that stage. I can hear you on that stage, right now, so many years later. And it continues to influence me and everything I do, and I know I speak for many in my generation who have chosen a similar path in life. So on behalf of myself -- on behalf, I think, of all of us -- I want to say to you, todah rabah for everything you've done for us, for Israel, for Jewish people worldwide. And todah rabah from me, your still very devoted friend, a student, and fan.

Natan Sharansky:

First of all, I [00:59:00] want to congratulate 92Y. You're having now Elie Wiesel for the 180th time. Lucky you are. I really envy you. I think it's very good to hear the voice of Elie Wiesel every year. Every day. To every Jew. It's Elie's

powerful voice which reached us behind the Iron Curtain. When we were afraid the Jews of the world will be silent about us, when some people thought that we are the Jews of silence. And Elie Wiesel called the Jews of the world not to be silent; to fight together with us for our release. And Elie Wiesel keeps reminding with his unique experience and with unique wisdom, to everybody, that even in the most awful days of Holocaust, [01:00:00] there is hope, if you only go back to your roots, to your ancestors, to your values, and will bring this back to this day, to the challenges of this day. You can and should be optimistic. And you should feel how important are our values -- for us, for our people, and for all the humanity. Thank you, Elie and Marion, for all that you did and are doing for our people. (applause)

Matthew Bronfman:

I'd like to thank the Elie Wiesel Foundation for helping us organize tonight. I would very much like to thank Marion Wiesel, who has shared her husband for all these years. Forty-seven years [01:01:00] here she shared her husband with us, and of course, with the world. For 47 years, Elie has lectured here. And normally there's a desk, and a chair, and Elie comes out without an introduction. And he comes out without an introduction because he is Elie Wiesel. (laughter) Ladies and

gentlemen, it is my privilege, my honor, and a pure joy to give you Elie Wiesel. (applause) [01:02:00]

Elie Wiesel:

Thank you very much. It's so unexpected. (laughs) (laughter) I had no idea that you were going to have this evening like that. But, you know, the Y is a kind of second home to us. A cultural home. And for so many, many, many, many years -- decades -- we have given the best of our intellect, of our thirst. Thirst for knowledge, for truth, for beauty. And why? So, it's only noble that it should have that feeling. Now, why is it so special? I don't know. Is it a [01:03:00] special evening today? (laughs) Some anniversary? I have no idea why you chose that day, (laughter) but you know, I'm invited, so I say yes. How can I say no? (laughs) (laughter) Especially, of course, when the inviting power is a friend, and we have been friends for so many years, and when he said, "Come and be here," I'm here. So. (laughter) So since I came, Marion came. (laughter) But since we came, of course, how can our son not be with us? (laughs) So it's a family reunion. (laughter) Thank you. Look. There comes a time in one's life that every day has special meaning, and the older one gets in years, at least, in experiences and in memories, we realize that time is running out. [01:04:00] Just like that. It's not the same anymore. Once upon a time, a week

was a long week. (laughter) Once upon a time, a year was infinite. And today already we know: years, weeks, months. Life is short. Is what we do with it is what matters. What we would do -- what do we do with our life? Of course, we share it with those that are close to us, that are our children, and our friends. And what do we try, really? We try to do the impossible. We try to ensure not only that memory should remain, but we try to ensure that certain -- certain events -- should never happen again. That's all. Again, not again. Oh, we know that evil [01:05:00] exists. We know that people can do terrible things. But there must be limits, as certain areas must be considered off-limits. And what was happening then, the problem really began that we did not notice the beginning. We didn't realize that it was only the beginning. When I study history books -- I love history books -- history before the '30s, when Jewish leaders would meet in Geneva, mainly -- sometimes in New York, but mainly in Switzerland. At that time, it was very much in to have conferences in Switzerland. And they were talking and talking of what to do, what to do, Europe [coming?]. Jabotinsky wrote, "Dark clouds are gathering over the skies of Europe." Nobody listened to him. Why, is the question. Why? Why should it happen? Why did it [01:06:00] happen? Could it have been avoided? It could have. There's no doubt in my mind that in the '30s, late '30s even, had there

been an outcry, an international outcry saying, "Look, stop, stop. Don't go further. If you go further, you know where it leads. Don't go further." We never heard such an outcry.

Now, at my age, of course, I was too young to know that. I didn't even read newspapers at that time. In my little town, in Sighet, in Romania, Hungary, the Carpathian Mountains, I didn't read -- I didn't read papers. I had enough books to read. Mainly studied Talmudic books, Bible and so forth. But now I know what I missed. But I also know now that not knowing is not an answer. It's what to do with the knowledge, is our choice, naturally -- our responsibility. [01:07:00] What do we do with that knowledge? And I am convinced deep down in my own self, I'm convinced: had we known how to deal with the memory of what happened, we would have saved so many hundreds and thousands of lives afterwards, in all kinds of places. Just to show the limit. Off-limit -- not further. Not one step further. Ah, you know, I was everywhere. Cambodia, Yugoslavia. Wherever mass murder occurred, I tried to be there as a witness. And each time, I was wondering, didn't they see where it leads to? Of course they did, but they didn't realize that it will happen again. We all thought, well, since it happened, we remember it, and therefore it won't happen again. Nonsense. No, it happened, it can happen elsewhere. [01:08:00] In different

places, under different names. Still, hatred hasn't disappeared. Antisemitism is still there in many places. And can we say that the world is safer today than then? Is the world safer? To whom? For what? As a teacher, and I am a teacher -- and a student; I remain a student, and a writer -- I can strive of course to understand what is it in history, what force, what dark force in history is there that moves humanity almost unavoidably, irrevocably, to its own destruction? And we know it's coming unless we do something about it, and yet we don't. And when we try, often it is too late. Does it mean that we could stop racism? We try. Does it mean that we could change human nature? [01:09:00] Of course we cannot, but we can try. We must.

Look, as the Jew that I am, never lived in Israel, but Israel lives in me. And since my very first visit to Israel, 1949, of course I go back since we got married, we go back together, always, at least once or twice a year to Israel. How can one not be in Israel? And each time we go to Jerusalem. And we both are in the car, we go, Marion and I, we take a car, we go to, of course, to Jerusalem. The Aliyah to Jerusalem, the mounting way to Jerusalem. All of a sudden, we stop talking. We have made that trip hundreds of times! But each time, the moment we start -- at a certain moment, we go left -- ah! And

Jerusalem is there, in the horizon. And I say to myself, what my father and his father and his grandfather, and his and his grand-grand-father, [01:10:00] have not lived to see, we are seeing. A free, independent Israel. Jerusalem, Jewish. Full, full of fervor. Of desire. Of dreams. Jerusalem. There is much more in common that we have today when we go to Jerusalem. Today, the Old City especially, in common with those who were there 2,000 years ago. Let us say we go today to Manhattan, to Brooklyn.

What do we learn from that? First of all, to learn that we must learn. What else can we do but learn and learn more? *tzay ul'mad* , go and learn. And this is, of course, what the teacher I am, the student [01:11:00] that I remain, and the writer that I am, the witness that I try to be -- of course, there are so many things that one has to do. And very often, I feel I haven't even begun. It's a tremendous feeling, both good and bad. I've spent my life on that. My life. I've written, I don't know, some hundred books, published 60, 40 manuscripts. I've written so much. And yet, often had the feeling I haven't even begun. And I say to myself, "Who knows? Maybe, im'yiratz ha-Shem -- if God willing -- one day I will begin." (laughs) (applause)

Matthew Bronfman:

Thank you, my friend. I love you. (applause)

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