

2006 04 06 Elie Wiesel Come Celebrate!

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Elie Wiesel:

(applause) The topic before us is "come and celebrate." So, let us celebrate. What should we celebrate? Should we celebrate the fact that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, freedom and solidarity still exist here and there? In many places, in our own country surely. In Israel, certainly. Should we celebrate what we always try to celebrate until now for the last 40 years? The value, the attraction, the melodious inspiration of learning? And that learning has an appeal, and you here are the living proof [00:01:00] that it has an appeal?

Should we celebrate that our people has never lost its thirst for knowledge and peace? Should we celebrate Israel? We always do, we always must. That Israel is strong and vibrant. That in spite of all the challenges, the threats, the dangers, the tragedies, Israel is still singing its love for the future, its love for the past, and what we all cherish: memory.

Should we celebrate that Jews in the former Soviet Union, together with other people there, are no longer oppressed? And

they are not. Here, in the beginning of our encounters [00:02:00] we spoke about them a lot. I quoted a lot of the stories written about them and for them.

Should we celebrate simply occasions that need celebration? By law, by Jewish law. Purim behind us, Passover before us. And these are great holidays. Purim after all, is what? One day, overnight, the entire Jewish community in the 127 provinces of King Ahasuerus were in danger. For a while, there was absolutely no trace of anti-Semitism, of hatred to Jews. And just one day, because Haman saw Mordechai, who was a proud Jew who refused to kneel, to bow, to humiliate himself before Haman, Haman decided to kill all Jews. Should be celebrated? Why is it that in that story [00:03:00] God's name is missing?

As for Passover, after all, the beginning of our history, Exodus, the glorious chapter that describes the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, the giving of the law, Moses, the greatest of all, his name is mentioned only once in passing between two commas. After all, it's about him. Now what is it? Why is God's name missing from the Megillah, and it's all pervasive in Haggadah?

Maybe we should simply speak about the need for celebration as a law. It is one of the 613 commandments. *V'samachta b'chagecha*, "You must rejoice during the holidays." It's a law, you must! Even if you don't want to, [00:04:00] should. (laughter) And the Gaon of Vilna, whom we Hasidim have tremendous problems with, but he was a very great genius. And he said, he wrote once that the most difficult mitzvah, the most difficult commandment to fulfill is this commandment. "You must rejoice during the holidays."

I never understood it. What's so difficult? You go to a Hasidic *farbrengen*, so to speak. You drink a little bit, and you rejoice, and you sing. What's the problem? Later on, I remembered, during those years, those dark years where it was so difficult, it was impossible to rejoice. And yet because of the need and the law, some people managed even there to rejoice.

Think of Shabbat, simply Shabbat. What is Shabbat? It's a temple [00:05:00] erected in time, a sanctuary in time, not in space. And part of the Shabbat is you must rejoice during the Shabbat, you must sing the Shabbat. The sacredness of the Shabbat is not only in its words, or in peace symbolized by Shabbat, but also simply in the extraordinary melody that

Shabbat brings and represents. What does Shabbat do? It is ushered in by angels of peace, peace between God and his creation, between word and silence, between words and song.

Maybe today, these days it's difficult to rejoice because the world is in a mess. To say the least. The world, isn't it a mess? We feel it here, we feel it everywhere. Something went wrong. All over, [00:06:00] not only in America, it's all over the world. Something went wrong. And we don't know why and we don't know what. Maybe we forgot, we forgot really the most important commandment. There are two commandments in scripture. We spoke about it last week. One is: "V'ahavta l'reakha." "You should love your fellow human being, your neighbor, or your friend as you love yourself." And the other one is: "Lo ta'amod al dam re'ekha." "Thou shall not stand idly by before God."

I know on April 30th there will be a march in Washington, to Washington and in Washington for Darfur. And I believe as a Jew, I believe we must be involved in that. We must because they are our fellow human beings. And not to do so would be a violation of the commandment, of "Thou shall not stand idly by."

As for the first *V'ahavta*, we spoke about last week about the importance of human relations. I am defined not by myself, but by the other, [00:07:00] in my attitude towards the other. And the question I asked, and I ask again and again, everybody asks, is what do you mean? This commandment is a strange commandment, "*V'ahavta l'reakha kamokha.*" "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." "*Ani Adoshem,*" "I am the Lord."

What do you mean? And what if I don't love myself? Should I hate you? (laughter) And my interpretation here is really a comma. Usually we say, "*V'ahavta l'reakha kamokha.*" "You shall love your fellow human being as you love yourself, I am the Lord." And I would displace the comma. And I would say: "*V'ahavta l'reakha,*" "You should love your fellow human being, or your neighbor, or your friend," "*kamokha ani hashem.*" "Like you, I am the Lord." Meaning, I will behave towards you the way you behave towards the other.

And so we must, [00:08:00] and we realize that not only we Jews know what danger means, what tragedy means. There are other people too who know. And it's up to us to share with them our lessons, our experiences, and surely our concept of human solidarity.

I'll tell you a story, a true story. When I came to America, a few weeks after I came, I wrote about it at least in one of my books, an accident. Every evening, I would go to the *New York Times*. I worked for, I was a correspondent for an Israeli paper. I was not an Israeli, but I was a foreign correspondent. So I worked for *Yedioth Ahronoth*. Then it was the poorest paper in Israel, today it's the richest. It became rich when I left it. (laughter) And so every evening, like other correspondents, I would go to the *New York Times* at 9:35 in the evening, would buy the *Times*, go to the cable office [00:09:00] and send my daily cable, stealing from the *Times*, but they were rich, I can steal from the *Times*.

And one day as I came there, a taxi ran over me in Times Square. And it was -- I was in a coma for days, and days, and days. In one of my speeches somewhere, I said that I had 48 fractures, it was the tape, the guy who taped it didn't understand. I said it had been four-to-eight fractures, but I had enough fractures anyway. I was in a cast until here. And the only people who really came to see me were my colleagues from the *New York Times*. One of them was a Hungarian Jew from Israel. He was the publisher of a paper called *Iton Meyuchad*. It doesn't exist

anymore. And he had a tremendous sense of humor. And he would come to entertain me, to make me laugh. The problem was whenever I laughed, it hurt. (laughter)

And I would plead with him: "Come on, tell me some sad stories."
[00:10:00] He made me laugh, and he was so happy. And I said, "Come on," I said, "what are you so happy about? Come on, look at me. I almost died, I am in a cast, everything is broken. I don't know what I'm doing. I'll stay here for weeks, and weeks, and weeks, and you are laughing!" And each time he said, "It could be worse." He said, "But it could be worse." And he said, "Well, you had glasses, right? You see? They didn't -- your eyes are all right." I said, "Okay, but look, I'm (inaudible)." "It could be worse." "But my legs hurt. "Could be worse." "Well, here." "Could be worse."

For I asked him, "What could be worse?" And then he told me the story. He said that two Jewish friends -- because he was Jewish, he spoke to his Jewish friends -- were talking. One said to the other, "Look, I am going through a difficult period in my life, a horrible period in my life. Can you imagine? I bought stocks, I lost all of them." "Could be worse." He said, "Not only that, I had a store. There were thieves, night, came,

and the money, everything was taken. "Could be worse." "Can you imagine? [00:11:00] My daughter is sick." "Could be worse." "My wife is very sick." "It could be worse." First person said, "What could be worse?" He said, "It could have happened to me." (laughter)

Well, in the context of a big picture; we believe that whatever happened to the Jewish people, happened only to Jewish people. We got the law, we were expelled. This, only to us. It could have happened to others, it didn't. But to us. But now we realize it could happen -- not to that degree -- it could happen to others. Take all these massacres that occurred after the war, after the war. Bosnia, Rwanda, and now Darfur. It could.

I'm not saying I don't compare. I never believe [00:12:00] and don't believe now that whatever happened to us one, two, or three generations ago, really happened to others. It could happen to others. No, it's not the same thing. I don't compare, I don't believe in analogies. But one thing is clear; then the world was indifferent to our pain, and now it was indifferent to other people's pain. Whether in Bosnia or in Rwanda.

And that is why, last -- in the year 2000, Marion and I were in the White House. I was invited to give the Millennium lecture by the President. And I called my lecture, "The Perils of Indifference." And I spoke about indifference. I've spoken about indifference from here so often. I believe this enables evil to gain power.

And after the lecture, there were questions, and a woman got up, she said, [00:13:00] "Professor, I am from Rwanda." I turned to the President who was at my side, and said, "Mr. President, you answer. You know very well that we could have saved from 600,000 to 800,000 men, women and children, why didn't we?" President Clinton, sincere, he said, "You are right. We could have and we didn't. And therefore I went personally to Rwanda to apologize in my name, and in the name of our country. But I promise you, it won't happen again."

Next day, we got a telephone call from Washington, a bishop from Sudan. And the whole group had to come and see me urgently, matter of life and death. I never knew then that there was a problem, or a tragedy, or something in Sudan. They came to speak to me. And they said, "We came to you because you are now

the custodian of a presidential pledge. Help us." That's how I became involved in Darfur, in Sudan.

So as you see, that I believe -- I hope you too -- that we cannot not be involved in other people's lives, in other people's dramas, in other people's events. The world is our world. And if we don't save it every day for every human being, then something is wrong with us.

And so therefore, we shall continue tonight. And I will continue tonight, and go back to the last 40 years. Because after all, tonight I believe that I was given the title by the Y, "Come and celebrate!" I thought naively they meant come and celebrate the 40 years of your presence at the Y. (laughter) So we shall talk about it. And since I [00:15:00] do what I have done for 40 years, I will simply say also, there are some people, latecomers who are waiting. Let them not wait any longer.

Let us celebrate this anniversary. The fortieth, yes, 40 years ago some of us began meeting here to study together and explore ancient texts, and contemporary interpretations and implications. Our intent was, and remains, to find timeless

beauty and meaning in words that are like treasures. Treasures that generations of scholars and students, fathers and children, approach with curiosity and fervor.

We studied biblical figures, and we learned of their divine greatness as well as their shortcomings. We admired the knowledge of Talmudic sages, and discovered their analytical powers. We entered the courts of Hasidic masters and fell in love [00:16:00] with their tales. The first sessions always began with Bible. And the first lecture, actually was the disquieting book of Job. Why did he suffer?

It is a question that cannot but trouble those who believe in heavenly justice. You remember the story: Once upon a time, in the land of Uz there was a man named Job, and he was a good man. *V'sar meira*. He was fearing evil and did nothing but good. And the story begins, really, like a Kafka story, meaning with simple words, everyday words that all of a sudden turn into an opening to a tragedy.

And it said that one day, God held court with his angels, you have the feeling it's really the [00:17:00] king and his court. And all of a sudden Satan appeared by chance. And it's almost

like saying, "Hi." And said, "Yes, hi, God." "Where do you come from?" "Oh, I took a walk." "Where?" "Oh, down below." (laughter) "Really?" "Really." "Tell me," said God, "by the way, did you happen to meet my good friend Job?" And Satan said, "As a matter of fact, I met him." "Don't you agree," said God, "that that he is a good man, a kind man, a God-fearing man? All the good things?" "Of course, it's true," said Satan. "But," but, there is a but -- "why shouldn't he? He's a happy person. You gave him wealth, happiness, family, seven sons, and three daughters. Why shouldn't he be good?"

"You know what," said Satan, an idiot he is not. He said, "Let me handle him a little bit. And then we will see." So a matter of wager -- it's a wager between God and Satan. [00:18:00] Why God should take Satan as a partner for a wager like in a chess game is beyond me, but he took him. And he said, "Okay, you want to take care of him? You handle him. Let's see. I tell you, he'll remain good." And one thing God said, "But don't kill him." Which means torture him, really. "You may torture him anyway you want, but don't kill him." "It's all right."

And you also have a story -- all of a sudden, a family picture, Job and this, or there, and his children were there, many, many

guests probably. And all of a sudden, all of a sudden when he and his wife were alone, then one day the door opened. A messenger came, he said: "I was in the fields, storm came. Everything was -- all the cattle were killed, and I alone escaped to tell the tale."

Hardly had he finished, when a second one came: "I was with your eldest in his home and [00:19:00] the roof fell, everybody was killed. I alone escaped to tell the tale." Third: "All your children were killed, and I alone escaped to tell the tale." At which point Job and his wife began mourning. And by the way, the laws of mourning that we have today, many of them have been taken from Job.

My question was, why did Job believe them? Why didn't he say, "Are you sure you mean me? Maybe you mean somebody next to -- who lives number three, not number one?" It's impossible that all these tragedies should occur to one family, same day, it's impossible. It's against the law of chances. Why didn't -- why did he believe the messengers? And my answer is, it's very simple. Everything in the Talmud wants us to believe that Job was not Jewish. [00:20:00] That he was a prince to the Gentiles, even a Messiah to the Gentiles, but not Jewish. And

there was no reason in the Talmud to say that. Except what I believe is, here is the proof. Had he been Jewish, he would say: "Are you sure?" (laughter)

So you have Job there, you have Job recently. And then Job for seven days and seven nights, he had three friends came to see him. And they were silent, for seven days and seven nights they were silent. My God, what a story, what a story. And of course the story is, will he or won't he break?

And there is a marvelous *pasuk*, a marvelous verse. Later on, when Job says: "*Hen yikt'leini lo ayacheil*" [00:21:00] "Even if he kills me," meaning "even if God kills me," *lo ayacheil* "I shall still pray to Him and believe in Him." Now "*lo*" with a *vav* means "Him," "*lo*" with an *aleph* means "no." And we have both versions. It's quite possible that Job said, "Let him kill me. But I will not pray to him." It's possible.

But then, you know, the whole story unfolds; what a marvelous series of dialogues with his friends. And until at the end, at the end, and God says to him out of the whirlwind, you know, really, "Who are you to question me? Who are you? Where were

you when I created heaven and earth?" You read the book of Job, you read it breathless.

I love Job, I was one -- years and years ago, I [00:22:00] wrote about it. I was interviewed on French television once, and then went back. So for two years I was teaching Job on French television prime time. Maybe that's why they became anti-Semitic, it was different. (laughter)

And so, one thing -- in the end, you remember, it was a happy end. And afterwards, Job again had children; seven sons, three daughters. And everything is good. Not to me. At no moment is Job told the truth. After all, somebody would have come and said, "Job, don't worry, you did not -- you did nothing wrong. It's only a game."

And you know, we speak of truth of course so much. And again you know, the Gaon of Vilna, he said something which has [00:23:00] been haunting me for years, and years, and years: Tachlit hu ge'ulah "The goal of redemption is," *ge'ulat ha-emet* "the redemption of truth." "It is truth," *emet v'emunah* "it's truth and faith." *AdoShem Elokeikhem emet.* "God is truth." And

we are looking for truth, human truth as conceived by the Creator of all man.

But you know, when you speak of truth of course, there is an extraordinary story written by a non-Jew, by a Russian writer, Andreyev. I love this story, because it's so tragic. But, once upon a time in a village in Russia, a young child turns to his mother and said: "Mother, do you know I want to do when I grow up?" "No, what do you want to do?" "I want to devote my life and find truth." "Good," said the mother.

And she was in the kitchen, "Mother," said the boy. [00:24:00] "What is truth?" "I don't know." "But Mother," said the boy. "Suppose I find truth, how shall I know that I found truth? What is she like? What is it like?" The mother said, "Truth is a very beautiful woman, the most beautiful woman in the world. She has dark hair, and she has dark, somber eyes that reflect the beauty of midnight. And red lips like cherries, and a voice that when she speaks it's like the sound of a violin."

And the boy didn't say anything, just kept the image to himself. A year came, another year, another year, another year. And then he grew up, he was already adolescent, 18 years old. He said to

his mother, "Mother, now I have to go and find truth." "Don't go." "I promised, I told you." She cried, he kissed her. He said goodbye to his friends, and he began wandering. He went from city to city, from land to land, continent to continent. [00:25:00] Didn't find truth. He'd found many beautiful women, but not truth. And one day, he arrived in the desert, he was already old and he was tired. So he lay down in the sand, closing his eyes.

Suddenly he felt a presence, opened his eyes. It was a creature. He shivered, he had never seen a creature like that. It was a terrible, terrible old woman without hair, with straw instead of hair. Dry lips, extinguished eyes. "Who are you?" he said, "who are you?" She said, "My dear child, weren't you looking for me?" "It's impossible!" Said he, "My mother told me that truth was the most beautiful woman in the world! With dark, so beautiful hair, eyes, lips." "Well, what can I do?" said she, "That's who I am." But then he said, "Madam, [00:26:00] I have to go back to my village. My mother is dead, some of my friends are still alive, and they know of my search. I must go and see them. What should I tell them?" And she said, "Do me and you a favor, tell them a lie." What, what a

horrible story. But of course we don't believe that, we believe truth is truth. And therefore, we gave God's name to truth.

About Talmudic beauty, of course we spoke last week. And about the Hasidic stories, my God, the Hasidic stories. All the stories that I wrote about in my books, I told them here first. Just as all the stories I told about the Bible or the Talmud, I told them here first.

The great Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, [00:27:00] some of you know this story, and you remember. "One day the king summoned his counselor and told him of his anguish. 'I have read in the stars that all those who will eat of the next harvest will be stuck with madness. What shall we do, my friend?' 'Nothing could be more simple, sire,' replied the counselor. 'We shall not touch it. Last year's harvest is not yet exhausted. You have but to requisition it, it will be ample for you and me.'"

"'And the others?' scolded the king. 'All the subjects of my kingdom, the faithful servants of the crown, the men, the women, the madmen, the beggars? Are you forgetting them? Are you forgetting the children? The children too?' 'I am forgetting nobody, sire. But as your advisor, I must be realistic and take

all possibilities into account. We don't have enough reserves, not enough to protect and satisfy everyone. There will be just enough for you and me.'"

[00:28:00] "Thereupon, the king's brow darkened and he said, 'Your solution does not please me, is there no other? Never mind. But I refuse to separate myself from my people. And I don't care to remain lucid in the midst of a people gone mad. Therefore, we shall all enter madness together, you and I like others, with the others. When the world is gripped by delirium, it is senseless to watch from the outside. The mad will think that we are mad too. And yet, I should like to safeguard some reflection of our present glory, and of our anguish too. I should like to keep alive the memory of this determination, this decision. I should like that when the time comes, you and I shall remain aware of our predicament.' 'Whatever for, sire?' 'It will help us, you will see. And thus, we shall be able to help our friends. Who knows? Perhaps thanks to us [00:29:00] men will find the strength to resist later, even if it is too late.' And putting his arm around his friend's shoulders, the king went on, 'You and I shall therefore mark each other's forehead with a seal of madness. And every time we shall look at one another, we shall know, you and I, that we are mad.'"

I found two versions of the end of the story. The other version is just different which -- I like both, but the other one is different. The other one is: "The king says to his friend, 'I shall eat from the cursed harvest, but not you. You alone will have access to the granary. And when everybody, me included, will be mad, you alone with your key, you will open the granary. And you will eat from the pure, uncontaminated [00:30:00] harvest, and you will remain lucid. And then when that time will come, you will go from house to house, from street to street, from city to city throughout my kingdom. And you will shout: Men and women, don't forget! Men and women, don't forget! You are mad! Don't forget!'"

And I felt that this may be the function and the mission of teachers, writers, parents. Surely as a group, the mission of our people, that we should be the ones who will shout, "Don't forget! Don't forget! Madness is here, it's coming." Because madness is not only an individual phenomenon or curse. We have seen [00:31:00] in the past, in the distant past, it can enter history. History itself may become mad, demented. The Crusades were madness; the pope has -- John Paul II recognized it. It was madness, to leave their homes in the thousands and go on

foot to Jerusalem. And on the way, wherever they could, to kill, and kill, and kill Jews. Trying to convert them, but kill them. It was madness. The worst of them were the so called Shepherds, children who joined the Crusaders. And they were even more cruel than the oldest, so much so that the pope had to stop it. It's madness.

The Inquisition was madness. And of course, maybe, [00:32:00] that what happened last century was madness, too. All of a sudden, all of a sudden, a kingdom, a dark kingdom was erected. A creation parallel to creation. And therefore, Rabbi Nachman's tale is so apt.

Ay, of course, we'll come back to Hasidic tales, but there's also one book I was not going to read from, I have never read from it. It is the first one, *Night*, which has a strange destiny. A strange destiny. In the beginning, nobody wanted it. And if anyone had told me 45 years ago that it will be what it is now, I wouldn't have believed it. And you know, really. And I hope some of you have seen it. It's Marion's translation, it's extraordinarily beautiful, and [00:33:00] sensitive, and good. And it's rewarding, it is rewarding. But strangely enough, in my mind, I have my own little library.

And in that library, I have not only other books, my own too. And I can see that the books are quarreling among themselves. They say, "Come on, hey, hey, hey! Why is *Night* so privileged? What about your novels? Why aren't they? Why are they forgotten and neglected? And why such favoritism?" They would say. Oh, go on, go and argue with books. (laughter)

Nevertheless, nevertheless, I will read to you a passage, which -- from a novel I wrote. It's about Hasidism, because this is the best of it, it's from *The Gates of the Forest*. That's about celebration. [00:34:00] "The celebration was at its height. It seemed as if it would never come to an end. The Hasidim were dancing vertically, as if not moving from their place, but forcing the rhythm down into the earth. What did it matter if the walls gave way except to show that no enclosure was large enough to contain their fervor? They sang; and the song gave them life and caused sap to well up in them and bind them together."

"Ten times, fifty times they repeated the same phrase, taken from the Psalms or some other portion of Scripture, and every time the fire would be renewed again with primordial passion:

yes, once God and man were one, then their unity was broken; ever since they have sought each other, pursued each other, and before each other have proclaimed themselves invincible. As long as the song and dance go on, they are invincible. The Hasidim sang. The song burst their chests and lit a thousand flames in their eyes."

"'If I [00:35:00] could sing,' said the famous Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, the friend and disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. 'If I could sing,' he said, 'I'd force God to leave his throne and to come down among us to be at our side.' The hall was stifling as if God filled it; he was the interval that separated the words and then brought them together into prayer or melody; he was the Hasid listening with closed eyes or his companion who was clapping his hands as if to applaud a victory. He was there, let that suffice; he is there, and that surely sufficed. Let the Angel of Death arrive if he chose and he would be disposed of forever. But he did not dare to come; he hid himself, awaiting his hour, for the Angel of Death is patient and knows that his hour will come."

"At the far end of the room, facing the door, the Rebbe surrounded by his court, presided over the table of [00:36:00]

honor. A royal person of the line of David the Conqueror, he joined past glory with future promise. All those present feared and admired him and pledged him fidelity without limit, limning the forces which converged in his person and which he alone could put to use. With a single look he could destroy buildings and raise them up again. With a word he could deny the power of fate and substitute his own for it."

"The righteous decree, we know that. And God obeys. But the rebbe sat silent. His disciples sang louder and louder, as if to provoke him to action, but he remained unprovoked. The hand of the Lord must not be forced; let Him act when He will, choosing the hour and the instrument. We offer him only his freedom."

And I describe, of course, in that, [00:37:00] a conversation I had with Rabbi of Lubavitch. When I asked him, "What about *ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu*?" God almighty and all that. And I said, "How can one believe after what happened?" He said, "How can one not believe after?" And if his question was an answer. I wouldn't accept it. But his question was also a question, so I did believe it.

In another novel, I describe a young man in prison: "In prison. He went back to his hometown, was arrested with the Communist regime, was tortured. And he was placed in a cell together with a madman. And it was very clear that if he stays there long enough, he will be contaminated by the young madman's madness. And so in order for him to save [00:38:00] his own sanity, he had only one way: to try to cure the young madman, and bring back his sanity to him."

"And so he spoke to him, and spoke to him, and spoke to him, and spoke, and spoke, and spoke. And one day he said to him, 'Right at this instant, my young friend, there are couples all over the world who think they are embracing, and some who really are; there are hearts hammering because they want to be beside someone who had just departed; and in the wild countryside of some country just awakening or just falling asleep, there is a woman, some woman, being stoned for a reason, some reason, and nothing can save her from human beings; and there is a man, some man, being deserted, whatever his desires, and you can expect nothing more from human beings. And yet I tell you: affection exists, love exists; it is created and transmitted like a secret formula from heart to heart and from mouth to ear. I know: [00:39:00] the paths of the soul, overgrown, often know

only the night, a very vast, very barren night, without landscapes. And yet, and yet I tell you: we'll get out, we will get out. The most glorious works of man are born of that night.'"

"I know, my young friend: it isn't easy to live always under a question mark. But who says that the essential question has an answer? The essence of man is to be a question, and the essence of the question is to be without answer. But to say, 'What is God? What is the world? What is my friend?' is to say that I have someone to talk to, someone to ask a direction of.'

"The depth, the meaning, the very salt of man is his constant desire to ask the question ever deeper within himself, to feel ever more intimately the existence of an [00:40:00] unknowable answer. Man has the right to risk life, his own life; he doesn't need to submerge himself in destiny in order to maintain his deep significance. He must risk, he can risk, a confrontation with destiny, he must try to seize what he demands, to ask the great questions and ask them again, to look up at another, a friend, and to look up again: if two questions stand face to face, that's at least something.'"

"It's a victory. The question, the demand, the outcry, the sickness in the soul or in the eyes--they never die. What I say to you, pass on to you, I tell you. I will give you the art and the necessity of clinging to humanity, never deserting humanity. [00:41:00] The man who tries to be an angel only succeeds in making faces. It's in humanity itself that we find both our question and the strength to keep it within limits--or, on the contrary, to make it universal.'"

"And man is human only when he is among man. It's harder to remain human than to try to leap beyond humanity. Accept that difficulty. Tell yourself that even God admits His weakness before the image He has created. To be indifferent--for whatever reason--is to deny not only the validity of existence, but also its beauty. Betray, and you are human; torture your neighbor, you are still human. Evil is human, weakness is human; Indifference is not.'"

And there is one more. The first time I [00:42:00] came back from the Soviet Union, 1965, it's here that actually I read the first report about Simchat Torah, and I will never forget it. "When the time comes, and I will have to appear before the

celestial tribunal, and they will ask, 'What did you do with your life?' I will say, 'I was there in Moscow. I saw them dancing at Simchat Torah.'" And I told the tale of the dancing. And I'm convinced that if we managed afterwards to open the gates of the Soviet Union, bring liberty to hundreds of millions of people, they will never forget that the first to brave the dictatorial regime of Stalin, and Khrushchev, and Brezhnev were those young boys and girls who came to shul, Arkhipova Street [00:43:00] on Simchat Torah. To sing their allegiance to their people, our people, to their destiny.

And I wrote, I said about the night of dancing: "Deliberately or not, they had been lying to us. With good intentions or bad, they had misinformed us. They wanted us to despair of Jewish youth in Russia. Had attempted to persuade us of its increasing alienation from Jewish life. For years they had spread such lies, supporting them with arguments whose logic was hard to refute. After all, we were talking about the third generation after the Communist Revolution. 'Even if they wish to be Jewish,' we were told, 'where would they begin? Even if they wanted to study Torah, who was there to help them? It is only natural that they had forgotten their past. Tomorrow, they will have nothing to forget.'" "

"And we listened, were saddened but concerned. Yes, there was something to that, what [00:44:00] can one do? You cannot demand the impossible, but they surprised us. Soviet Jewish youth had remained Jewish to a degree beyond anything you could possibly have expected. I do not know where they came from. They didn't tell me, although I asked. Perhaps there is no one answer, but tens of thousands that are all the same. No matter--they came."

"Who sent them? Who persuaded them to come running to spend the Jewish holiday in the Jewish atmosphere, in accordance with traditional Jewish custom? Who told them when and where and why? I was unable to discover. Perhaps they knew but preferred not to say it in public. Fine. Let them preserve their secret. All that matters is that they have one and that they came."

"And they came in droves. From near and far, from downtown and the suburbs, from the university and from the factories, [00:45:00] from school dormitories, and from the Komsomol club. They came in groups; they came alone. But once here, they became a single body, voicing a song of praise to the Jewish

people and its will to live. Tomorrow they would descend and scatter, disappear into the innermost parts of Moscow, not to be heard from for another year. But they would return."

"They sang and danced, talked among themselves or with strangers. They were borne along on a crest that seemed incapable of breaking. Their faces reflected a special radiance, their eyes, the age-old flame that burned in the house of their ancestors-- to which they seem finally to have returned. And I was swept along in the current, passing from one group to another, from one circle to the next, sharing their happiness and absorbing the sound of their voices." [00:46:00]

If anyone had told me then that a million Soviet Jews would now live in Israel, I would never have believed it, never. But a million Russian Jews are now in Israel. And some, and many are here in New York. And that is something to me, which, to this day carries me, that memory.

And one more for the evening. And then of course, you know, we have to remember that celebration means music, means singing, words should become song. But, another story which I describe, in *A Beggar in Jerusalem*. Now we speak about Jerusalem, and

discussions, and what to do with Jerusalem? I arrived there during the War of -- [00:47:00] the Six Day War. I'll never forget it. The entire country was running to the Wall, and I was with them. The entire country. You had the feeling then that the war stopped, it didn't but the feeling was there.

And when Motta Gur, who was the commander of the paratroopers, on the police radio said: *Ha-har ha-bayit Be-yadeinu* "The mount is in our hands." Everybody was shivering. You had the feeling that history itself was seized by its own dream. And as I stood at the Wall, I wrote this novel there, really. Every day, I would come to the Wall, and I wrote it with my lips. I went back to the hotel in the evening and I wrote.

And then I wrote one page, which I wrote like this, I said: "And then," standing before the Wall, "I heard a voice [00:48:00] inside me saying, 'I am the eye that looks at the eye that is looking. I shall look so hard that I shall be blinded.' So what? Then I shall sing, I shall sing with such force that I shall go mad. So what? I shall dream."

"I shall dream that I am David, son of Sarah. I tell my mother what I have done with her tears and her prayers. I tell her

what I have done with my years and my silences of my life. Why so late? I had no strength. I could not accept your absence, Mother. If I have never written you, it is because I have never left you. You were the one who went away, and ever since, I see you going away. I see nothing else. For years now, you have been leaving me, vanishing into the distance, swallowed by the black and silent [00:49:00] tide,

"`but the sky that drowned the fire cannot drown you. You are the fire, you are the sky. And this hand which is writing, it is stretched toward you. And this vision which haunts me, it is my offering to you. And the silence, it is on your lips. I find it and give it back. Wandering beggar or prisoner, it is always your voice I seek to set free inside me. And each time I address myself to strangers, I am speaking to you."

"A human throng presses towards the Wall, nestles against it. And I stand aside and look. In a flash, I see from one end of the world to the other, [00:50:00] and further, into my deepest self. I see all those who have stood here before me, bent with humility or touched with ecstasy. Here before this very Wall. Kings and prophets, warriors and priests, poets and philosophers, rich and poor, all those who throughout the ages

have pleaded everywhere for a little compassion, a little kindness: it was here they came to speak about compassion and kindness."

"Here, in this place, a sage of Israel once remarked, the stones themselves are souls; it is they who each day rebuild an invisible temple. Still, it is not here that I will find my mother's soul. The soul of my mother found shelter in fire and not in stone. And to think that her own dream had been to come here and pray and meditate [00:51:00] and cry. Well, I shall dream in her place."

"But that army chaplain who is approaching, Torah in hand, like a bridegroom on his wedding day, where had I seen him before? Tears are streaming down his face as he recites a prayer and blows the shofar. And that horn itself, did it come from a ram sacrificed on this very spot four thousand years ago by a father crushed by faith and love?"

"And that old Hasid who comes running, where have I seen him before? Dressed in the black kaftan and black felt hat, his prayer shawl under his arm, he hurls himself against the wall as if as if to smash his head. Hypnotized by the stones, he feels them, caresses them, and sobs inwardly, without shedding a tear.

For a moment I observe him as if he was a stone among the stones."

"Then I see [00:52:00] soldiers lifting him up, tossing him into the air, yelling: 'You must not weep, old man, not anymore; the time for lamentations is over; we must rejoice, old man, we must cry our joy to the Wall, it needs that joy and so do we!' One circle is formed, and then another. Everyone is dancing, and on a carpet of shoulders, the old man is dancing too. He's not afraid of falling, or of flying away, he's not afraid of anything and neither are we."

"Someone breaks into song, and that song fills the square, the city, and the whole country. 'Louder, louder, the old man shouts, bouncing back each time with new vigor, greater frenzy; he is in ecstasy and so are we. Someone near me succumbs to tears, someone is weeping and it is not I. Someone is weeping and it is I."

Well, [00:53:00] what can one say when one had lived such experiences? Some of you were born afterwards. And you missed -- you missed that experience. Those of you who were then my age, or younger, or a little bit older, you remember. An event

occurred then which transformed our relationship to each other, and to history.

And the only thing that is missing there really is then -- but I thought about it, is song. And I really feel that -- and my friend you know is n a conductor, Matti Lazar. He knows that what makes me always so envious of my youth, of my childhood, and it is because at that time there was singing more than now, there were more occasions. And one of the songs that actually I remember from that time [00:54:00] was of course of Vizhnitz, I come from Vizhnitz. And always Vizhnitz, no matter what, it's Vizhnitz. And the song is from the Psalms, it's called *She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu ki l'olam chasdo*, which means, "Even when we are in distress, He remembered us and we remembered Him." And I'll sing you that song.

Elie Wiesel with chorus:

[00:54:22 - 00:57:44]

She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu hu hu oy,

Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, oy,

Oy she'bshifleinu zakhar lanu oy,

Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, oy,

She'b'shifleinu, ah, zakhar lanu oy,

Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, whoa-oh-oh-oy,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,

*Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu,
Ki l'olam, ki l'olam chasdo,
She'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu, oy
Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, oy,
Oy, she'b'shifleinu zakhar lanu, oy,
Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, oy,
Oy, she'b'shifleinu oy, zakhar lanu, oy,
Vayif'r'keinu mitzareinu, oy.*

(applause)

Elie Wiesel & Chorus:

And the other one [00:58:00] of course is a song that some of you have already heard. It's called "Ani Ma'amin," you know

"The Twelfth Article of Faith" of Maimonides, *Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah* "I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah." And I remember when I learned it, it was 1943 or so, I was in Nagyvarad with the Vizhnitzer Rebbe on Shabbat Shirah. And a nephew of his came, escaped somehow from some place over there. And in the afternoon, just before Shabbat shalosh *seudot* after *mincha*, he in the corner began singing this song alone. And we were hundreds of, the whole Yeshiva, we surrounded him listening. And he began again, and again, and again. And that's how we accompany the Shabbat.

And this is a very strange, strange "*Ani Ma'amin*," because [00:59:00] grammatically it's wrong. It says "*V'af al pi, sheyitmahmeha*". "I believe in full faith the coming of the Messiah. And although he will be late in coming, I am waiting for him." It should be, "*shemitmahmeha*". In the present. Although he is late in coming, not that he will be late in coming. My feeling is maybe Maimonides felt that he will be late in coming, as we do. So late, he could have come earlier. (laughter)

And the song really is one of the most beautiful songs. The strange thing is really, I wrote -- years ago, I was asked to

write the cantata for Darius Milhaud, one of the great, great composers. And I called it "A Song Forgotten and Found Again." "Ani Ma'amin," that's how the book came out. "A Song Lost and Found Again." And the truth is I [01:00:00] forgot this melody for years. And one year, Marion and I went with our son, we went to Miami. We had a friend, a late - who is no longer here. Very, very close friends, his name was Moshe Chaim.

And he was a hotel owner of a kosher hotel, we went for Pesach. And in the middle of the Seder, he turned to me without, believe me, he said, "Do you remember?" He didn't say what, and I began singing it. And he stood. We were -- he was in the same place, the same Shabbat that I was. And that's how we remembered it, and I brought it afterwards to Matti. And with his choir, and this is how it is.

Elie Wiesel and choir:

[01:00:47 - 01:05:53]

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

V'af al pi sheyitmamehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

V'af al pi sheyitmamehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

*Ani [ani] ma'amin [ma'amin] b'emunah [b'emunah] sh'leimah b'viat
hamashiach*

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

V'af al pi sheyitmahmehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

V'af al pi sheyitmahmehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah b'viat hamashiach

V'af al pi sheyitmahmehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

V'af al pi sheyitmahmehah, achakeh lo, b'khol yom sheyavo

Ani ma'amin b'emunah sh'leimah

Elie Wiesel:

Thank you. (applause)

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