

Elie Wiesel:

(applause) The topic tonight is in quest of peace in the Jewish tradition. I admit, I love the word "quest." First, because there is quest in question, and I love questions. And the term has been used frequently in Jewish life and in Jewish study. It almost defines Jewish existence. Quest for truth, quest for meaning, quest for spirituality, quest for redemption. And naturally, quest for peace in God's creation. Is there an endeavor more noble, [00:01:00] more demanding, more urgent, too? If only we could strengthen peace, as so many generations of leaders have idealized, if not immortalized, various aspects of warfare. If only we could dedicate ourselves to spread peace in the world just as others, even among us, have devoted their energies to bring violence to our own ranks.

Why do people fight? Why is war such an easy option? And why is peace such an elusive target? There have been leaders as there are now who know how to handle conflicts. But where are those who could learn and teach how to avoid them? We have discovered the price one pays for war, but isn't peace [00:02:00] priceless? The quest for peace is eternal, God

Himself takes part in it. In our daily prayers, we repeat the idea and conviction, in the Kaddish, that "*Oseh shalom bimromav.*" Which means He who makes peace in the heavens will also establish peace unto us, and unto the entire people of Israel. But one may wonder, "*oseh*" is in the present singular. He is making peace up there.

But who is doing the fighting? The souls of the dead? Or the still living? No, the angels. Their animosity towards one another actually began before creation. Some opposed creation of man, claiming he will embarrass his Creator. [00:03:00] He will be a hypocrite, he will steal, he will kill. Why have him, said the angels to God. But then, there were also the angels of peace. So there was war between them, but God favored the angels of peace. But we may ask, if God was and sometimes is unable to make peace in heaven, how can we achieve that here on Earth? Another question. If angels who are in eternal contact with God, pure of anything ugly or immoral, cannot dwell in peace in heaven, why should we, mortal human beings, faced with multiple challenges, desires, and temptations, behave differently?

The fact is, we cannot. After all, we must remember, [00:04:00] the first war in Biblical history was and remains a fratricide.

As if it would wish to teach us all, forever and ever, that every war is on a metaphysical and metahistorical level a war between brothers. That whoever kills, kills his brother. Which leads us to the realization that whenever a human being is assassinated anywhere, the act is committed by a brother. Are we therefore to conclude that there is -- that there always has been and will always serve as something of both Cain and Abel in our very nature? Thus, in our destiny? Biblical history is full of episodes and incidents [00:05:00] sadly answering, yes, remember, brothers in Scripture for a long period do not fare too well in the Bible. Isaac and Ishmael. Jacob and Esau. Joseph and his brethren. And centuries later, the hostility between the two Jewish kingdoms, Judah and Israel -- then let's be frank and logical. If war is timeless and eternal, aren't we entitled to conclude that history is both a long timeless process of violence and warfare, and therefore, despair?

The subject of war as a historic, unavoidable development and the [00:06:00] human calamity occupies an important place in Scripture. It tells the people of Israel when war is a rigorous necessity, and when it is only envisaged as a political or military option. The Hebrew term is either "*milchemet reshut*," which means a war decided by men for pragmatic reasons, and "*milchemet mitzvah*," the kind of war by commandment, which has

theological implications. And today, of course, we would say that the difference between these options is simple. Warfare whose object is not the very existence of our people, more than momentary strategic priorities, therefore, that [00:07:00] war is not what we call so poorly "a *milchemet mitzvah*" or a kind of holy war.

In other words, in the regular war, there is no total mobilization. Someone who has just married is automatically exempt of service. As is someone who had just built a home. Or believe it or not, someone who is quite simply a coward. And even the coward's human rights are protected, in that war. His reasons for exemptions are to be kept secret, so as not to humiliate him. If he withdraws from battle, people are free to imagine that he may just have gotten married. But if the war is about the people's ultimate future, no one is allowed to stay home. The [00:08:00] young groom is taken from the bride under the chuppah during the wedding ceremony, and brought him to the front.

Remarkably, among the three last chapters of the Bible, the text deals not with military or political issues, but with personal ones. The role and fate of the women taken prisoners. How they should be treated, kept, or liberated. Above all, the conqueror

must not hate her. The captive woman must not pay the price for what adult men do elsewhere. For whatever reason, or how they behave on the battlefield, the woman should not be touched. But actually, in those early times of Jewish peoplehood, there existed a book of God's wars, [00:09:00] "*Sefer Milchamot AdoShem*". Was it a military handbook? We do not know. All we know is that it disappeared from circulation. It vanished altogether. Now, tell me, was the author worried of possible literary critics? Or simply being misused?

But what about the quest for peace and all that? This had been left to the Prophets to deal with, and they fulfilled their mission. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and their peers, all of them object to a war waged for the sake of war. David was not asked to build a temple in Jerusalem because he was a conqueror, with blood on his hands. His son, Solomon, did, because he was not. No spiritual goal [00:10:00] has been as exalted by our sages as the ideal of peace. Peace with neighbors, with others, and with one's self. War as such is often questioned and condemned in Midrashic sources. Where enemies themselves are being shielded. When the pursuing Egyptian soldiers drowned in the Red Sea, grateful, talented angels were about to sing of God's glory, when God interrupted them. And with his extraordinary admission, "*ma'aseh yadai tov'een b'yam*"my creatures are

drowning, and all you think about is composing poetry or singing." Oh yes, in God's eyes, fixed on the laws of ethics, even the [00:11:00] enemies are his children. But on a totally different level, even the latecomers here are our guests.

(laughter) And they may come in.

We cannot speak of peace without mentioning that word combined with the Sabbath. In Yiddish, we used to say "*gut shabes*." In Israel, you say "*Shabbat Shalom*." The shalom, the peace of the Sabbath. When you greet one, a friend, it's "*shalom aleicha*" or "*shalom alayich*" or "*shalom aleichem*." Shalom, peace unto you. Every Friday evening before sitting down for the first Sabbath meal, we sing a song inviting the malachei [00:12:00] *malachei hashareit* the angels of peace, to enter our home with their blessings. The chant begins with "*Bo'achem l'shalom*," "come with peace, angels of peace." And ends with "*Tzetchem l'shalom*," "leave in peace, angels of peace." The Sabbath is peace. It is the cathedral, it's a temple in time. Our sages tell us that even in hell, the fires are extinguished during the Sabbath, and the sinners, even they, can rest. And we are to believe that when the Messiah will appear, time itself in its totality will be an eternal Sabbath, *Yom Shekulo Shabbat*. And it will therefore be absolute peace.

Now, I say that because we speak of peace, meaning against
[00:13:00] war. Against violence. For a long time, I developed
a very deep sympathy for the first king in our recorded history,
King Saul. I liked him. For his fits of melancholy, for his
love of music, and above all, for his humane, although
incorrect, decision to place morality above politics.
Disobeying God's orders, he refused to kill the captive enemy,
King Agag. And for his excessive compassion, he was punished.
Now, is morality incompatible with politics? Leadership and
sentimentality cannot coexist. That unfortunately has been
proven. Good generals must necessarily lack imagination. Were
[00:14:00] they to imagine the suffering of their soldiers in
battle, the agony of their victims? They would hesitate for too
long before making decisions.

Eisenhower said that he slept well on June 6th, 1944, after
ordering the Normandy invasion. He felt he could go to sleep
while millions of people were going to die and be killed, yes.
He needed rest. Truman slept peacefully, he said, after he gave
the go-ahead to drop the bomb on Hiroshima. I heard him say it.
I was there when he said it. Of course, he was no longer
president. But those were exceptionally abnormal times, war
times. A time of war is not a time of peace. What is permitted
in war is [00:15:00] forbidden in peace. If all wars are

dominated by the need to obtain victory at any cost, peacetime activities are motivated by the need to avoid war. Most wars are immoral. Some are just.

Is peace always moral, or at least morally motivated? Britain's pacifism in the '30s was partly responsible for Hitler's early victories. And that applies to France's complacency, and their common fear of involvement. Had France and Britain, in 1939, '40, acted immediately, more vigorously, more consciously, and entered Germany when she was unprotected, war probably would have been limited, if not avoided at all. Had France mobilized [00:16:00] in '34, had Britain mobilized in '36, the fortunes of Europe would have been altered. Does it mean that one may, that one must make war, make small wars to avoid or prevent big wars? Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, let's not forget it, refused to bomb the railroad lines going to Auschwitz. In times when the Nazis were killing, burning thousands of human beings, every day, every night, men, women, and children, all Jews. The Allies couldn't divert one bomber to destroy the railways. At least to give the Germans a signal, to say to them, we know, and we will remember, and we care. And to tell the victims, look, we [00:17:00] know, and we care.

In refraining from bombing, the Allies gave a signal to Hitler and Himmler and to Eichmann, that they didn't really have any concern. Was their decision moral? Granted, there was a war. A world war going on. And the Allied leaders had other things on their mind. That was the trouble. They had other things on their mind. Not the fate of Jews. I believe that whenever there is war, some people suffer more than others, first of all, children. Adults make war, and children die. Nations make war, and their victims perish. Wherever nations fought somehow in the past, the Jewish people suffered on both sides.

So what is our attitude to be [00:18:00] towards war? I believe that it has many components. Economical, political, military, and even racist. Racism is sinful, and ethnic persecution or religious discrimination outrageous. I believe that apartheid wars -- a shame. I believe that whenever people suffer because of their color, it's an outrage. If people suffer because of their religion, it's a scandal. I believe, therefore, that when people are discriminated against, and when communities are persecuted, war will follow. I believe that religious fanaticism leads to hate, not to salvation. I also believe that political extremism and religious fanaticism beget hostility, [00:19:00] not security. When a group, any group, for ethnic, racial, religious, or any other ideological reasons, claims its

superiority over any other, that means that it claims the right to dominate the other, and no group, no individual have that right.

And yet, in spite of these beautiful ideas transmitted in our Jewish tradition, where humiliation is the greatest of sins, there has never been a generation without some nation being conquered by others. Some freedoms abolished by others, some people killed by others, some believers persecuted then humbled and shamed by others. By including -- by other believers. In other words, there has never been a time without violent contests being played out somewhere under [00:20:00] the sun. In our own country, in my generation alone, one president was shot, another humiliated. A communist empire far away is increasingly attracted by capitalism, whereas Western society is fascinated with socialism. Liberal is now a bad word. What does it mean? Liberal means people who believe in freedom. So, words have changed, but everything has changed.

We live in strange times, and we have even stranger customs. Remember when politics used to be open and sex private? (laughter) Today, it's the opposite. Once upon a time, a certain person went to jail because he wrote a book. Today, he goes to jail in order [00:21:00] to write a book. (laughter)

Today, words do not mean not even the opposite. They mean something else or nothing. So, must the human condition forever confront its own destruction from within? Will society never learn that to accept war as an option ultimately helps death increase its power, and stretch its boundaries to the farthest horizon? Will we never realize that all wars are absurd? For their victories never last long. Will we ever agree together that war is the illogical consequence of illogical, irrational madness?

Madness is not only an individual phenomenon, madness can strike groups and crowds. Madness can erupt into history and move its known and unknown protagonists into the abyss of blood and fire. Even [00:22:00] today, sometimes I see postcards of those times when there were lynchings in America, my God, to see the postcards with -- families would come to watch with their children. It was no madness. Is peace the answer, the only answer? If so, how does one come to it? I think it would require imagination on the part of all people, teachers and students alike, parents and children alike. Why not make use of its poetic power?

Even in the field of nuclear negotiations, there is room for imaginative initiatives. I would like to see the next nuclear

summit, not in Geneva, not in Washington, not in Moscow, but Hiroshima. I was there in 1995, spoke, and I remember I [00:23:00] told them, "Look," to the Japanese governors and so forth, I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I promise you, we shall never forget Hiroshima, but you, don't forget Pearl Harbor." So why not have a summit conference on human rights, against anti-Semitism, with all the leaders participating in Auschwitz? I believe desperately that all people of the Middle East must pray for peace, for that region had suffered in the last 40 years more than many others. And I, being the Jew that I am, with my upbringing and my past, and my commitments and my dreams, I must say without any hesitation that my love for Israel is deep and total. I love Israel. I love Jerusalem. [00:24:00] Of course, there were times when I loved Israel in joy. There were times when I loved Israel in anguish. But always, with hope.

Naturally, as a Jew, I oppose war. I oppose war with all my heart, because I have seen what war does to those who wage it, and to those against who it has been waged. The war against Hitler was a just war. I was too young to fight. Had I been older and not in the place where I was, I hope I would have fought. I believe that today, wars can be avoided. How? Maybe through diplomacy, maybe through other means, surely through education. Every war begins in one's own self. Everything

begins here first, in the individual self of the person. Of the [00:25:00] human being. In order to change that person, we must educate that person. The only way to educate that person is to show the grotesque aspects, the cruel vantage point of violence and war.

I study every single book that appears on that period, and of course, I studied days and nights the revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto. When a few hundred youngsters stood up to the mightiest of all armies in Europe then, the German Army, and that rebellion, without almost any weapons, lasted more than eight weeks. In the very beginning, it was Erev Pesach, or the eve of Passover. In the very beginning, then the rebels killed the SS who entered the ghetto. Stories the witnesses told [00:26:00] about a strange scene. In the evening, the fighters would meet on the ground around the German corpses, singing and dancing. My first reaction was, what, really? Really. say in Yiddish: Es pasht nisht , it's not nice, really. But I understood, it's not that they wanted to humiliate anyone. It's simply because they were happy. Not so happy to kill, but to defend themselves. And above all, to witness and ascertain that the Germans, too, were mortal.

As a Jew, I have studied my tradition, and in my tradition, I have learned that whatever is good is in peace, and whatever is bad is related to violence and war. [00:27:00] Perhaps we diplomats in mind -- the Talmud even authorizes lies, if they are told on behalf of peace. For the sake of peace, says the Sifrei, one may worship idols and even may pay tribute to heathens. The Mishnah states clearly that all lies are prohibited except those spoken for peace. The expression *Gadol HaShalom*, great is peace, recurs frequently in our Talmudic literature. And everywhere peace occupies first place.

What is essential in all things is peace. The word "*shalom*" has the same root as "*shalem*," which means peace confers harmony, a totality of harmony, on beings and the world. To break the peace is to deprive humankind of an extra dimension, a timeless dimension. When men [00:28:00] go to war, God is their first victim. That is why the Prophets were forever inveighing against the war policies of certain kings, why the sages never ceased to advise caution, patience, moderation, pacifism, yes, and faith in God. For the Jewish people, war was never considered holy. No war was ever holy, because of the victims of war. The Maccabees, the heroic men and women of those times, are not even mentioned in the Talmud. Why? Because they were warriors, and the Talmud did not want to glorify warriors. The

Talmud glorifies knowledge. The Talmud glorifies humanity, learning, friendship, not war.

Saint Louis in French history was a [00:29:00] saint. He is the one who burned the Talmud in the squares, public squares of Paris, and he was a saint in their language. In our tradition, a man who would burn books and oppress people could never be considered a just man. War serves death, peace serves the living. We do not say the entire Hallel prayer during Passover; Sukkot, yes, but not Passover. Although it was a miracle, and what a miracle, the crossing of the Red Sea. The liberation from slavery. Jews were saved, the whole people were saved. Why we do not recite those sounds is because the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea resulted in too many casualties among the Egyptians. When people die, no praise is justified. Not even [00:30:00] the praise of God himself.

And so, I am afraid of a new catastrophe, maybe. Why am I so afraid? I don't trust human nature. If we have weapons, we use them. Ultimately, we shall. And if I so fervently and wholeheartedly have spent the last few years going around the world just to fight Ahmadinejad's desire, not only to destroy Israel but also to acquire nuclear weapons, because we know what he would do with them. He says so. He doesn't say he wants the

weapons to destroy, he simply says, I want weapons, and he says he wants to destroy the Jewish state, to the last. And till the last Jew will be alive, he said. That Jew will have to be destroyed.

And so, what can we do? [00:31:00] We shout, we protest, and we mobilize all our friends. And of course, the ultimate goal is to strengthen peace and strengthen hope, for without it, no future is possible. We cling to hope in spite of our memories of the past filled with fear and anguish and sadness. Yet in spite of them, hope in spite of the threats weighing on the future, yes, in spite of them and because of them. Hope in spite of all mankind has been doing to illustrate the absurdity of hope. Hope in spite of war, hope instead of war. When Robert Oppenheimer, the great scientist, appeared before a congressional committee, he was asked, "Professor, we have heard your description of what a nuclear war would do to our planet; it would destroy it. What then, in your [00:32:00] view, should be the answer to nuclear war?" And Robert Oppenheimer's answer was brief. He offered one word. "Peace." The answer to any war is peace. So, if only we could celebrate peace as our predecessors have celebrated war.

As a writer who considers his role as witness, I plead for memory, and therefore, for hope, and therefore, for peace for our people and all people. As long as we remember, our actions will be governed by moral imperatives, but if we forget, we have already lent our support for immorality. To remember means to be worthy of our predecessors and forebears. To remember means to affirm the right of men and women to build and rebuild their own homes, and educate their children, and laugh with them, and [00:33:00] rejoice with them, and give them everything we have. To remember means to proclaim the sacredness of life, even if life had profaned. To remember means to fight the enemy whose aim is to wipe our memory. To remember means to recognize evil, unmask it, and fight it immediately, and not give it a second chance. To remember means to proclaim in the name of suffering the need to curtail suffering. In the name of nightmares, the necessity of dreaming lofty and peaceful dreams. In the name of collective sadness, the duty to appeal to collective joy. And if only they would remember, and to celebrate, those lofty ideals that bring people together and give security and some [00:34:00] measure of happiness to our people in exile. In spite of the inhuman forces that drive humanity so often to inhumanity, I think redemption would be not too far away.

So as for the present, is the quest for peace still vibrant in our hearts? With the burning of the Second Temple, most Jews living in exile with neither military power nor political authority, the quest of peace was not really their problem. It became theirs and ours in 1948 when the state of Israel was born. I remember it. I was still in Paris, just came to Paris three years earlier, very poor, almost homeless, lived in a children's home. And I remember it was Friday afternoon. It was the 14th [00:35:00] of May, it was supposed to be the 15th, but to declare the independence, but Shabbat, they didn't want to violate the Shabbat. And I heard David Ben-Gurion on the radio, at the neighbors' home, his reading the first declaration of independence. You cannot imagine what went through my mind, my heart, and my soul.

So, it was supposed, of course, to be an appeal to the neighbors for peace. The very first hand outstretched to an Arab nation, offering that Arab nation to recognize its independence and to live side by side in peace, was Israel. Read the declaration of independence, where Ben-Gurion is saying [00:36:00] precisely that. Why? Because the UN partition plan was so small for Israel and so huge for the Arabs. At that time, they didn't speak about Palestine, they wanted simply an Arab state alongside the Jewish state.

Had the Arabs accepted the UN plan, Israel would have been infinitely different from what it is now. Do you realize that Jaffa, which now is part of Tel Aviv, would be Arab? The Lydda Airport would be Arab, the Galilee would be Arab, Jerusalem would be internationalized, not Jewish. Israel would have been a miniature state. And (sighs) Ben-Gurion's offer was rejected. Six Arab armies, well-armed and well-trained, some of them trained by Britain, [00:37:00] began immediately the assault on the young nation, six hundred thousand men, women and children, with a small army, with almost no tanks. And they intended to slaughter that little state. Somehow, somehow, Israel won. Oh, nobody really knows how, but they won. And it became a great democracy, the only democracy in the Middle East. Israel is a democracy and -- in every term of the meaning of the word democracy. With all its shortcomings.

The same David Ben-Gurion, for instance, hated the opposition leader Menachem Begin. Real hatred, to the point that in Parliamentary debates, [00:38:00] he never called him by name. He always attacked him, but instead of saying "Mr. Begin," he would say, "The man sitting next to Menachem Bader." (laughter) Never. And whenever Begin rose to speak, Ben-Gurion left the Parliament. He couldn't listen to Begin. The hatred was so

strong. Well, what happened later on? Ben-Gurion had the Mapai, it was then the dominating party, and then he was (laughs) expelled from Mapai himself, at one point.

I remember Golda Meir, whom I used to see a lot, and once I visited her in the hospital. At that time, Ben-Gurion was expelled from his own party because he created a small party called -- I don't remember what. Meretz, I think. No. Anyway, [00:39:00] and Golda was crying -- literally, on her bed, in the hospital. Because she was in love with Ben-Gurion, they all were in love with Ben-Gurion. And here, she said, "What is he doing to us? He's destroying us. What does he want? Does he want Begin to be in government? God forbid." She said, "I don't want to live that day." Believe it or not, she lived that day. (laughter)

Not only was Begin in the government, Begin became Prime Minister, and a great Prime Minister. He's the one who made peace with Sadat. And Sadat, in a very extraordinary gesture. One day, I remember it was also Shabbat, he came to Israel, to address the Knesset. It so happens that his daughter was my student. What Jewish destiny does, really, I must. (laughter)

Same time, [00:40:00] May 1967. Mid-May. Nasser was president of Egypt, and one day, he simply began amassing his troops in the Sinai, closing the -- Eilat to the Jews, and he was preparing for war. I was then a correspondent in the United Nations. I listened to all the speeches, all the Arab representatives. "Now we are going to exterminate the last Jew. The last Jew will be expelled from Israel and drowned in the sea," or language like that. And very few delegates would get up and say, "How can you talk like that?" The only one who did was Arthur Goldberg, Justice Goldberg, who was a great, great man, and a great Jew. And he was then ambassador, [00:41:00] and he's the only one, actually, who took Israel's side with passion.

And then, then came the Six Day War. Strange again, I remember the war began one day, and on Sunday, I participated in a commencement of the Jewish Theological Seminary, because all my great friends were there, Lieberman, Heschel, and so forth. I got a degree, the first in my life. And then, at that time, we still had the greatest scholars in the seminary.

And the Israeli ambassador, Gideon Rafael, was there. In the middle of my address, I turn to the graduating class, I say, "My dear young friends, Israel is on the edge of war. And

[00:42:00] I want you to know," I wasn't married then, I said, "I want you to know that when the war breaks out, I will leave right away and go to Israel, and I appeal to you, you do the same." It was Sunday. At five o'clock, a telephone, the ambassador called, Gideon Rafael. So I said, "Maybe war breaks out tomorrow. So, go to Israel." And he said to me, "How did you know?" I had to send my story to the Yediot Ahronot , I was a correspondent then. Slept maybe two hours, I was very tired, and he, the ambassador, he said, "What did you know?" I said, "I knew what?" "How did you know there's going to be war today?" "I didn't."

But there was war, and I was there during that war. The way it was done was extraordinary. Just extraordinary. We speak about peace, Israel wanted peace [00:43:00] right away. May 14th, 1948. Throughout its history, Israel has said, again, let's make peace, let's make peace. And then, of course, there was the war. And the Six Day War was a great war, because Jerusalem, the Old City of Jerusalem, was liberated. And when I arrived, I ran to the Old City together with thousands and thousands of Israeli Jews, young and old, children from school. Standing at the wall, what I have then felt, I wrote, I used to then spend days and days and nights at the wall, writing my book

[00:44:00] with my lips, and then go to the hotel and write it down on paper. This is what I wrote. "Do I stay there? I heard a voice 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? That I shall sing -- I shall sing with such force that I shall go mad. So what? Then 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 and my life. Why so late? I had no strength, mother. I could not accept your absence. If I have never written you, it's because I have never left you. You were the one who went away and ever since, I see you [00:45:00] going away. I see nothing else.

For years now, you have been leaving me, vanishing into the distance, swallowed by the black and silent 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 is stretched towards you. And this vision which haunts me 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.

So, I contemplate the wall, which bears my mother's face. Yes, she had two faces, my mother. One showed [00:46:00] the daily sorrows from Sunday to Friday, and the other reflected the serenity of the Sabbath, and now, this is the only one she has left. I see. A human front presses toward the wall, nestles against it. I stand aside it and look. In a flash, I see from one end of the world to the other, 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 had pleaded everywhere for a little compassion, a little kindness, it is here they came to speak of compassion and kindness. Here in this place, a sage of Israel once [00:47:00] remarked, 'The stones are souls.' It is they who each day rebuild the 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, like me, with me, to pray and meditate and cry. So what? 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 the prayer and blows the shofar. And that horn, did it not come a ram sacrificed in this very spot four thousand years [00:48:00] ago by a father crushed by faith and love? And is not that father also present here, and the chaplain, could he be the angel who took pity on Abraham and saved him by saving his son?

If so, then for once, God is on the side of man, on the side of madmen. 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 arms. He hurls himself against the wall as if to smash his head. Hypnotized by the stones, he feels them, caresses them, and sobs inwardly without shedding a tear. And for a moment, I observe him, as if he were a stone among the stones. And then I see soldiers lifting him up, tossing him into the air, yelling, 'You must not weep, not anymore, old man. The time for lamentation is over. We must rejoice, old man, we must cry [00:49:00] our joy to the wall, it needs that joy and so do we.'

One circle is formed, then another. Everyone is dancing. And on a carpet of soldiers, the old man is dancing, too. He is not afraid of falling or flying away; he is 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's not I. Someone is weeping and it is I.

And in my dream, through my tears, I see the old man lift his arms, trying to tear away a scrap of sky, and [00:50:00] offering to those who sing, to those who make him tall and proud and invincible. Who is he? King David, perhaps? Abraham? Or Katriel, the hero of my book? Or perhaps the Messiah. I know I ought to be afraid, the miracle is too violent, the joy too intense. It cannot last forever. But I also know that I am dreaming.

I am at the top of a mountain. I trip over a pebble; I fall. I see the abyss growing darker, as it approaches. I see it darker than the dark eye of a tempest. I am afraid, but the fear itself is part of the dream. From afar, I see the dancer [00:51:00] set the old man down. They are exhausted; he is not.

And now I can distinguish his features more clearly, a familiar face. He is the beggar, the preacher of my childhood. And he recognizes me, and beckons.

I tear myself from the ground and take one step towards him, then another. I sigh with relief. It is not he; it's a younger man. The crowd separates us. I do my best to join him, but he disappears from sight. I question people, 'Where did he go, that tall, slender man with burning eyes? The one about my age?' They don't know. In panic, I run from one person to another. Some turn their backs, others stare at me, their eyes blank. Meanwhile, the crowd keeps getting larger, military personnel and officials, celebrities and journalists.

Still, [00:52:00] all are still streaming into one continuous procession along with rabbis and students gathered from all over the city, from every corner of the land, from every corner of exile. Men and women and adolescents of every age, every origin, speaking every language. I see them. Literally, with my own eyes, I see them moving, running towards the wall, towards all that remains of their collective longing. Just like long ago, when they were given the Torah. Just like a generation ago in the kingdom of night, when it was taken back.

Once again, the exiles are being gathered in, the knots being knotted, the end is rejoining the beginning and justifying it. Over there, in the camp, a wise and pious inmate had cried out in a fit of madness, 'All of us heard God in the desert, here we shall be allowed to see [00:53:00] him.' 'Yes,' the others had answered. 'We shall see him and perish.' The image of God cannot be transmitted; it can be carried away only in death. But here, it is man's image that it is being transmitted from Jew to Jew. And in order to receive it, an entire people had begun to march. For the third time in its history.

So, I look at all of them, and I'm afraid to look, afraid to discover myself among them. I look and cannot stop looking. A father lifts his son to his shoulders and tells him to open his eyes wide. A young couple in love holding hands quicken their steps. Two widows slow theirs down." And I know what I have seen will last forever and ever, [00:54:00] for peace will come for everyone. Thank you. (applause)

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