

A People Of Mercy Or Of Pride?

Wiesel And Netanyahu A Study In Contrasts As They Tell Their Views Of Jewish History To Rabbi David Kahane In Jewish Town Hall



SUTTON PLACE TRIALOGUE -- Elie Wiesel (left), "poet laureate" of the Holocaust, and Benjamin Netanyahu (right), Israel's Ambassador to the U.N., engaged in a wide-ranging discussion with Rabbi David B. Kahane of the Sutton Place Synagogue, New York, in the second in the congregation's annual Jewish Town Hall series. Wiesel spoke of his anguished confrontation with President Reagan over the Bitburg visit and urged the overflow audience of 5,000 to remember the Holocaust as "a unique event in the history of the Jewish people." Netanyahu termed the rebirth of the State of Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem as "the completion of Jewish history" and stressed the pride that Israel's very existence engenders in Jews throughout the world.

NEW YORK -- Elie Wiesel and Benjamin Netanyahu -- "the Chassid and the Litvak," as they described themselves -- shared the bimah of Sutton Place Synagogue in the second session of Rabbi David Kahane's "Jewish Town Hall" series here this week, fascinating the audience with their contrasting personal styles and ideologies as Jews.

Netanyahu, Israel's youthful and dynamic Ambassador to the United Nations, spoke of the need to "fight back" when Jews are under attack. He described the "revolution" in Jewish history and the Jewish future brought about by the new State of Israel. And he told with pride of what Israel's very existence does for the life of Jews in the Soviet Union, Uganda, Ethiopia, the Sudan and other trouble-spots around the globe.

"Now there is a place where they can come, and now there is a nation that works at every moment to protect them," Netanyahu said.

"Israel has made it possible for Jews to regain once more our most precious possession: our pride, our dignity, our self-respect. Jews were victims in Palestine and in Rome, in England and in Spain, in Czarist Russia and pre-war Poland, and finally in the Holocaust.

"But never again will Jews be attacked with impunity, because there is an Israel."

Wiesel -- older, grayer and slight of build, a survivor of Auschwitz who has become the poet laureate of the Holocaust, and who spoke truth to power in his famous confrontation with President Ronald Reagan over the Bitburg visit last month -- responded softly. He reminded the audience that Judah Maccabee, "one of the greatest generals in Jewish history," had never been mentioned in the Talmud.

"We are a spiritual people," Wiesel said. "That is our tradition. And we are a moral people -- that is the legacy that the Jews have bequeathed to civilization. Our values have been mercy and compassion to the widowed, the poor, the orphan, the sick; and justice to those who have been wronged."

And he pleaded with the Israeli envoy, and with the audience as well, to see the Holocaust "as a unique event, not as only another episode in the long and tragic history of the Jewish people. If we do not," he said, "we lose part of the truth, and thus part of the legitimacy of the Hurban, the destruction of our people." Wiesel continued:

"For always in our history, there was a Jewish community ready to receive those Jews forced to flee. The Jews of Spain," he recalled, "went to Holland. Jews from Czarist Russia went to America, and some to Palestine. But this time, in this century, 40 years ago, Jews had no place to go; there was no hand stretched out to receive them."

It was, at the end, not so much a case of disagreement between the two as a matter of emphasis. Netanyahu recalled how, as a student at M. I. T. some years ago, he had listened to Elie Wiesel lecture in the Boston area. Wiesel agreed with the Israeli diplomat that President Reagan's visit to Bitburg was not an issue that would soon go away.

"The Holocaust proved that there is such a thing as evil, and that if evil is not resisted in time, humanity pays a terrible price," Netanyahu said. "And so we remember the Holocaust -- but we celebrate the independence of Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem as the completion of Jewish history."

Wiesel: When Should I Resign from Holocaust Council?

Asked by Rabbi Kahane to describe his feelings today, nearly a month after his confrontation with President Reagan over the wreath-laying at the German military cemetery in Bit-

burg, Wiesel replied: "I have a problem. It is this: "When should I resign in protest as chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Council?" He explained, to rising applause: "There is a limit beyond which I cannot continue. To compare the victims of the Nazi destruction of our people with those criminals who committed the destruction, as President Reagan did -- that is..." His voice trailed off, as if unable to describe how indecent that comparison was.

The synagogue event had been planned to commemorate the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps 40 years earlier and the 18th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, celebrated the day before in Israel. Nearly 5,000 persons tried to get into the synagogue to hear and see the discussion. Over a thousand were accommodated in the sanctuary and balcony, hundreds more on closed-circuit TV in the synagogue ballroom, and perhaps a thousand more on East Fifty-first Street, which had been closed to traffic so that a giant screen could be set up in the street and people could watch from apartment windows and from folding chairs set up on the sidewalk and on the street itself.

The evening ended with the singing of "Ani Ma'amim" ("I Believe"), the anthem of the Jews in the concentration camps, and "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" ("Jerusalem of Gold") to mark the liberation of the ancient Jewish capital in 1967. And Elie Wiesel, Benjamin Netanyahu and Rabbi David Kahane stood together in front of the ark, singing together their joy in being Jews -- Jews imbued with mercy, endowed with pride, determined as a people to live in dignity and peace.

Israel Prepared To Give In On Taba Dispute

JERUSALEM (WNS) — Israel apparently is prepared to yield to Egypt's insistence that their border dispute over Taba be put to international arbitration, provided agreement is reached on an overall "package" of issues to be settled between the two countries.

Government sources expect the decisive debate on Taba to take place at a meeting of the inner Cabinet next week, when Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin will have returned from trips abroad. The inner Cabinet consists of 10 senior ministers, five

Labor and five Likud. Likud leader Shamir continued to press for an alternative to arbitration in settling the ownership of Taba, a small strip of beach on the Gulf of Aqaba. He expressed his position to the visiting Egyptian Energy Minister, Abdel Hadi Kandil. But political observers believe that Shamir ultimately will go along with arbitration in order to avoid a confrontation within the Labor-Likud unity coalition, provided that other elements of the package are dealt with.

Israel's aim is to improve bilateral relations which have deteriorated ever since Egypt recalled its Ambassador from Tel Aviv in 1982, during the Lebanon war. Israeli officials seemed encouraged, after a round of talks in Cairo two weeks ago, that progress can be made toward a "package" deal. They spoke of a "favorable atmosphere" during a long meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismet Abdel-Meguid. The Israeli negotiating team was headed by David Kimche, Director General of the Foreign Ministry, and Gen. Avraham Tamir, Director General of the Prime Minister's Office.

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