

Elie Wiesel

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Dear Friend,

I read your review in the Times of Groussard's book on The Massacre of the Israeli Athletes, The Olympics, 1972, several days ago. Your last sentence has rooted itself in my soul. "Dead or alive, Jews are alone."

How can I respond to that judgment? It is one of the most terrible judgments I have ever been aware of. I know you are not condemning. Humanity is condemning itself. The judgment is a self-judgment. But you see it more clearly than we. Your vision is authoritative because it is based on suffering. Your Holocaust vision I will call it, purified by fire, forged in pain, emptied of all but the pure flame of prophetic tradition.

How can I respond, indeed? What a blasphemy it would be to say that you are not alone. Who is with you, Jewish man? Who is with the Jewish people? Am I? Who am I? What have I done to be worthy of standing next to you, to be counted among your friends? More precisely, who am I that I could presume such a right? Possibly I have not betrayed you directly. But who can say that I will not betray you in the future? Each anti-semitic joke I have tolerated, each time I have refused to react vigorously when someone has accused the Jews of not being able to forget about the ovens at Auschwitz--accused I say, imagine that! (and I can imagine that because I have experienced that too many times)--each time I heard lies about Jews no matter how ridiculous ("Jewish women don't clean their homes. If their maids quit, the house stays dirty until another maid is hired") and didn't struggle to show the true import of what was really being said with such a statement--each time, I say, that I took the easy way out I may have been preparing for a far greater betrayal.

And yet I am motivated to a certain awareness of this because the Holocaust is central to the meaning of my life. How old was I when World War II broke out? Science indicates I was perhaps three quarters of a million years in age. Not just physical science, but psychology too. Thus I inherited so many neutral predispositions, the collective unconscious (especially of the last 2,000 years), that I too may be ready for a serious act of betrayal, which is the ultimate sin against a friend.

Each betrayal implies a set of loyalties. Which are my specific loyalties, or developing this, what are the loyalties of this generation? Were they symbolized by that group meant to be representative of all that is best in world-wide society, UNESCO, when that body voted to discontinue aid to Israel? Is Israel alone committed to God while the rest of us are only committed to each other? False loyalties are no loyalties at all because any loyalty which includes a betrayal is immoral. And only moral acts are fully human. Therefore, immorality in the very fullest sense is a betrayal of the self before God, an unwillingness to assume totally the gift of humanity God has given us. Any betrayal, ultimately is self-betrayal. This is true of betrayal through overt act or from the great sin of inaction. Why is this so difficult to see?

We are leaderless. I cannot lead myself into the kind of sanctity my human nature requires. Where are my saints of today, the spiritual leaders? Why is this generation without its Abraham <sup>we</sup> will argue with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Where is the Moses of today who insists that God must not destroy the people promised by God to God?

Possibly in this era of collectivisation, it isn't a person but a nation that will lead us. Maybe that nation is Israel. It is possible that the political entity of Israel serves to lead in the struggle against demonic forces so that all of us can become people of God-- inheritors of the spiritual realm of Israel. Maybe political Israel is our saint. Not because it is perfect. No saint ever was. But because it is struggling in a way symbolic of the activity which needs to be taking place in each of our souls if each of us is to become authentic.

I will keep the eye of my heart on Israel then, glorying in her glory, anguishing in her mistakes, but loving her both for what she is and for what she symbolizes. I mean the Israel of now and the Israel of the past. For just as each of us has a continuity of perhaps a million years, so Israel has its own particular tradition within the larger scope. And Israel's Tradition is One. If I can honestly come to understand the meaning of that Tradition of One, and let its meaning purify the contemplative portion of my soul while tensing the ~~acting~~ motivating part, then perhaps dead or alive, the Jews who are alone will be a little less alone. Or at least, with God's grace, I may be able to be alone with them.

Peace in deed,